

Message Draft for 2010/8/8
by Joseph Totsis

Last Sunday Pastor Dan reminded us that the Christian Faith was not about obligatory rules but about having a loving relationship with God. Amen! But how do we have a loving “relationship” with God? I believe many struggle with this, even those of us who know and love God need this reminder. So, before we start we need to establish a foundational truth.

1John 4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Now, this is something that many skeptics have a hard time understanding and even excepting. They will often ask, “if there is a God of Love, then why is there so much pain, violence, suffering, in this world?” Where is this God of Love? Have you ever heard that argument? Perhaps you have even asked it yourself?

The answer is found in one word that might surprise you... Does anyone know it ??? The word is... “Choice” Let me explain... Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,

As we read... God is love. (1John 4:8)

Understand that love is an attribute of God. Question??? Does everyone have love? No! Question??? Does everyone desire to be loved? Yes! And if they say they don't they are either lying or they have been hurt by false love and are afraid to love again. But inherently, instinctively... every human desires to be loved.

I have a friend who has been a missionary in Romania for the last 13 years. She started a ministry called Rock Ministries. The ministry is to rescue helpless and hopeless children. Children who have been abandoned at birth. This is a big problem in Romania and if we were to take a missions trip to Romania you know what Nanette would have us do... ? Hold babies! Why? Because the Hospitals are filled with abandoned babies. And although they have staff that can feed and change them... they don't have enough staff to hold and love each one of them. And many of these babies will not survive without love. They will simply give up.

“A child can survive longer without food than without love...” - Nannette Gonzalez

So inherently, instinctively... every human desires to be loved. This is an attribute of God. And God desires for us to Love Him. Why else do you suppose we were created?

But in order for God to receive Love from Human beings He had to give us the ability to Choose. It's called free will. You see “Love is a Choice”

Love without a choice is really not love at all. Think about it.... our desire to be loved will never be fulfilled unless the other person has the choice not to love you or me back.

Let me explain: when I proposed to Amy. It wasn't like the cave man days. I didn't just grab her by the hair and say, “your going to be my wife!” I didn't start slapping her and forcing her to tell me she loved me. “Oh, I love you, I love you, please don't hurt me!” That's not love! We understand this. Why? Because we wouldn't want anyone to force us to love them.

And so, God doesn't force us to love Him.

Now, I am really good with computers. And I can program my computer to start up and have some beautiful women on the screen telling me that I am so handsome and that she loves me... but that isn't love either. I can't program someone to love me. That would never satisfy the desire I have to be loved and excepted. And so God doesn't program us to love Him. “I love you God, I love you God...” like a robot.

Last October I came to propose to Amy at Disney Sea in Tokyo. I was so nervous!!! But when she said yes... it was so special! Why? Because I knew she could have said no. But she choose to say yes!

So, God gives us a free will choice to love and except Him or not. Why is there Pain, Violence, Suffering??? Because from the beginning mankind has rejected God. This is the root of sin? Rejecting God's love. Hence... pain, violence, suffering, etc... etc...

James 4:1* What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God."

If every human being decided to love God... we would be in paradise.

So with that as our foundation. Back to the question...
"How do we have a loving "relationship" with God?"

You all know the answer. Just ask yourself one question? How would you like to be loved???

We see a good picture of this in the book of **Acts 2:41-22**. This is at Pentecost where the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit in the upper room and Peter just finished sharing the Gospel (the good news about Jesus) to the multitudes.

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

So, we see the early church steadfast in four areas that are not just a good example for us to follow as a church today. But as we will see. They are vital in sustaining Loving relationship's. Let's look at them one at a time.

1: The Apostles Teaching: What were they teaching? The Word of God, the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Bible is God's love letter to us. This is how He speaks to us. Through His Word.

Now... how does this relate to our relationships? Think about your Loved ones and Friends. How do they stay in touch with you? They Text message you, they send Emails, letters, mail. Facebook, etc... Now... think about how you respond to those messages.

- a. Are you "excited" to read what they sent you?
- b. do you feel like you "Have to" read what they sent you.or
- c. Do you just ignore what they sent you and perhaps even trash them?

Your answer will reveal what your relationship is like with that person. And so it is with God and His Word.
PRAYER: Is simply talking to God.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Be joyful always; **17 pray continually**; **18** give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

It is God's will that we continually speak to Him through prayer. Now... once again how does this relate to our relationships? Think about your Loved ones and Friends.

- a. Are you "excited" to talk to them?
- b. Do you feel like you "Have to" talk to them. or
- c. Do you just ignore them and never talk to them?

Your answer will reveal what your relationship is like with that person. And so it is with God and your prayer life.

FELLOWSHIP: Spending time with God

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

When we spend time with each other in His name we are spending time with God. That is why Paul said in...

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This is also why Jesus gave us a new commandment to Love one another

John 13:34* "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **35** By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Now... how does this relate to our relationships? Think about your Loved ones and Friends. Emails, and talking on the phone are great but pale in comparison to being with that person you care about physically.

What we really desire is to be with that person. Face to face.

So Ask yourself...

- a. Are you "excited" about spending time with them?
- b. Do you feel like you "have to" spend time with them. or
- c. Do you just ignore them and hope you will never see them again?

Your answer will reveal what your relationship is like with that person. And so it is with God. Are you "excited" to be with the Lord?"

Isa 55:6 **Seek** the LORD while he may **be found**; call on him while he is near.

Jer 29:13* You will **seek me** and find me when you **seek me** with all your heart.

Now many churches will encourage new believers in these three areas which are very good. You will often hear... "We need to go to Church, read our Bible and Pray." But how many times do you hear we need to Break Bread? It is something that is usually not stressed at first. Yet, it is listed here in Acts 2:42. I believe it is the most important of them all. Let me explain.

1. **BREAKING OF BREAD:** What is this? We did it last Sunday. Communion.

1Co 11:24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in **remembrance** of me."

1Co 11:25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in **remembrance** of me."

Why do we take communion? To Remember. To remember how much God loves us. To Remember that He died for us:

Why is it so important to remember? Often times if someone is out of sight... they become out of mind!" And once out of mind... they will soon be out of our heart." But that is in reference to those you really don't care about. It's easy to forget them. But when you love someone... they may be out of sight. But they are never out of mind. We love them... we miss them! Our deepest desire is to see and be with them again. Sometimes, many times, with tears.

We do things to remember our friends and loved ones: We take Pictures to remind us. Purikura. We have keep sakes, even wedding rings. All to remind us. And when we remember them. That is when we are motivated to **call them**. That is when we are motivated to **read their messages**. That is when we can't wait to **fellowship with them**, to see them face to face.

Remembering is essential to any relationship. And so, remembering Jesus is essential to having a relationship with Him. Remembering that He loves us and died for our sins, and has gone to prepared a place for us. A place where there is no more sorrow, no more pain, no more suffering. Where he will wipe every tear from our eyes and make all things new. His love for me! When I remember.... That is when I am motivated to read, to pray, to fellowship. This is the key to any intimate relationship. And just like the people we love... we don't just think about them once a month. We think about them all the time! And so, we don't have to wait once a month for Communion to remember Jesus. We can remember Him all the time, in everything we do, everywhere we go, we take Jesus with us. Don't just leave Him here at church. Or in your Bible. Or soon forget about Him after you say your prayers. You take Him with you. You hold Him dear in your heart. This is what it means to have a loving relationship with anyone and it is no different with God.

When I first decided to follow Jesus... I could remember many different denominations and even cults telling me what to do and what not to do. Many of the claiming to be the only true way... but I realized that they all can't be right. Especially because they were contradicting each other.

So out of my confusion and desperation I remember crying out to God saying, "God I just want to love you. Everyone is telling me what to do and what not to do... But what do you want me to do?" And the Lord Spoke to me... I opened up my Bible and read:

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22* Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

23* Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

This is judgement day. These people are not being allowed into heaven. Although they did many works in His name. They still weren't getting in. Why? Because Jesus "never knew them". Personally, intimately. They were caught up works in hopes to reach God, in hopes to elevate themselves. Regardless... they didn't get it. They didn't understand that Jesus didn't die on the cross for us to be religious. He died because He loves us. And all He wants is for us to simply love Him back the way we would want to be loved.

Tonight I "want" to go home to my wife! I "want" to talk to her! I "want" to hear from her!" And I am excited about it because I love her!

Imagine if I thought... Oh.... I "have" to go home to my wife tonight. Oh.... I "have" to talk to her. Oh... I "have" to listen to her.

If that is the attitude I had... how sad that would be for Amy. How sad that would be for you. And how sad it is for God.

Now understand... allot of times there are things I don't want to do for Amy. Because I am tired, I am busy, whatever the reason. But I do them anyways... why? Because I love her! Love is sacrificial.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Sometimes we need to sacrifice our wants, our desires, and die to ourselves. The ultimate expression of Love.

So ask yourself...

Have we been doing this? Is it all about Him? Or is it all about us?

Do you have a personal loving relationship with Jesus Christ today?

Do you love God? Don't tell me? Show Him! Show Him! Talk to Him, Listen to Him, Spend time with Him!

Not because you have to... but because you want to!

So for those of you who do not know the Lord. Know this.. He loves you and so much and wants to start have a personal relationship with you today. Will you open your heart to Him and receive His love today? Has your relationship with God been based upon works? Have you had a "have to" relationship with Jesus? But today you "want to" simply love Him back and start having a real personal relationship with Him today? Perhaps you have been a Christian for some time but your love has become luke warm. Perhaps you need to return to your first love today.

If God has spoken to your heart today then simply pray this pray after me on your heart. A prayer to invite Him in for the first time or perhaps a prayer of re-dedication. If God has spoke to your heart. Than repeat this prayer after me.