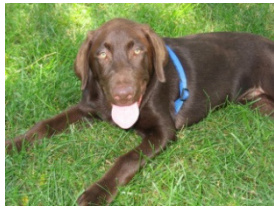


God Wants All of Me

As most of you know, this past summer the church gave me a twelve-week sabbatical. It was a great time. My family and I are so appreciative of the gift of that time away from ministry to recharge.



I would have to say that God changed my life in a couple of ways this summer. One of the real changes He brought to my life this summer was this. We got a five month old lab, Toby, seven weeks into the sabbatical. A lab puppy and the concept of sabbatical do not necessarily mix together well. The one good thing about Toby is that I think he will provide many sermon illustrations.

But God did work in my heart beyond the things I learned from Toby. In preparing for the sabbatical, I had prayerfully thought through some goals that I wanted to focus on – all of them centered on the idea of “reconnect.” I wanted to reconnect with Cindy and with the kids. I wanted to reconnect with my mission and calling and with my role here at Faith. But mostly, I wanted to reconnect with God. I’m grateful to be able to say that God did help me reconnect with Him.

As I’ve reflected back over the summer, I see so many things that God taught me; so many great lessons that He impressed upon me to help me reconnect with Him. And as I’ve thought about all of this I think there is one core lesson that God taught me this summer about reconnecting with Him it is this: **He wants all of me.** He doesn’t just want part of me. He doesn’t just want me on some days. He doesn’t just want me to serve Him. He wants me. He wants ALL of me. That is where connection happens – being fully yielded to God. It’s hard to connect with God if you are holding back from God. And you know what? He wants you too. He wants your heart. He wants your love. He wants you – ALL of you.

And so this morning I want to share two truths that God used in my life this summer to help me return to a place where I am more honestly saying, “God, I’m yours. You have my life. You have my day. Lead me.” These are not new truths, and they probably will not be for you either, but they were truths that needed to travel from my head to my heart to help me reconnect.

Maybe you sense a need to reconnect with God too. I trust that God will help these truths descend into your heart as well.

The first truth is this:

I. Christ Lives in Me

In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

Christ lives in me. This is one of the amazing truths of the New Testament, that God Himself, comes to take up residence in the believer's life. When I trusted Jesus as a little boy growing up in Nebraska, Jesus came to live within me. And he has dwelt there every day since, whether I've paid attention to Him or not. He's there.

Well, this is a truth that I've known for a long time. It's a truth that I've taught many times, but I needed God to take that truth and press it down into my heart. I needed God to remind me of what an amazing thing it is that Jesus Christ lives in me.



In early June, I went on a five day personal retreat in a remote cabin north of Fairplay, CO where I could pursue silence and solitude. These are spiritual disciplines that have helped me reconnect with God in the past. While I was there, I was reading and reflecting on the book of Luke and particularly on Jesus and what he was like.

One day I was reading in Luke 8. I just want to highlight a bit of what happens there and so feel free to flip there or just listen. In 8:22-25 as the disciples and Jesus are crossing a lake in a boat a storm comes up and scares the disciples to death. Verse 24 says:

²⁴ And they came to Him and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.

Then in 8:26, Jesus encounters a man who is possessed by demons. The passage says that this man had not put on any clothing for a long time and that he lived in the tombs. They had tried to bind him with chains, but he would break his chains and the demon would drive him into the dessert. You couldn't get more messed up than this man. Well, Jesus casts out the demons and verse 35 says this:

³⁵ And the people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened.

This man who was so mess up is *clothed and in his right mind*. He was normal. Jesus changed his life because of the power he had to cast out the demons.

In verse 40 we are told about a man named, Jarius, who asked Jesus to come to his house to heal his daughter, but as Jesus tried to go the crowds pressed in on him. And in those crowds was a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years. No one had been able to help her. Verse 44 says that this woman:

⁴⁴ came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak; and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. ⁴⁵ And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the multitudes are crowding

and pressing upon You." ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." ⁴⁷ And when the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

Because of Jesus' power this woman is healed.

Well, because of this delay, the daughter of Jarius dies. Some people tell Jarius not to trouble Jesus any longer, but Jesus goes to the house and we read this in verse 52:

⁵² Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said, "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep." ⁵³ And they began laughing at Him, knowing that she had died. ⁵⁴ He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!" ⁵⁵ And her spirit returned, and she rose immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat.

What an amazing person Jesus is. This Jesus, Paul says, lives in me. The One who calmed the waves and wind; the one who cast out the demons; the one who healed sicknesses; the one who raised the dead to life lives in me, this One lives in me.

As I prayed about what I was reading here, I sensed God saying to me, not audibly, but in a very real way that I live by my own power – that I don't allow the power of Jesus who dwells within me to empower me. And so I asked God what hindered this and I sensed Him saying to me that it was my pride – I think I can do it myself.

Unfortunately, I had to agree that God was right. (Or course, He was right! He's God!) It is so easy for me to trust in myself; my skills, my training, my hard work rather than to trust Christ in me. One of the ways I see this trust in myself is in my prayerlessness. At times I pray so little for things in my life and ministry. When I'm not praying, I'm not trusting in God. When I'm not praying, I'm simply trusting myself. And if I'm trusting in myself I'm short-circuiting the power of Christ who lives in me. If I'm trusting in myself, I'm really trying to live independent of God. That's not a very good way to connect with God.

Paul said in Gal. 2:20

. . . the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."

A life of faith in Christ who lives in us – that's the life God wants for us. How are you doing with this? Are you experiencing the life of Christ in you? Are you experiencing His transforming power in your life? Are you living by faith in him? Or would you have to say that you really are more prone to trust yourself? Let me encourage you to turn away from trust in yourself and toward trusting Jesus who lives in you.

Well, that was the first truth that God pressed into my heart this summer. But there was also a second truth that God moved from my head to my heart and that was this.

II. God Loves Me

Now you might be saying, “You’re a pastor and you needed God to tell you that He loves you? Didn’t you get that in Sunday School?” I did get it in Sunday School, but unfortunately, at times I’ve got it too much up here (mind) and not enough down here (heart). What God did once again for me this summer was to move this truth from a truth that I give mental assent to, to an experiential truth that I believe in my heart.

If there is one verse that really captures what God impressed upon my heart this summer it is 1 John 3:1, which says:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

God calls us His children. That’s an amazing thing that the God of the universe, the all-powerful Creator and Ruler calls us His children. That’s what we are. We are his children. And that God would call us *children*, 1 John 3:1 says, shows us *how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us*.

Now, as a Biblical truth, this is something I’ve know and taught for a long time. But unfortunately, at a heart-level, I’ve struggled to live out of this truth.

On June 5th, during the second day on my retreat in CO, I wrote this in my journal about this struggle:

“Read the introduction to Foster’s book, *Prayer*. The same theme that God has been speaking to me about is there [The theme that I’m in relationship with Him and He loves me]. Foster writes that his book is about ‘a love relationship: an enduring, continuing, growing love relationship with the great God of the universe.’ This is the same message. God is saying it to me in many ways. Off to the side of Foster’s comment is a note I wrote the first time I read this many years ago:

I think “task” not “relationship” often when I pray.

This has been my struggle for years. Oh Lord, how far back does it go? Even to childhood? Have I ever truly learned to walk in a love relationship with you?

See, 1 John 3:1 is saying, God love’s us. Period. We are His children and He loves us. My struggle has been that though I say I know God loves me, I act as if I have to perform to have that love.

Early in the summer, one of the books I read was a book called, *Shaped by the Word*, by Robert Mulholland. In the book he says this about how we approach spiritual formation:

It seems, therefore, that the first and continuing question of spiritual formation is: Are we operating on a functional basis, somehow trying to get ourselves closer to God or to what we think God wants us to be; or are we operating on a relational basis, where, in responsiveness to God, we are allowing God to draw us into genuine spiritual formation? . . . Do we come to the scripture seeking a technique, a methodology that will enable us to draw close to God – a functional mode; or do we come to the scripture to open, to yield, to submit, to humble ourselves, to bow ourselves in God's presence and allow God to speak to us and then be obedient? Do we seek to function out of our relationship with God, or do we try to function ourselves into relationship with God?

And then a bit later Mulholland gives this challenge:

Let God analyze you. What is your primary mode of Christian life: Is it functional or is it relational?

God did analyze me and He opened my eyes to the fact that for the most part my primary mode of living the Christian life is functional. I'm always trying to function my way into a relationship with God. I'm trying to perform and earn His love by working hard, doing the right things and on and on rather functioning out of my love relationship with Him.

Here's how God analyzed me. This is what I wrote in my journal, again on June 5th during my time in CO:

I continued to pray and I sensed God speaking a number of things to me, but the main thing I sensed Him saying is that I seek Him in wrong ways. When I asked what He meant by that He seemed to say, "You don't seek ME!" In other words, when I read my Bible or do so many other spiritual things it is not really about seeking God – it's about getting information, etc. So I asked what I needed to do and I felt like God said that I don't need to do anything; I just need to be. ["Be what?" I asked. "My child," He answered]. When I began to pray about this and what this meant, God seemed to give me [a] picture . . . of sitting in his lap. I asked God, "What do I have to do to sit there" and in response I sensed God said, "You already are."

See I'm always thinking, "What do I have to do?" Task, task, perform. Earn it. But God was saying, "I love you. You don't do tasks to earn my love. I just love you. Like a little child sitting in complete relational security on his dad's lap, you are sitting on my lap. It has nothing to do with you earning it. It has to do with the truth that I love you. You are my child."

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.

What's your approach to God? Are you trying to function your way into relationship with Him? Do you try to perform to earn His love? Or do you really understand that you are His child and that He loves you?

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, Jesus, the Son of God, full of power, lives within you. What an amazing truth! And, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have entered into a love relationship with God. You are His child and He loves you. Again, what an amazing truth! These were the central truths that God impressed upon my heart during my sabbatical.

But, let me explicitly make the link between these truths and coming to a place where God has full reign in our lives. When we think about allowing anyone else to be in charge of your life, that's kind of a scary thing. Our natural tendency is to push back against that. And that's our natural tendency with God too. We push back against allowing Him to have all of our lives. The only way I think we will allow Him to have all of us is if we are convinced that if we don't we will be missing the better life; the best life. And unless we are convinced that God is a good heavenly Father who wants our best, we won't yield all to Him. These truths are critical.

If you don't mind, I'd like to share one last journal entry from my sabbatical that helps you see how God was using these truths in my life. In the final week of my sabbatical, Cindy and I attended a conference put on by Willow Creek called the Leadership Summit. After the conference I wrote this in my journal:

Lord, thank you for this conference . . . The most important thing I got from it was the work you did on my heart. You are calling for my fully yielded heart. That is what I sensed Your Spirit pressing upon me at several points.

And then I wrote about the first talk I heard that day and then I wrote this about Bill Hybel's talk:

Then Hybel's final talk where he shared about the things he gleaned from a study of the life of Mother Teresa's life was a significant challenge toward this end. At the end he had us make some vows like Mother Teresa made. Things like: immediate obedience, love for God even when I don't feel anything; nothing held back. Essentially, he called us to make a full surrender to God.

And I made those commitments, believing that God loves me and that it the best way to live life. And then I wrote this:

Lord, help me to die to myself, to a desire for comfort, to a tolerance for sin, to a desire for greatness, for the applause of men. Lord, remind me and overwhelm my heart again with your love and grace. Show me afresh the work Christ accomplished for me. Don't let me be content to live for anything less than Your glory and Your purposes. As Hybels said – this is my one and only life. Help me not to waste it.

If you are living independent of God; if you are not living a life of faith and trust and yieldedness, a life empowered by Christ in you, are wasting your life. Do you really want that? Or do

you want your life to count in all the ways God wants it to count? I'm convinced that God has an amazing plan for your life – a life of significance, a life invested in the things that matter to God.

Well, the only way that you will have that kind of life is if you give yourself fully to God. Does He have you fully? He wants all of you. Or are you holding back?

If you are struggling with giving yourself fully to God, let me encourage you to invite him to remind you afresh of the reality that Jesus lives in you. Invite him to show you afresh how much He loves you and that you are His child for whom He wants the best.

To close today, I want to lead you in a prayer. This is prayer that Hybels led us in at the end of the conference. It is a prayer of commitment to God. It is a prayer of saying, “God you can have all of me.” If that is where you are at this morning, let me encourage you to pray this to God in your heart after I pray.

God, I yield myself fully to you. I embrace your calling on my life. I will do your bidding without delay. I will refuse you nothing. I will endure all hardships. When I don't feel your presence, I will still be faithful. I will seek to love you as you have never been loved before. Here am I; send me.

Closing Prayer