

Volume 1, Day 22: Freedom from Struggling to Please God

My young woman listener from Europe continued, "... God sent His Son, not to condemn, but to save the world from the penalty of sin." And I love this freedom, and I guess that's where the relaxing comes from. It's not just to find a couch and become a potato. What relaxing means is that I'm not **striving so hard** on the inside. I don't mistrust God's love such that I have to earn what He wants to give me. And then I can relax into that reality."

That's something Jesus talked about with his disciples when He talked about this journey in Matthew chapter six. He's talking about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field and how they don't toil or spin, but God provides. He cares for them. And He asks the question, "How many of you, by worrying, can add even an inch to your height." And then Jesus says this (and I'm going to use "The Message" by Eugene Peterson) "What I'm trying to get you to do is to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, that you can't respond to God's giving." Now, that's where the shift needs to happen.

For all of us, we're used to getting. We're trying to **get** God's will, **get** a voice, **get** a relationship, **get** a ministry, **get** something. We've been taught all that, but **this** relationship is not about what I can get from God. It really is as if we were each morning waking up and saying, "God, what are you giving me today? What do you want to put into my life? And if it's just peace and if it's just calm it's okay."

It may not be words of wisdom and revelation and knowledge every day. It may just be the security of God's assurance, "I'm with you. I've got your back. You're safe in me." Let's grow in the beauty of this relationship. Relax.

Volume 1, Day 23: Trust Follows Love Received

It's not hard to do. It's like my relationship with my 2-year-old grandson. If I'm going to have a relationship with him, he can't do any of the work. I'm going to do the work. If it's true of me and my grandson, how much truer is it of me with God? If this relationship is going to grow and flourish, it's not because I'm going to know what to do. It's because He does. And as I'm actively participating **in** Him, I'm not actively trying to grab what I want for myself. I'm actually learning to relax in God's provision.

Everything about life, the fellowship, the wisdom and the strength you need is a gift that God gives. But if you ask him, He'll help you. Pray, "Lord, teach me to rest in your love today. Help me know how deeply loved by God I really am, even in my least worthy moments." You'll find out He's not there to condemn you. He's there to teach you how to love Him enough so that you will trust Him enough to follow Him with no more questions.

Volume 1, Day 24: Transformation NOT Information

We've learned that there are experts. And if they tell us what to do, we can follow them. Or there is some system we need to work that will make this Christ-life happen. Listen to this letter from Orlando. "Several years ago, I had a conversation with my pastor and asked him, "Why can't we have a conversation with God in the same manner that the men and women we read about in the Bible did?" His response was, "We don't need to. We have the Bible today."

Now, I love the scriptures, but if we're going to follow the Bible, we will not be following Him. We will have made the Bible the object of our worship. The journey we've been invited to take is not to be **good** Christians. It is not to follow the obligations, demands, and rituals of religion. Instead, we've been invited to love Him and follow Him only because we love Him.

This is how Paul expressed it in Ephesians chapter five. Again, reading from the message, "Watch what God does and then you do it. Like children who learn how to live from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with Him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious, but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us, but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that."

That's where this journey takes us. As God begins to make Himself known to you, you will develop a greater desire to follow Him. An unfortunate thing happened to Christianity in the second century. It went from being people who were learning to live in the love of God and celebrate that love with each other, to being a religion about Christ with defined doctrines, rituals and traditions.

Volume 1, Day 25: Simplicity and Peace of Love

People became **good** Christians by doing the things that **good Christians do**. Jesus didn't teach us to live like that. Instead, He taught us that God wanted us to love Him in the same way that we were being loved by God. This is a journey of love. It is a journey of growing love. And for that, we need to follow a **person** not a **punch list**. Many times when we are following a religion or curriculum or some man's idea of what God is, we'll find ourselves on a completely opposite journey.

Come back to the simplicity of the love of Jesus. Ask Him, "How do you love me and how do you want me to love you?" Then listen for Him. This journey is **not**, "Yes, I'm sharing my life with Him. I'm initiating the dialog. I'm talking about the things that concern **me**," but **rather**, "I'm always listening. I am listening when I'm engaging in my activities and simply talking to Him."

I don't always get answers right away. I don't have direct conversations like, "Well, God, what do you think about this?" And He answers, "Well, I think that." But over time we fall into a rhythm where we already know what He thinks and desires and begin doing it immediately.

Now, how does God speak to us? It's different for every person. I look for an impression in my mind or soul. It is something deep inside that leads you. I like this. Someone said, "When you're being led by the Spirit, there are times when you have a sense of peace or a sense of pause. In other words, He speaks to you through your circumstances. Sometimes it's a feeling of warmth and rightness about what it is that He might want you to do or something He wants you to know. It brings peace to your heart, even if it's a difficult word, even if it's something you'd rather not do. There's a peace with it."

Volume 1, Day 26: Even Restlessness Leads to Peace

There are times when there is restlessness in our heart when we're thinking about doing something difficult or thinking about dealing with a difficult person. This restlessness and unease can be the Spirit of God as well. It is still as simple as learning to recognize and follow those impressions in our spirit. When they come we can be fully aware of them. Scripture described it as, "... a still, small voice." Some people wish that God would just yell at us, light up neon signs and make His way obvious. I think God speaks in a still, small voice to us for the same reason I do it with my children.

When I talk in a still, small voice, it invites them close. They lean in, and it's the relationship that's more important than the voice. It's more about learning to recognize how God is loving me than it is what I should do or what I should know about him. Recognizing his love in the actual circumstances of my life as I walk on day by day is what it means to follow Him.

The scriptures may help, if the Spirit directs you to a particular passage that provides guidance. But do not play 'spin the Bible' to get random chance answers. The most important thing is that you **feel** His love. How this Father **feels** about you in your worst moments and in your best moments is identical. He always loves you wholeheartedly. **Feeling** His presence with you in the agony of your life gives you peace even when the circumstances are anything but peaceful.

He's celebrating happily and joyfully with you and in you in the middle of the mess. You consider it joy when trials come when you believe how deeply God loves you. As you live **feeling** loved, you can love others like that. His love will make you comfortable in every situation.

Volume 1, Day 27: Prayer as Natural as Breathing

Begin to listen to God in the thoughts He puts in your mind. Feel the impressions He makes on your heart. This is how He makes Himself known to you. He also talks to you through your circumstances and experiences. It's not an exact science. We use words, actions and body language like He uses these things. Following Him is by becoming literate in His ways of communication, that is, His expressions. You're not going to be a hundred percent sure of what He is trying to express. Neither are you 100% sure that you have been perfectly clear in your communications with other persons. But we get the idea.

There's a feeling of warmth in being drawn into something by Him. And there's the feeling of restlessness when it's time to back away. And fully understanding another's communication may require extensive dialog. Prayer is this dialog with God to get a more accurate understanding of what He is trying to tell you. Then prayer expands like human conversations into dreaming and scheming new things.

Someone wrote to me, "Since I've started on this journey, my prayer life has flat lined (died)." He said that he used to pray a big list, trying to get God to do those things. And in the course of this journey that began to feel artificial. So, he stopped doing it. He thought his prayer life was over. So, I asked him, "Are you talking to God at all?" He responded, "Yes, all the time." I asked, "When you're engaged in your daily activities?" He said, "Yeah, I've got things before God all the time." I continued, "Is He speaking to you? Is He making some things clear?" He said, "Yeah, I feel like I'm beginning to make some discoveries." I said, "But you feel like your prayer life is flat lined." Suddenly it dawned on him. THIS IS PRAYER!

Volume 1, Day 28: PRAYER: Affectionate Dialog

Prayer is an ongoing conversation with God in which I simply present things to Him or ask Him questions, a dialog of sorts. I'm listening for Him to express Himself in His ways as I go through the day. We are finding our way into a rhythm of conversation and life together. My prayer life changed drastically in this journey.

Before I became confident in the Father's affection for me, I prayed a lot. But I prayed my fears. I prayed my anxieties. I prayed for things I wanted. And I prayed intensely. I was desperately hoping that God would give them to me or my friends for whom I was praying.

When I began to be at ease in His love, I wasn't as anxious anymore. I wasn't as needy for the things I wanted God to do in my life. I didn't need a big ministry with great book sales volume anymore. So those things that I had been praying for ceased. Anxiety was no longer driving my prayer life anymore. And, to be honest, I felt like I was losing something valuable to me.

But as time went on, I learned that I was losing something that had never worked anyway. And I ask you this, "For all the prayer lists you have, how much of that did God actually do for you?" For most of us, the answer is, "Very little." Occasionally something happens regarding those lists. I am confident that God meant us to live in genuine dialog with Him, but not by reciting prayer lists.

Prayer is about the things God wants to give us, not Him giving us the things we're requesting or expecting of Him. So now that I have engaged in conversation with Him, I find myself asking these kinds of things. I just pray, "God, what are you giving me today? Who are you putting in my life that I get to love? What do you want to show me about yourself? How do I live in your life and grace?"