

“Cultivating Dynamic Relationship with God” Pt 2

Introduction

The Westminster Shorter Catechism adopted in 1646 answers the question concerning the chief end of man like this...

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

Augustine wrote,

“You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.”

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

Love God fully. Love people sacrificially.

Jesus clearly identified these are two life-priorities. They happen to be two of four priorities of our faith community; Chico Alliance Church. I call it CPR for eternal impact. 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.

We shared a whole series of messages on the “one another” passages and how we should relate to one another. There are some commands in scripture that absolutely cannot be practiced apart from intentional connection to a group of people.

Resolutely resist evil and restore godly living.

We recently spent considerable time on the subject of righteous living.

This too is best accomplished through connection with a group of like-minded people. As we practice these three priorities we will effectively impact our world for Christ and most effectively carry out our Jesus-pronounced mission to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them to faithfully follow Jesus.

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. Structure your everyday life and activities around the purpose of deepening relationship with God. How we think about God determines how we relate to Him. One's view of God dictates one relationship with God. How we see God determines how we relate to Him.

The church has advocated many different perspectives over the years that can be identified by the use of a particular preposition. Many of these perceptions in some way seek to control God and life to address our need. We live in a chaotic and frightening world. We gravitate to anything that will provide peace, security and happiness.

OVER GOD

The over God concept views God as the original cause who is no longer personally involved in our life but has built principles and natural laws into the universe. The more we discover and apply those laws, the better life will be. The key is to discover and apply the right principles. It doesn't matter if you are a believer or not. If you apply the right principles you will realize success in life. As long as I know the principle or natural law, I move beyond any need of on-going personal relationship with God.

I may believe there is a God, but there is no sense of a necessary tangible personal interaction. This applies to every aspect of life. You really don't need to consult the law giver when you have the laws or principles. The Bible then becomes a life management manual rather than the means to know God.

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... 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.

The fact that life cannot be reduced to a set of formulas creates a major problem. When things don't "work" we experience either guilt (because we didn't do what we were supposed to) or bitterness (because God didn't do what we expected).

God and life can never be reduced to some formula or human expectation. The Bible records multiple examples of God's unpredictability and mystery. Job expected that if he applied the right formula he could expect the positive outcome.

When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually. Job 1:5

Job's expectation was that if he only followed the rules his family would be protected. He slammed into the reality that there was NO guarantee. He, in fact, lost all of his children to tragic unexpected calamity. Not only that, he lost his wealth and health. Job's struggle all through the book was, "Why is this happening to me? I followed all the rules and so this should not be happening." Job's friends also operated from this same viewpoint. If you live righteous, God will bless you. If you don't, expect suffering and punishment.

Job struggled with both the "over God" and "under God" viewpoint. He did get a healthy dose of "under God" in the end along with a restored relationship with God.

UNDER GOD

The under God concept views God as a celestial policeman. It is all about discovering and obeying the rules. Obey the rules and there is no problem. Violate the rules and expect retribution. This is a fear based perception.

There is a place for a healthy respect and fear of God but it is not the primary foundation of relationship. Yes God is holy but He is also LOVE.

Most want nothing to do with developing a relationship with a frightful God. This is a relationship base on obligation and guilt when we fail to life up to the rules. The view easily leads to bitterness when we follow the rules and still suffering.

FROM GOD

This concept of God views Him as only a means to an end. The relationship is only valuable to achieve self-actualization. My happiness is really the highest goal.

The younger prodigal son illustrates this relationship. He served his father to gain an inheritance. Even when he returned, he had no expectation of restoring relationship with his dad. He returned home for a job. Of course the Father had a whole different perspective and embraced his son and drew him in to a restored relationship.

Here is a current example of such a viewpoint taught at a large mega church.

“I just want to encourage every one of us to realize when we obey God we’re not doing it for God — I mean that’s one way to look at it,” she said from the pulpit. “We’re doing it for yourself, because God takes pleasure when were happy. That’s the thing that gives him the greatest joy this morning ... just do good for your own self. Do good because God wants you to be happy.”

Notice the “under God” viewpoint mixed in. Do good for your happiness not for God’s glory.

She added, “When you come to church when you worship him, you’re not doing it for God, really. You’re doing it for yourself, because that’s what makes God happy.”

True relationship with God results in genuine joy but do I only do good to obtain joy? NO! This view keeps a primary focus on my well-being not on deeper relationship.

AGAINST GOD

This approach views God as an enemy to be resisted and opposed.

FOR GOD

This approach to God carries some merit but only for the right motivations. This approach relates to God not for intimate relationship WITH Him but sacrificial service FOR Him. This approach views God as commander and chief interested only in soldiers to carry out the mission. This approach serves God for a sense of worth or purpose not relationship.

The older prodigal son illustrates this approach as well as the under God approach. The older son followed all the rules. He served the Father with hope of a future pay out. His true motivation came to light when the younger son returned.

"But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; Luke 15:29

God does call us to service but it is not the primary motivation or focus.

Paul said, "The love of Christ constrains me to serve Him." True relationship with God must flow from 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's finished work that we, out of gratitude, chose to serve Him.

Our service flows not out of obligation or a sense of personal worth but out of response to His unconditional love for us and what He has done IN us. Service best flows out of dynamic relationship with Him. Jesus served the Father from the overflow of His daily communion with Him.

The final two approaches to God are similar if not synonymous. It could be that one flows out of the other. Perhaps they could be coupled and call it the "Within God" concept.

WITH GOD

This approach understands that God designed us for intimate relationship with Him and views daily interaction with God to be our primary 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

The Old Testament drew attention to such special relationship with God by the phrase, "God was with him." We often pray, "God be with us" knowing full well the God's presence is everywhere. What we are asking for is that God would provide some tangible demonstration of His presence.

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 only a few choice people in the Old Testament.

Jesus came to make such a relationship 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 experience between He enjoyed and 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

Many recognized this obvious connection.

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

The Holy Spirit drew attention to this Divine connection in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

"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

Jesus promised a continual intimate relationship 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. Jesus spoke of a yet future unmistakable "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 concept of relationship with God towers over the other approaches of Over God, Under God, From God or For God. Yet another preposition visualizes an even deeper relationship possible.

IN GOD

Jesus promised a shift in relationship 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. Col 1:27

The fact of an oil well IN the ground under your property doesn't change because of your lack of awareness or failure to tap into it. The fact of God with us and in us does not change because of our ignorance or neglect.

God did not create in order to be loved, but rather, created out of the overflow of the perfect love that had always existed among the father, son, and Holy Spirit who ever live in perfect and mutual relationship and delight. Kevin DeYoung

Skye Jethani, the author of “With” summarizes the various approaches to God this way.

God’s plan to restore his creation was not to send a list of rules and rituals to follow (life under God), nor was it the implementation of useful principles (life over God). He did not send the genie to grant us our desires (life from God), nor did he give us a task to accomplish (life for God). Instead God himself came to be with us to walk with us once again as he had done in Eden in the beginning. Jesus entered into our dark existence to share our broken world and to illuminate a different way forward.

At their core, all the other approaches to God try to use God.

- Life from God uses him to supply our material desires.
- Life over God uses him as the source of principles or laws to make life better.
- Life under God tries to manipulate God through obedience to secure blessings and avoid calamity.
- Life for God uses him and his mission to gain a personal sense of direction and purpose.
- The life with and in God is different because the goal is not to use God the goal is God.

Consider an often quoted Psalm.

Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

On the surface, this appears to be a formula for achieving our desires. I prefer to view this verse as an invitation to know God more deeply. If we will delight ourselves in him, then He actually is the desire of our heart that God grants.

"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." John 14:21

God wants to have deeper relation with us. Do we want that kind of relationship with Him? Just because you live IN the same house with your spouse does not guarantee intimacy.

God promises to be **with** us and dwells **in** us and we **in** Him. It is a present reality, but will only become a practical reality through the practice of specific habits.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:1-4

Next week and perhaps beyond, I will review the kind of Biblically prescribed habits or tools that help us to continually cultivate this dynamic relationship with God. It is interesting that they just happen to be the same kind of activities that deepen ANY relationship.

God's presence is in you and you are in Him; believe it.

Deeper connection is possible; cultivate it.

One purpose of Chico is to do what we can to help our family continually cultivate deeper relationship with Christ.

Each member's purpose should be to continually develop deeper relationship with Christ.