

## ***“Cultivating Dynamic Relationship with God”***

### **Introduction**

The New Year generally inspires a time for reflection on the past year and the year ahead.

I think I would rather not think about this past year. I would much rather think about the year ahead with prayer for a more positive outlook. Even though most of us don't like change, the New Year inspires us to think about what changes we want to consider. Health changes, economic changes, social changes, personal changes and of course spiritual changes. Any change in how we live comes out of how we think. It involves goals stemming from priorities.

Few things ever come about without specific intention; planning.

I love the fact that Jesus Himself boiled the entire Scripture down to two irreducible minimums from which all the rest flow.

*One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that Jesus had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:28-31*

Love God fully. Love people sacrificially. These must hold a priority position in our day to day life if we are to claim to be true followers of Jesus Christ. They must be the priorities of a faith community (church) or an individual. They happen to be two of four priorities of our faith community; Chico Alliance Church. As we begin a new year, I want to reset our sights; recalibrate our activities to align with our purposes. I call it CPR for eternal impact. When someone quits breathing, many have been trained to perform CPR to keep life-giving blood sustaining the vital organs.

Our CPR for supplying life to a dying church or spiritual life stands for...

Continually cultivate dynamic relationship with God.

Persistently pursue meaningful connection with people.

Resolutely resist evil and restore godly living.

As we practice these three priorities we will impact our world for Christ.

### ***I. Continually cultivate dynamic relationship with God.***

Jesus said...

*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.*

Jesus called for continuous all-encompassing love for God. Love God with all of your being all of the time. The command to fervently love God appears all through the Bible.

#### ***“Cultivate”***

What does it mean to cultivate something? It means to give attention and energy and time to bringing something about. In our purpose statement we are to give time and energy to cultivating a relationship with God. All good relationships require cultivation. Good relationships require intentional activity. Without cultivation, relationships cease to grow and even diminish.

#### ***“Dynamic”***

Dynamic means vital, ever-changing, growing, vibrant, energetic, active, alive. Does that describe your relationship with God?

### **“With God”**

Our purpose is to engage in an ever-growing relationship with the God of the universe. This is only made possible through the work of Jesus Christ. He made it possible for a sinful creature to reconcile with a Holy Creator. He made communication and understanding the incomprehensible possible. This is only possible through intentional cultivation.

A preposition is a word that generally designates relationship of some sort.

“They locked the dog **IN** the cage.” “The child ran **AFTER** the dog.” “The bird flew **AROUND** the cage.”

The preposition indicates some sort of spatial or relational connection. People cultivate a particular relationship with God indicated by particular prepositions.

### **OVER God**

This is the concept that I am beyond any need of personal relationship with God. I may believe there is a God, but there is no sense of a necessary tangible personal interaction. The better I understand how things are made and operate according to certain principles, the less I need personal connection. This applies to every aspect of life. You really don't need the law giver when you have the laws or principles. This approach to God grew out of the enlightenment.

Science and discovery of universal principles replaced personal regular interaction with God.

Consider many of the self-help books that claim to have discovered the hidden secret of...

Business, parenting, marriage, communication, success, finances, church growth.

Follow these principles and you are guaranteed success without God's specific intervention.

There is really no need for moment by moment communication with God because, after all, I have discovered the principles. This approach to God reduces life to a secret set of formulas.

Christians easily fall into this pattern of relating to God. The problem is, our ways are not God's ways and we must continually rely on Him for application of His truth to any given circumstance.

He often does not always do things the same way twice. Moses did not, as far as we know, continually go back to the burning bush for the next step. The Bible does not record any other communication from the bush or God using a burning bush with anyone else. Hebrews says He communicated through His prophets in many portions and many ways.

Moses ran into a problem later when he relied on previous God-directed methods for a similar situation. The mass of Israelites migrating to the Promised Land encountered many opportunities to trust God; most of which they failed miserably. One such opportunity came when they ran out of life-sustaining water. Water for a group of up to three million people and their livestock in the searing heat of the desert is a serious issue. They complained. Moses communicated with God. God gave Moses specific instruction to deal with the life-threatening situation. Strike the rock; which Moses did and water sufficient to meeting the need burst forth.

Sometime later, they met with a similar crisis. Again the people whined and Moses went to God. God again provided specific instruction to deal with the life-threatening situation. Speak to the rock and it will bring forth

live-sustaining water for man and beast. Moses however in a fit of anger toward the people reverted to what worked before with even greater gusto. He struck the rock twice. God in His mercy still provided water and in the eyes of the people Moses was again the hero. For God it was a different story.

*But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." Numbers 20:12*

Don't allow your relationship with God to fall into some formula. There is mystery and often confusion when it comes to spiritual understanding. Don't rely on what worked before or what some book said is the secret to success. Continually develop a dynamic relationship with God.

This kind of relationship also manifests in another way. There is a tendency to limit God to our perception of what we THINK God should be like.

*But to the wicked God says, "What right have you to tell of My statutes And to take My covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline, and you cast My words behind you. When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you associate with adulterers. You let your mouth loose in evil And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes. Psalm 50:16-21*

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9*

Our understanding of God must continually develop through interaction with the Scriptures.

## **UNDER God**

This approach to relationship perceived God as basically harsh and unapproachable. They view God as a Judge, policeman, boss, enforcer, punishing parent and even executioner. Most want nothing to do with developing a relationship with any of these. This is a relationship of obligation and guilt.

## **FROM God**

This view of God sees Him as only a means to an end. The relationship is only valuable to achieve self-actualization. My happiness is really the highest goal. I will do whatever is necessary to achieve what pleases me and advances my personal agenda. I may even pray, serve, worship, study or learn but the end goal is not deeper relationship WITH God but rather greater blessing FROM God here and hereafter.

## **AGAINST GOD**

This approach to God by some refuses to bow the knee to a sovereign God. They actively oppose anything to do with God.

*For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Romans 1:21-23*

*And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper... Romans 1:28 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. Romans 1:32*

At the end times when God pours out His wrath on the nations of the world that have rejected Him, they defiantly react.

*The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. Revelation 9:20-21*

*Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory. Revelation 16:9*

*and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds. Revelation 16:11*

Even after a thousand years of righteous reign under Jesus and His followers, the devil will rally many of those born during that time, that refuse to bow to the rule of Christ in a final war. Hell will be amply filled with those who really have no desire for relationship with God. Many want to escape hell but really do not want to live in intimate relationship with God.

## FOR GOD

This approach to God has some merit but only under the right reasons. This approach relates to God not with intimate relationship WITH Him but sacrificial service FOR Him. This certainly has a place and can be seen in Scripture but such an approach cannot be sustained because it is ultimately a relationship based on works for God. It seeks to gain God's favor by service.

True relationship with God must be founded on a surety of God's favor based on Christ's works on our behalf not ours for Him. It is on the basis of Christ finished work that we, out of gratitude, chose to serve Him.

Our service flows not out of obligation but out of response to His unconditional love for us.

Our service flows out of dynamic relationship with Him. This now brings us to the final two relational prepositions that I believe form the foundation of our approach to God. It is the basis of our priority to continually cultivate dynamic relationship with God.

## WITH GOD

This approach understands that we were designed for intimate relationship with God and views daily interaction with God to be our reason for living.

*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ... Philippians 3:7-8*

All through the Old Testament such special relationship with God was indicated by the phrase, "God was with him." Before the rebellion, Adam walked with God in the garden.

*Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. Genesis 5:24*

*The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian who saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. Genesis 39:2-3*

*Then Moses said to God, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" Exodus 33:15-16*

*Joshua, "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you." Deuteronomy 31:6*

*So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land. Joshua 6:27*

*The angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior." Judges 6:12*

*Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." Judges 6:13-16*

*Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. 1 Samuel 3:19*

*David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him. 1 Samuel 18:12-14*

*Now Solomon established himself securely over his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him and exalted him greatly. 2 Chronicles 1:1*

*But the LORD said to me (Jeremiah), "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. Jer 1:7-8*

*But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. Isaiah 43:1-2*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me...Psalm 23:4*

Such a relationship seemed limited to a few choice people. Jesus came that such a relationship would be available to all.

*"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." Matthew 1:23*

God promised a similar relationship with us as He enjoyed with the Son.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. John 1:1-2*

It was recognized by many.

*Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." John 3:2*

It was declared by Scripture.

*"You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. Acts 10:38*

Such an intimate relationship is promised to every believer.

*But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 1 Corinthians 6:17*

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matt 28:19-20*

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. John 14:23*

Such a relationship is available but not always as tangible as we would like.

There are promises related to an even more tangible "with" relationship.

*"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. John 17:24*

*"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. John 14:3*

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, Revelation 21:3*

This relationship towers over the other approaches of Over God, Under God, From God, For God. Yet another preposition pictures an even deeper relationship possible.

## IN GOD

Jesus promised a transition from "with" to "in".

*"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Encourager, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17*

*"In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. John 14:20*

*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 1 John 4:15*

*As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 1 John 2:24*

*"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. John 17:20-21*

*God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27*

The fact of an oil well IN the ground under your property doesn't change because of your lack of awareness or ambition to tap into it. God's presence is in you and you are in Him.

Believe it. Pursue it. Determine this year to cultivate dynamic relation with the God who is not only "with" you but "in" you.