Building Healthy Relationships

Light of Christ Lutheran Church

September – November 2017

Page 3
Message 01 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: God's Design and Its Corruption | Sermon Text: Genesis 2:15-23, 3:8-19 | Speaker: Paula Graves | September 24, 2017

Page 11
Message 02 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: The Present of Presence | Sermon Text: Exodus 33:7-23 | Speaker: Paula Graves | October 1, 2017

Page 18
Message 03 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: My Relationship with the Lord Transforms my Heart | Text: John 5:16-30 | Speaker – Pastor Tom Graves | October 8, 2017

Page 22
Message 04 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Facing the Fire | Sermon Text: Daniel 3:12-30 | speaker: Paula Graves | October 15, 2017

Page 29
Message 05 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Jesus Comes to Set us Free | Sermon Text: Luke 13:10-17 | Speaker: Pastor Tom Graves | October 22, 2017

Page 33
Message 06 | Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Trials test our Relationships | Sermon Text: Ruth 1:1-20| Speakers: Lay people | October 29, 2017

Page 37
Message 07 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: In Eternity, Will You Be Known as a Soul Saver? | Acts 16:1-5, 2 Timothy 1:3-14, 4:9, 13, 21 | Speaker: Pastor Tom November 5, 2017

Page 41
Message 08 | Series: Building Healthy Relationship | Theme: Tested by Abundance | 2 Chronicles 32:27-31 & 2 Kings 20:13-19 | Speaker: Paula Graves | November 12, 2017

Page 48
Message 09 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Being Rich Toward God| Luke 12:13-31 | Speaker: Pastor Tom Graves | November 19, 2017

Page 52
Message 10 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Whose Kingdom are you Building? | 1 Cor. 3:1-15 | Speaker: Pastor Tom Graves | November 26, 2017

Message 01 | Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: God's Design and Its Corruption | Sermon Text: Genesis 2:15-23, 3:8-19 | Speaker: Paula Graves | September 24, 2017

Today we begin a 10-week sermon series on *Building Healthy Relationships.* Our lives are full of relationships, some good and some not so good. If you are anything like me, you find relationships can be a struggle and even a source of pain. Is it possible to have healthy relationships in this sinful world? What does God say about this? I think it will be helpful to start at the beginning.

Let me set the context for today's story. God has created the universe in a very orderly fashion day by day. God's word is so powerful that He speaks creation into being. The last thing that God creates is a human. God doesn't speak Adam into being like the rest of creation, No, He lovingly forms Adam from the dust of the ground and breathes the breath of life into him. Adam had been made in the image of God. It is at this point that our story begins.

A Story from the Word of God

2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.
16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a
helper fit for him.” ….. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens
and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the
Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and
closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made
into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

(God had given His human creations one command, but the serpent came and tempted them to eat what had been forbidden by doubting the goodness of God. After they had eaten the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil….)

3:8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,
and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of
the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 And he
said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid
myself.” 11 He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I
commanded you not to eat?

(The act of eating the forbidden fruit would have consequences for both Adam and Eve.)

16 To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

17 And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you; in pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

A story from the Word of God

Today’s story is foundational on many levels but today we are going to focus on what it tells us about relationships. The text gives us hints of what God’s design for relationship is and how this perfect design was corrupted at the fall. I think it will be helpful to break this design into several levels in order to understand what our story tells us about relationships. First, I want to look at what our texts shows us about the relationship between humankind and God.

Relationship with God

Design:

By hand and breath of God to be spiritual beings, unlike the animals

From our context we can see that humans were designed in a unique way by God. He specifically formed Adam by His hand into His image and breathed the breath of life into him. God created us to be spiritual beings. Spiritual beings who had the capacity for spiritual understanding, discerning right from wrong, and connecting and communicating with God.[1] I believe God made us for relationship from the beginning.

Walk in cool of day, The type of relationship that Adam and Eve had comes to light in the text only after the fall. It appears that they would meet God face to face to walk in the garden in the cool of the day. Doesn't that sound delightful? They would spend time together in the midst of the beauty of God's creation.

To Work and Keep Garden

God also placed Adam in the garden to work and keep it. As a child, I assumed that meant God made Adam to be a gardener. This is true but there is more. The Hebrew words that are translated here can also have a deeper meaning, especially when they are used together. They have a connotation of serving God and keeping His commandments. These terms are often used for the Levites as they do their work in the Tabernacle.[2] You may be put off by the statement that humans were created to be God's servants. In our culture that doesn't sound like a positive thing, so let's examine what that might mean. Jesus says in Matthw 26:37 that the greatest commandment is:, '*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'*

The greatest commandment We can see from the greatest commandment that God created humankind to love Him. But love can't be forced, it is true love only when there is a choice to love. Example of niece and nephew. God provided that choice in the prohibiting eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had structured creation so that man had a choice to trust and follow God or not. They only had one rule, but that was sufficient for a test of their hearts.

Corruption:

Become naked and separated from God

Before the fall, Adam and Eve would have had a perfect relationship with God, so perfect that they were comfortable walking exposed with God. After the fall, Adam and Eve realize that they are naked and hide from God because they are afraid. I think their nakedness was not only physical, but emotional and spiritual. They realized that they were guilty and vulnerable, they were no longer at ease with God, but separated. Death had begun its work because death is separation. Spiritual death is separation from God, and physical death is separation from life.

God's questions: God still loves them so even in their fear and separation, God asks questions to draw Adam and Eve out. God knew the answers to the questions but wanted Adam and Eve to admit to what they had done. God, in his compassion, provides clothing and even the

[1] Ross, A., & Oswalt, J. N. (2008). *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Genesis, Exodus* (Vol. 1, p. 43). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
[2] Ross, 46.

expulsion from the garden is an act of grace. It prohibits them eating from the tree of life and living in their sinful state forever.

Curses in effect The eating of the forbidden fruit has unexpected consequences of curses. Curses for the serpent, the woman, and the man. Curses which affected all of creation and would continue through the generations.

To summarize what our story tells us about relationship with God: God designed us to have a loving relationship with Him. This love would show itself in service and obedience to God. But God did structure creation so that humans had a choice to love and serve God or go their own way. When Adam and Eve doubted the goodness of God and assumed that God was withholding something from them, they chose to eat of the forbidden fruit. This act corrupted and broke their relationship with God. Sin separated them from God and their once perfect relationship was destroyed.

Relationship with Self

The next section I want to look at is the area of relationship with self. Now you may wonder what this is or you may be thinking that this really sounds weird. Let's take a minute to think about this together. How would you label yourself? We all have many labels, let me give you some examples of mine. I'm the daughter of Marvin and Elaine, and wife of Tom. I've also been know at various times as John's mom, Blondie, or that tall lab tech. These are fairly straight-forward neutral labels.

Some of the labels that we have for ourselves are not always as positive. I could think of myself as the one who always flunks tests, or the ugly one, or the loser who you don't want to be around. Kevin McClure said something profound, "It is impossible to behave in a way that is inconsistent with what you think you are." For example, if you think you are unlovable, you, consciously or even subconsciously, will make yourself unlovable. If you think of yourself as a failure, you may never try or if you do try, you may sabotage yourself. If you know you can never please God, why would you ever try? For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he Pr.23:7

Design:

Relationship with God influences relationship with self

Define ourselves in God's purpose for each From our story, we can see that God had designed us to be in relationship with Him and in that relationship was our purpose in living. We were to love, serve, and obey God. We are made in His image and as such can find our personal identity in Him. Just imagine that if you were completely grounded in knowing God's love for you, you wouldn't have to depend on the love of others. What would happen if you knew deep in your heart that you are a child of the king. You are a son or daughter of the creator of the universe and He has given you the use of His name. How would that change your life?

Able to stand in presence of God & Use God's name We were designed in the image of God by the fingers of His hand and the breath of His mouth. That means in the original design

we could walk side by side with Him. Jesus demonstrated power over the weather, disease and demons. I believe that was part of the original design for us also.

Corruption:

Fear and separation from God

Unfortunately, God's perfect design for relationship with ourselves was also corrupted in the fall. Instead of being able to stand in the presence of God, which has the connotation of being in front of God's face, Adam and Eve hid in fear. Even today, many generations later sin separates us from God and we often feel vulnerable and guilty in front of Him. We don't want to be exposed and try to create barriers between ourselves and God, and even barriers as how we think about and define ourselves.

Curses

Let us look at the curses that resulted from the fall. Eve is told that childbearing will be painful and Adam is told that work will become painful. It has been my experience in life that many times women define themselves in terms of family and men define themselves in terms of their career. This is, of course, a generalization, but many times true.

Eve is told, "that your pain in childbearing will be multiplies and in pain will you bring forth children. " I am sure that this partly refers to the physical pain of labor and delivery, but even more, I think it can apply to the pain of the years of child-rearing. If you are a mom, you know that motherhood is immensely rewarding, but it also has its moments of pain. Some of this curse certainly came to fulfillment when Mary brought the baby Jesus to the Temple and was told that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35).[3] When we as women adopt motherhood as a label to identify ourselves, it can also be painful. I have watched female friends loose purpose in life when they became empty-nesters. Depression resulted because their identity was wrapped around being a mom.

Adam is told that the ground will be cursed and the work of growing food will be hindered by thorns and thisles. It will be painful, life-long sweaty work. Even with the pain of work, many men define themselves by who they are at work. When Tom left the corporate world to enter seminary, he experienced an unexpected identity crisis. He had left a good job as a senior process engineer and had become a first-year seminary student which many on campus considered a peon. It took a while for him to begin to redefine who he was.

I have also observed friends who when they retire undergo an identity crisis because they can no longer define themselves by their occupation. How much better to define yourself as God intended, as a worker in His kingdom no matter where you are.

In summary, God intended for us to define ourselves in the way He designed us and in the way that He sees us, not how the world would define us or label us.

Relationship with Others

Design:

[3] Ross,56.

God designed us to need each other

Even before the fall when Adam had a perfect relationship with God, God said, "*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."* To this point, everything else had been created good. By saying "not good" God shows that Adam can't fulfill the purpose God has for humans. God goes onto fix the situation by creating Eve, and with a partner, God's creation was "very good" (cf. 1:31). They came together in body and spirit, sharing everything in common as they enjoyed God's world together and sought to obey him as one. I believe this shows that God has designed humankind not only for relationship with Himself but for relationship with each other.

Helper is complementary not an inferior

In today's language, we often think of a helper as less than the person that is being helped, as someone who is inferior. The word "helper" is not a demeaning term at all; in the Bible it is used most frequently of God

Ps. 33:20 We put our hope in the **Lord.**
He is our **help** and our shield.

Ps. 70:5 But as for me, I am poor and needy;
please hurry to my aid, O **God.**
You are my **helper** and my savior.

Ps 115:9 O Israel, trust the **Lord!**
He is your **helper** and your shield.

When God helps people, it means He does for them what they cannot possibly do for themselves. In this context the word indicates that the woman would supply what man lacked and, that he, in turn, would provide what she lacked. Together they would be complete and able serve the Lord.

Corruption:
Helper seen as inferior

Modern theologians have often taught that as a "helper" the woman would be less than the man. Obviously, as we have seen, God is a helper, and we know that God is not inferior to man. God supplies what man cannot because of His love and grace. Therefore, this term can't be used to define woman as something less than man.

I think this part of God's design not only speaks to relationships between men and women but to all of us in the church. We also see that we need each other in the church, Paul tells the Romans, 12:*4 Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, 5 so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.* Our church body needs each of our individual gifts to be a complete whole to serve the purpose

God has for us. While some gifts are more public than other, than does not mean that they are more important.

Curses bring discord .

Part of the curse of sin for the women is, "*Your desire shall be to control your husband, but he shall rule over you."* The sinful nature of women is to control the man while the sinful nature of the man is to dominate the woman. This makes for a tremendous struggle.

Again, thinking in generalities, men tend to be physically stronger than women, but women seem to be more verbal than men. Women use this trait to control men, often in the form of nagging. Does the Bible have anything to say about nagging, quarrelsome women?

Pr. 21:9 It's better to live alone in the corner of an attic
than with a quarrelsome wife in a lovely home.

Pr. 21:19 It's better to live alone in the desert
than with a quarrelsome, complaining wife.

Pr. 25:24 It's better to live alone in the corner of an attic
than with a quarrelsome wife in a lovely home.

Pr. 27:15 A quarrelsome wife is as annoying
as constant dripping on a rainy day.
16 Stopping her complaints is like trying to stop the wind
or trying to hold something with greased hands.

Women, are we feeling a bit convicted? You guys may be thinking, yes, hallelujah. But before you celebrate too long, here is a verse that is often quoted by men,

Eph.5:24 wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

But men conveniently leave out the next verse.

25 For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her. So yes, men, we wives are to submit to our husbands, but our husbands are to love us so much that they would die for us. That kind of love is not abusive or domineering. That kind of love is self-sacrificing.

In summary: We can see that while God designed us to work together for His purpose in His kingdom, we, in our sinful state don't do that. God has given us His Word to show us our sin and where we have gone wrong in our relationships with each other. No matter how hard people try to do away with pain, conflict, male domination, manipulation, or death, the Curse will

continue because of sin. Only when the presence of sin is removed at the end of the age will these effects be removed.[4]

The solution

Restoration:

God had created perfect relationships with humans and between humans but sin corrupted God's design and brought a curse upon all relationships. It would take the suffering and death of God who came to earth as Jesus to remove this curse. Jesus came and lived a perfect life of service and obedience, died a cursed death on the cross, and then was resurrected which broke the curse.In the fall, Adam was cursed by the tree, the thorns and the struggle. Jesus endured a struggle, a crown of thorns and died on a tree. Paul tells us in Galatians 3:*13 But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." 14 Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.*

God breathed the breath of life into Adam to make him a living being. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent. Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior has the breath of the Holy Spirit breathed into them. This begins the restoration of what was lost at the fall.

Rom. 5:12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

18 Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone.

As we close take time to meditate on these:

What surprised you about;

God's original design for relationships?

How that design was corrupted?

Where are you in the restoration process in your relationships?

How can you allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life for more restoration?

[4] Ross, 57.

Message 02 | Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: The Present of Presence | Sermon Text: Exodus 33:7-23 | Speaker: Paula Graves | October 1, 2017

Last week we began the series on building healthy relationships and we discovered that God has created us for relationships. Relationship with God, with ourselves and with each other. Today we are going to look at a story from the life of Moses. Moses has been called the friend of God several places. What does it look like to be a friend of God? How does Moses carry on this friendship with God? What can we learn from Moses that will help us become a friend of God?

Context:

Our story today comes right after the story of the golden calf. To summarize that incident: Moses was called by God in the burning bush. He goes to Pharaoh to ask freedom for the Israelites, and it takes 10 plagues to finally convince Pharaoh to let the people go. Even then, Pharaoh has second thoughts and begins to chase down Moses and the Israelites. God's solution is to part the Red Sea, let the people move to the other side and then drown the Egyptians. The people have experiment God's provision in the desert with manna, quail and water that gushed

from a rock. These same people have declared their commitment to God and obedience to His covenant twice in formal ceremonies (Ex. 19:8, 24:7).

Then, when Moses seems to take too long with God on Mt. Sinai, the people get nervous. This God that has taken them out of Egypt is different and scary so they revert back to what they knew in Egypt. They made an idol of a golden calf and declared this was the god that brought them out of Egypt. This rebellion brought the wrath of God. God declared that it was not safe for Him to accompany them to the promised land, His anger might flare up at their rebellion and kill them. He would send an angel ahead to remove the Canaanites. The people did mourn their actions and repented, but what would happen at this point? Would they leave and head for the promised land without God? Or were they stuck in the desert? It is here that our story begins.

A Story from the Word of God

7 It was Moses' practice to take the Tent of Meeting and set it up some distance from the camp.
Everyone who wanted to make a request of the Lord would go to the Tent of Meeting outside the
camp.
8 Whenever Moses went out to the Tent of Meeting, all the people would get up and stand in the
entrances of their own tents. They would all watch Moses until he disappeared inside. 9 As he
went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and hover at its entrance while the Lord
spoke with Moses. 10 When the people saw the cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, they
would stand and bow down in front of their own tents. 11 Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord
would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Afterward Moses would return to
the camp, but the young man who assisted him, Joshua son of Nun, would remain behind in the
Tent of Meeting.

12 One day Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Take these people up to
the Promised Land.' But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. You have told me, 'I
know you by name, and I look favorably on you.' 13 If it is true that you look favorably on me,
let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor.
And remember that this nation is your very own people."
14 The Lord replied, "I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything
will be fine for you."
15 Then Moses said, "If you don't personally go with us, don't make us leave this place. 16 How
will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don't go
with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the
earth."
17 The Lord replied to Moses, "I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on
you, and I know you by name."
18 Moses responded, "Then show me your glorious presence."

19 The Lord replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my
name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show
compassion to anyone I choose. 20 But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see

me and live." [21] The Lord continued, "Look, stand near me on this rock. [22] As my glorious presence passes by, I will hide you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. [23] Then I will remove my hand and let you see me from behind. But my face will not be seen."

Moses' Relationship:

Tent outside camp

In the beginning of our story Moses is goes out of camp to the tent of meeting. Now this is not the tabernacle. While the instructions how to build the tabernacle have been given, it is not completed. The name "tent of meeting" will eventually be transferred to the tabernacle so it can be confusing. The tabernacle will eventually be in the center of the camp to symbolize the presence of God with His people. This tent is on the outside of camp. Why? The people have sinned and rebelled even with all that God has done for them. God has not deserted them but at this point, because of their sin, He is not in their midst either. Remember last week we discussed how sin separated Adam and Eve from God. This continues to happen in our story. Sin has separated God from His people and stalled out the journey to the promised land.

Face?

One of the first things I noticed about this story was what seemed to be an inconsistency. Moses is described as speaking to God "*face to face as one speaks to a friend*" when he is in the tent of meeting. Then, when Moses requests to see God's glorious presence, God tells him "*But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live.*" So, what is the deal here, can Moses see God's face or not?

Hebrew has no word expressing the abstract idea of "presence." So, when it wishes to speak of someone being immediately present in a situation, it says their "face" is there. What is translated as "presence" in English is literally "before the face of."[5] In Hebrew. Numbers 12 gives us more insight as to what might be happening in the tent of meeting:

[6]If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. [7] Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. [8] With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. (ESV)

Here Moses and God are described as talking mouth to mouth. God doesn't conceal his message in visions or dreams but clearly speaks them to Moses because of His faithfulness. Moses sees a form of the Lord while this is happening.

Later Moses makes the request "*Then show me your glorious presence*." The Hebrew term for glory conveys the idea of "heaviness, significance, importance." Thus, it speaks of God's glorious reality, the fullness and weight of His essential being.[6] Moses seems to be asking for God to reveal His total fullness.

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[5] Ross, A., & Oswalt, J. N. (2008). Cornerstone biblical commentary: Genesis, Exodus (Vol. 1, p. 528). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

[6] Ibid.

Considering these things, I think we can safely conclude that there is not a contradiction in this story. While God did converse with Moses clearly in the tent of meeting, I don't think God was revealing the total fullness of Himself. He was coming in a way that Moses could tolerate, just as God had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even Moses, the faithful servant that he was, would not be able to bear the full weight of the total being of God.

Seeks God's way

Now that we have that cleared up, let's consider the situation Moses is in. God has said that if He goes with the people that He may destroy them because of their sin. God, however, is a covenant God, so to keep His promise of land to His people, He will send an angel ahead to help them defeat the Canaanites and enter the land. Moses knows that only the power and provision of God has gotten the people from Egypt to where they are now. How could they possibly leave without the presence of God? Would getting the land be worth it if God wasn't there?

Moses begins the conversation by asking who it is that God will send with them. He reminds God that if God is favorable toward Moses shouldn't He be favorable to His people, too? It is at this point that Moses askes for God to show the way in this situation. Moses is desperate. God does reply and says that He will go personally with them and get them into the land so that they can rest. It will be fine.

Even with this reassurance, Moses doesn't seem to be satisfied. He makes the statement, "*If you don't personally go with us, don't make us leave this place."* Moses knew the gift of the promised land was important, but he also knew that the Giver of the gift was even more important. For it is the presence of God that makes the difference. It would be better to stay in the wilderness with God than to have the promised land without God.

Test

I think that the quickness of God's response shows that a test was taking place. God did not need to be argued down from a position to which he was holding fast. Rather, like any good teacher, He wanted Moses to respond appropriately. God intensely wanted to accompany his people to Canaan, and His refusal to do so was neither a way of "holding out" on them nor a way of getting them to beg him to change his mind. The question was whether anyone understood what the whole enterprise was about: the desperate need of humans to have God living within them in a love relationship.[7]

God's presence is what make difference

Moses demonstrates that He understands this principle when he goes onto say, "*How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don't go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth."* Moses appeals to God's reputation among the nations. Other gods were deemed to have a territory and did not travel with the people. The people had to travel to them. The true God was

[7] Ibid.

unique to live among His people and lead them and be with them. Israel was to be a nation that demonstrated who the true God was by the way they lived. If God would desert them, even if the angel defeated the Canaanites, they could not be a nation that lived with their God.

Seeking for experience or relationship?

It is at this point that Moses makes a request, *"Then show me your glorious presence*." Does he just need more reassurance? Moses has been in a tough place and has interceded for the people so that they can continue their way to the promised land. As a leader myself, I understand that there are times I have asked for some type of a sign to make sure that I am going the right way. This certainly could have been true of Moses, also. Was the covenant Lord really committed to going ahead with some sort of a relationship after this devastating denial of the covenant? Would he reveal Himself to Moses again as proof of that intention? But it may also be that Moses had become thirsty for new experiences.

Moses had had many experiences with God from the burning bush to the parting of the sea to receiving the ten commandments on Mt. Saini. We humans are so made that we can never get the same stimulation again from the same experience. Did Moses want a new and deeper experience?

God knows what is best and in His mercy and grace gives us what we need and not always what we want. God refers Moses to His Goodness and to His covenant name. Moses needed to be sure of the character of God and the faithfulness of God to His covenant. The nature of God and not another experience was what Moses needed in this desperate time. God in His grace denied the full weight of His being because He knew that Moses could not withstand it.

Know God by character and where He has been

God hides Moses in a cleft in the rock and passes by. Moses is not allowed to see God from the front, but he can see God from the back. The passage says that humans may see only where God has passed by and so know Him by his past doings and acts. God as he is, in all his mystery, we cannot know or comprehend.[8]

Application for our Relationship:

We live after Jesus

You may say, nice story, interesting, but we live after Jesus. Yes, the redeeming work of Jesus is a milestone in history. He came and lived a perfect life and His death on the cross paid the price for our sins. His resurrection broke the curse of death from our sins. All we have to do to receive the beginning of restoration and eternal life is to put our trust in Him. But life is very daily, what should we do to grow in our relationship with God after we have put our trust in Jesus? Our story gives us some good points.

[8] Cole, R. A. (1973). Exodus: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 2, p. 232). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Begin with repentance and being humble

Moses had to leave camp to go to the tent of meeting. God could not tolerate the rebellion and sin in the camp. We, too, sin and need to approach God in humbleness and repentance. We can be assured that because of what Jesus has done, when we sincerely repent before God, our sins are forgiven.

Design own tent of meeting

Moses had a dedicated area to go and converse with God. While a designated area for prayer with God is not specifically necessary, I have found it helpful to have a place in my house where I do my devotions each day. Set aside a space where you can keep your Bible, journals, and devotionals. It can be a desk or it may just be a corner of the kitchen table. I have also found it helpful to set aside the same time each day to do my devotions.

Realize that God speaks to each of us as individuals

God spoke to Moses mouth to mouth, but He also spoke to others through dreams and visions. He has made you a unique, one of a kind individual, and will communicate with you in His own way. Don't try to be someone else, be yourself. We have some here that get dreams or see pictures. I rarely dream, but find that God speaks to me very powerfully through the Bible.

When we seek God's ways, He will be found

Moses was desperate and asked God to show him His ways. God answered him. There are many verses that tell that if we seek God, God will show Himself.

Deut. 4:29 But from there you will search again for the Lord your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him.

1 Chron.28:9 "Worship and serve God with your whole heart and a willing mind. For the Lord sees every heart and knows every plan and thought. If you seek him, you will find him.

Seek the giver, not the gifts

I have observed many people who pray, not to know God better, but to use God as a type of cosmic Santa Claus. They desire God to do what they want, to get gifts, but they have no time for a relationship with Him. Isn't this much the same as the Golden Calf? The people desired God to be something they could understand and in a way control. In our story, God had tested Moses with the prospect of getting the gift of the land without Him, but Moses said He would rather stay in the wilderness to have a relationship with the Giver.

Bible is source of knowing God's character and where He has been

Moses wanted to see the fullness of God's glory, but God would only show Moses His back, where God had been. Where God has been and what God has done demonstrates His character and who He is. We, too, can see where God has gone and we don't have to hide in the

cleft of the mountain to do it. We can open the Bible and see what God has done and how God has acted through time. In our small groups, a standard question that is asked is "Who is God in this story?" What character trait does God display here that God will continue to display in my life?

I had a friend who had begun to use the storytelling for discipleship and this is what she said, "I don't mean to be disrespectful to God, but learning about Him through the story is like going on a date with Him. Just like you learn more about a person on each successive date, I learn more about God in each small group."

Train another

This is just mentioned in passing in our story, but Joshua is with Moses in the Tent of Meeting. Joshua was learning from Moses and would become his replacement after Moses died. Although it is possible that God can impart knowledge about Himself supernaturally, most often God uses another person to bring people to himself. Even if you are a new believer, you know more about God than an unbeliever. All of us, no matter how long we have walked with God are to be ready to give a testimony to who God is to us.

God is a gentleman – remember love can't be forced – and God doesn't force love. He gives us the choice of our level of relationship. We can choose to seek what God can do for us or we can really seek God. Wilbur Rees died three years ago but was born a in 1917. He had a rough childhood and eventually became a pastor. He observed how many people in his congregation only wanted a limited relationship with God and penned these words:

I would like to buy $3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy $3 worth of God, please.[9]

Where is your relationship with God?
What is God telling you? What are you going to do about that?

[9] http://faith-forward.org/three-dollars--worth-of-god.htm, accessed Sept. 28, 2017.

Message 03 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: My Relationship with the Lord Transforms my Heart | Text: John 5:16-30 | Speaker – Pastor Tom Graves | October 8, 2017

To set our story in context Jesus was going up to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish Feasts which would have been Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles. There Jesus found himself near the Sheep Gate where there was a pool where a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, lame and paralyzed.[5] One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. [6] When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" [7] "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

[8] Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." [9] At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, [10] and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." [11] But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' " [12] So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" [13] The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. [14] Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop

sinning or something worse may happen to you." [15] The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Text

[16] So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. [17] But Jesus replied, "My Father is always working, and so am I." [18] So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

[19] So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. [20] For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. [21] For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants. [22] In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, [23] so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.

[24] "I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

[25] "And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it's here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. [26] The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. [27] And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. [28] Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, [29] and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment. [30] I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will. <u>A story from God's word.</u>

I want to go back to the context of our story to see what the Lord is trying to teach us. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish feasts and while he is there he goes by this pool where many disabled people used to lie. One of these men was a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. So, Jesus asks him a very interesting question…do you want to get well? Do you want your life to be changed to one of being a beggar to one who is able to work? Sometimes in life good changes can be difficult. The man then tells Jesus he has no one to help him get into the pool where he believes he may receive some type of healing. Jesus then tells him to get up, pick your mat and walk. *At once the man was cured and he picked up his mat and walked and it was the Sabbath. The Jews said to the man who had been healed that the law forbids you to carry your mat on the Sabbath. Then he says this man who made me well…he told me to pick up my Mat and walk. The man did not know who Jesus was at the time but Jesus told him later at the temple stop sinning or something worse will happen to you and then he went and told the Jews it had been Jesus who healed him.*

The question is why when the Jews encountered this man were they not rejoicing, filled with joy, giving thanks and praising God for this man had just experienced a miracle? Also, the invalid himself there is no account of him praising God for what he had done. Why is this? It all has to do with their relationship with God or lack of. What were the religious leaders focused on? Rules they made up instead of praising God. You see…**Our relationship with God affects how we see others and ourselves affecting our actions.** The question Jesus asked the invalid is an interesting one…because he asks him if he wants to be healed. The obvious answer would be yes…but why does he ask? What if Jesus asked you and me today…do you want to grow in your relationship with me…that is Jesus? The answer to that would be yes. Like the invalid to be healed would change his life…he would now be expected to work not beg for a living. And if we were to grow in our relationship with God what changes would God want to make in our life? How would that affect me? There is going to be a battle in your life when you start growing in the Lord…it is not easy…but when we do it does change things for the better…but it will not be a worldly better…but a godly better, and it will be countercultural. You see the Lord does not want us to stay where we are spiritually…he wants us to grow, but growing is not easy.

The next part of the story the Jewish leaders are harassing Jesus because he broke some man-made rules and healed a cripple on the Sabbath. *[17] But Jesus replied, "My Father is always working, and so am I." [18] So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.*

[19] So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. [20] For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished.

As we said earlier…what were the Jewish leaders focused on? On the rules, not the person just as we said earlier… **Our relationship with God affects how we see others and ourselves affects our actions.** I want to go a little deeper into this passage because I believe the Lord wants to give us revelation you may never have seen before in these verses and the key is verses 19 and 20 that gives us insight on how to improve on our relationship with God. *[19] So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. [20] For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished.*

What is the Son doing…how does he describe himself in this passage? He only does what he sees his Father doing…whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything his is doing. The Father is modeling to the Son…by watching the Father he knows what to do…he knows what he likes…what he does not like…he knows what is expected. You see it is all about a relationship. **Jesus is also modeling for us what we are to do.** We are to watch Jesus…see what he does, and then do as he does. How do we get to know Jesus? By being in the word. *Psalm 119:105 – Your word is a lamp to my fee and a light for my*

path. When Joshua took over leadership from Moses as the leader of Israel the Lord told him *"Be strong and Courageous because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them."* The Lord goes on to tell Joshua…*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written it. Then you will prosperous and successful.* By being in the word and meditating on it he was watching what the Father was doing…he was learning from the Father and by doing so would change how he would lead the people. This is so simple it is profound…because the Lord wants to transform us. *Psalm 25:4 says, "Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow."*

It says something similar in Deuteronomy 17:18-20 - *18 When he (The King) takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.* *19 It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees* *20 and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.*

What was going to change the King? Learning about what the Father does so he could model himself after him and the same is true for us today. That is the power of being in the word…being in a discipleship group so you can get to know the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. John 10:27-28 says - *27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.* *28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.* *29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.*

Now we turn to the last part of our story which builds on the first two parts which have to do with getting to know the Lord. **When we have a personal relationship of faith with the Lord it sets us on a new path in life and in eternity.** *24 "I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.* *25 "And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it's here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live.* *26 The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son.* *27 And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man.* *28 Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son,* *29 and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.*

The Good news is the Lord rewards those who follow him…who come to faith (who were spiritually dead)…whose lives he changes by the work of the Holy Spirt. As the Lord changes our life we have the opportunity in this lifetime to reach out to others to be an encouragement in their life, to lead people to faith, and to model Jesus to them. When we die Jesus will call us from the grave…we have enteral life with God in heaven. What a privilege…praise God. All this is possible because of God who sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins so we could be

forgiven. The Father send the Holy Spirit so we could be drawn to faith and he gave us his word so we could get to know him and do what he models. Wow! What a journey the Lord has for us. To God be the glory. Amen.

Message 04 | Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Facing the Fire | Sermon Text: Daniel 3:12-30 | speaker: Paula Graves | October 15, 2017

Intro: This is the fourth in our sermon series of Building Healthy Relationships. We have explored how God designed us for relationship and how that design was corrupted by the fall into sin. The past couple weeks we have looked at examples of what relationship with God. Moses showed us how to spend time and listen to God. He saw God from behind, where God had been. We saw how what God has done in the past reveals His character to us. We have stories of God's action and through these stories we begin to know who God is.

We also saw how Jesus is a model for us of what our relationship with God should look like. Jesus only did what he saw the Father doing. We, too, should do the same and to do that we need to know what kind of things God does. Here again, we need to spend time in God's Word. Jesus also showed us that our relationship with others and with our self also depends on our relationship with God. That is the foundational relationship. If that is missing all other relationships are missing a footing.

Today and next week we begin to explore what the relationship with our self should look like. We will always act in the way that we see ourselves, we will never act in a way that doesn't agree with our opinion of ourselves.

Context:

Today's story is from the Old Testament. Moses had lead the people into the promised land. God had promised blessings if they followed Him, but announced that they would bring curses upon themselves if they did not follow God. The people had lived as a united country for many years, but eventually divide into two nations, the northern nation of Israel and the Southern nation of Judah. Israel never did follow God and was eventually destroyed by Assyrian never to become a nation again.

Unfortunately, Judah did not learn anything from this and they, too, strayed away from God. Babylon was the country that would eventually destroy Judah. The people of Judah were not exiled at one time but in three different waves. Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were taken to Babylon in 605 BC and Jerusalem wouldn't be destroyed until 19 years later.

Even though the nation of Judah, as a whole, was not following God, God always has a remnant. Part of this remnant, Daniel and his friends, was taken away to a Gentile nation where they continued to follow the true God. King Nebuchadnezzar has set up a huge statue, gathered all government officials, dignitaries, and ambassadors from other nations together to worship this statue. It is at this point there is conflict that develops and it is where our story begins.

A Story from the Word of God

(The king's advisors said,)[12] But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up."

[13] Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, [14] Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? [15] I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"

[16] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. [17] If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. [18] But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

[19] Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. [20] Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. [21] So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. [22] And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as

they threw the three men in. [23] So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames.

[24] But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied.

[25] "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!"

[26] Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most-High God, come out! Come here!"

So, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. [27] Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke!

[28] Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. [29] Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!"

[30] Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.

A story from the Word of God

Who are Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego?

These three men are faithful Hebrews of the royal court of Judah. They were friends of Daniel and all would have been exiled to Babylon together. It was the custom of Babylon to move people around within their kingdom. This would help diffuse uprisings and allowed them to take advantage of gifted people. Babylon would take the best and the brightest back to their own country and indoctrinate them so these people would be useful in the Babylonian kingdom.

We see this happening in chapter one of Daniel, these young men are given different names and taught the Babylonian culture. They most likely are young teenagers from royal descent who are part of the royal court. They have been taken away from their families and temple to be forced into a different culture. They must learn a different language but even with all that had been taken from them, they remain faithful to their God. They appear to be more faithful to God than the King of Judah. They refuse to defile themselves with a Babylonian diet and God gives them favor. They seem to have been promoted to high government positions. The native people are jealous of these Jewish men. They don't appreciate some exile getting a better job than they have and look for a way to put them out of office, most likely so that they can have the good positions.

This is not the first time that Nebuchadnezzar has tried to kill them. In the chapter before our story, Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream and wants his wise men, which include Daniel and these three, to interpret the dream. The problem is, Nebuchadnezzar won't tell anyone what the dream is. When no one comes with an interpretation, the king threatens to kill all the wise men.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego become Daniel's prayer team as Daniel seeks the Lord for the dream and its interpretation. God gives Daniel the dream and interpretation and in doing so saves the lives of not only these four Jewish men but all the Babylonian advisors, also.

Now the king has demanded that they worship the statue, something they were forbidden to do by Jewish law. They certainly could have compromised and knelt just once to avoid being called out, but they don't. We can see from their actions that they define themselves as believers in the true God, no matter what happens.

These men had been ripped out of their homes and force marched 900 miles[10] to a foreign land. They would never see their families again. They were forced to take classes to learn a new language and culture. The Babylonians even changed their names. These Jewish men were called out before the king because their co-workers were racist and manipulative. They had every right to play the victim, but our story does not portray them as bitter. They reply to Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to get them to worship the statue in this way:

Dan. 3:16 *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you.* 17 *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty.* 18 *But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."*

It seems that their total identity is wrapped up in who the Lord is and a complete trust in Him alone. They were literally willing to go through the fire of testing and die for the Lord. Their relationship with themselves was wrapped up in their relationship with God.

Who is Nebuchadnezzar?

He is a very capable leader as he has defeated Egypt and Assyria to become the ruler of the most powerful kingdom on the day. It is interesting that God has several things to say about Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah was a contemporary of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, only Jeremiah continued to live in Judah. God gives Jeremiah this message: Jer. 43:10 *Then say to the people of Judah, 'This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: I will certainly bring my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, here to Egypt.* God calls Nebuchadnezzar His servant, and Nebuchadnezzar does defeat the Egyptians.

Years later, Daniel would tell Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's descendant, Dan. 5:18 *Your Majesty, the Most-High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar.* Through scripture we can see that Nebuchadnezzar is appointed by God to do God's bidding, even though he is not a believer. God uses Nebuchadnezzar to bring judgment on

[10] https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/facts-ezra-7/ accessed Oct. 12, 2017.

Egypt for what that country had done to Judah – killed King Josiah and took next king prisoner and left a puppet king on the throne.

But N. is arrogant and prideful. In chapter two, Daniel interprets the dream about a statue. There N. is only the golden head of the statue. Immediately, we see N. building a statue all of gold and declaring that all must worship it. Does the statue represent N. or just his gods? The text doesn't really make this clear. What is clear is that all the bigwigs of the day; government officials of every kind and foreign dignitaries are there. This ceremony is a really big deal. The refusal of the Jewish men to worship the statue is an insult and blow to the pride of N. He does give the Jews a second chance but even then, they explain that they can't worship the statue.

Remember he can't "lose face" in front of all these important people. He is proud to be the most powerful person in all the land. He reacts here just as he reacted earlier, with anger. John Bevere in his book, *Undercover*, explains that anger is fueled by pride.[11] N.'s relationship with himself is based on his position of power and the pride that brings. He is angry with the answer of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and asks them directly, "*Dan. 3:15b And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?*" He sees himself as someone that is always to be obeyed. I find it ironic that those that obeyed N. the most, his special forces that throw the Jewish men into the fire are the ones who die in this story.

N. in effect challenges the true God, because he did not understand that the true God had given him the kingdom. The Babylonians did not understand their gods to be the kind of gods that dwelt with people. During the statue dream incident, the wise men of the country remarked, "*Dan.2:**11** The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."* We saw in our story of Moses that God's presence with His people is what sets Him apart.

Intervention

The conflict of our story has its basis on how the Jewish men define themselves versus how N. defines his relationship with himself. The Jewish men who define themselves by God refuse to bow down to a statue. The king who defines himself through his power is so angry at the refusal of the Jewish men that he will kill them. He orders the furnace to be made seven times hotter. Now they didn't have thermometers back then, this was a way to say make it as hot as possible.

The command is so urgent that those who bind and throw the Jewish men into the flames die themselves. Now these Jewish men were dressed in all the finery that the occasion demanded, turbans and flowing robes. These should have begun to burn about the time that the soldiers died. But they do not.

N. is astounded to see that the men are not bound but walking around in the fire fully clothed. The king who did not think that a god could dwell with men sees what he calls a son of god or an angel with the three men. This prompts him to call out to the men to come out of the fire, which they do.

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[11] John Bevere, *Under Cover* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 52.

N. has called everyone who was anyone to come worship his statue. Now all these people crowd around to see the miracle of survival of these three Jewish men. They should have died, at the very least been singed, but they didn't even smell of smoke. N. had basically called all these people together to worship him, but now had to save face somehow. What else can he do except say, *""Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. [29] Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!"* I don't think N. is a believer at this point because it is not his god, but the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It will take another incident, one in which N. is humbled by God to turn N. to God. And God gets the last word. Those coworkers of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who wanted them at the least demoted or dead, now see these three men get promoted.

Our Relationship with Our self

Our story has much that we can apply to ourselves. We see it is only when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego define themselves in terms of their relationship with God can they act as they did. They did not have to depend on the opinions of others. They even tell Nebuchadnezzar, "*we do not need to defend ourselves before you."* They fully trusted in the Lord to act, and the men did not assume that God would save them.

It is through what Jesus has done for us that we can have a relationship with God. Jesus came to restore what had been lost in the fall. When we fully trust in Him, we can act out our faith. John 1:12*But to all who have received Jesus--those who believe in His name--He has given the right to become God's children*. We don't need to define ourselves by our power like Nebuchadnezzar did, or our things, or our relationships with other people. We can define ourselves as a child of God. This frees us to be what God designed us to be, not what a spouse or a culture says we should be.

If we think about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they were freed from their bonds in the fire, God walked with them, and gave them salvation. Jesus can do the same thing for me and you. Rom.6:6 *We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin*. He frees us from the bond of sin, walks with us, and saves us from the fire. All we have to do is believe and act on that belief. "1Co.1:30*b Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. [31] Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord*.

One of the highest forms of worship is obedience. The Jewish men were obedience to God. Nebuchadnezzar had brought people together to basically worship him because of his power, but God showed the king that there was something more powerful than him. The obedience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego allowed God to work in a way that brought the glory to Him and not to an earthly king. Paul found that obedience would spread God's glory:

2Cor.2:14 But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. 15 Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God.

When we define ourselves in terms of our relationship to God, it is only then that we can fully live like God designed us. It is then that we are able to give God's love to others instead of constantly seeking love from those who may not have it to give.
Others may say that we don't wear the right clothes; but God has made us new creatures.
Some may say that you don't have enough money; God has made me rich with His grace.
We may be accused of hanging out with the wrong crowd, so was Jesus,

You can see that it isn't helpful to define who we are by what we own or by the opinions of others.
When we have the type of relationship where we can converse with God, He will give us peace.
Phil 4:6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

It is only when we our relationship with ourselves is wrapped in our relationship with God that we will be able to face the fires of our lives.

As we close, take time to consider:

What is your opinion of yourself based on?
If you could see yourself as much as a child of God as the Jewish men in our story, how would your life change?
What did you learn from this story that will help your walk with Jesus?

Message 05 | Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Jesus Comes to Set us Free | Sermon Text: Luke 13:10-17 | Speaker: Pastor Tom Graves| October 2, 2017

To set our story in context in Luke chapter four [14] Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. *[15] He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. [16] He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. [17] The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: [18] "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

As Jesus begins his ministry he begins to set people free both physically and spiritually. In Luke chapter six Jesus heals a man's hand which was shriveled, but the religious Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious with Jesus because he broke one of their rules and healed the man on the Sabbath. *[9] Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" [10] He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored.* Jesus was not very popular with the religious leaders who had great knowledge, but lacked faith and compassion. Jesus addresses this lack of compassion later in Luke 6:43-45.

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. [44] Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briers. [45] The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

As we enter into our text we see Jesus again showing people by his actions what it means to have compassion. *10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. 14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." 15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing*. A story from God's word.

I want to go back to the context to our story and look at Luke 4:18-19 *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* Jesus came to set us free. He has come to set us free both physically and spiritually, and when He does it begins to change everything we are about. When the Lord changes my heart, I become aware of people that I was blinded to.

I become aware the path of life that I am on maybe my plan, but not God's plan. My goals may not be God's goals. Relationships that I thought were not important now begin to be a large part of my life. I may never have given eternity a thought and now I not only think about eternity for myself, but those around me. Something has changed…the Lord has freed me…I was captive and now He has set me free to pursue the plans the Lord has for me, which may be much different than my plans.

We begin to have compassion on others when my heart changes and I begin to see people through a different lens…a lens of a person who is a redeemed child of God.

How many times have we driven to our church here at Washington school and not noticed the people in the neighborhood that is filled with houses and apartment complexes. When the Lord begins to change you the people who were invisible now become visible. You begin to remember one soul is worth more than all the riches of the world. You begin to think about…how can we reach those people with the Gospel. What does it mean to show them compassion? What can we do as a congregation? When our heart begins to change is when my life begins to bear fruit. Jesus says…in Luke 6:45 *The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.*

We need to ask ourselves what is stored up in my heart? Change my heart O God, bring revival to my heart to help me build the Kingdom of God. I think we need to pause right now and pray before we go any further that the Lord would open the eyes of my heart so I can see those who need to be touched by Jesus. Lord as a child of God give me your vision for these people…

As we move into our text Jesus is teaching on the Sabbath in the Synagogue when sees a woman who has been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. *She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. [12] When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." [13] Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.* That is a long time to be afflicted by this spirit causing her back to be bent. This was a long trial in her life...but she remained faithful because in our story she is in the synagogue when she is healed. She may have been praying for healing we don't know, but we do know this **Jesus heals in his timing and his way.**

For many of us that is a hard pill to swallow…we want to be healed in our timing and our way. My Father became ill with cancer when he was 75 and only lived another year. He would be cured when he took his first breath in heaven. A number of years ago one of my classmates from grade school and high school lost a toddler after a very short illness. My mother's parents also lost a child after a brief illness as a toddler. It is one thing to die when you are the age of my father and it is quite different when a family loses a child.

I learned a lot through my father's death…things I could not have learned in any other way. My grandparent's faith was tested in the fire of suffering and that experience drew them closer to the cross…closer to Jesus. My grandfather wrote we are were very thankful to have such a child even if his stay was short.

Mountain climbers could save time and energy if they reached the summit in a helicopter, but their ultimate purpose is conquest, not efficiency. Sure, they want to reach a goal, but they want to do so the hard way by testing their character and resolve. God could create scientists, electricians, carpenters, athletes, and musicians. He doesn't he creates children who take on those roles over a long process. We learn to excel by handling failure. Only in cultivating discipline, endurance, and patience do we find satisfaction and reward.

It says in 2 Cor. 1:3-4 – *Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

Romans 8:35 says – Who shall separate us form the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Paul also writes in *Romans 8:18 – I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

As the woman was healed on that Sabbath day some had cold hearts toward God and had very little compassion toward this woman…to them she was invisible. *[14] Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." [15] The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? [16] Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"*

The good news of Jesus is opposed in the world by satan. Our enemy does not want you to be set free of your sins or your infirmities and he will work through anybody to oppress people…even church people.

When Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the synagogue to be circumcised they met a prophet name Simeon who said this…*Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him.* The name of Jesus is opposed by our own government because many of our leaders are controlled by satan and oppose Christianity because the enemy knows the power of Jesus to transform people and to set them free.

Jesus was trying to give the synagogue ruler an opportunity to think about these manmade rules about the Sabbath. He was trying to awaken his heart to the foolishness of his tradition, and give him an opportunity to praise God and repent of traditions of men. The Lord brought healing to the woman and he also wanted to bring spiritual awakening to the synagogue ruler.

Our text today tells us that the woman was afflicted by a spirit not of God. We are in a battle and the enemy wants to bring misery and suffering into our life.

The Lord tells us in Ephesians 6 *[10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. [11] Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. [12] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. [13] Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

Being a church planter for the last three years I have become more aware of the spiritual battle that I am and that rages all around me. I found great strength in the Lord because when I am weak he is strong. I don't know what to do, but he does. You too can find strength in Jesus, strength in his word, and strength in prayer.

As we come to the end of our message we recall the women was set free of her infirmities. **Jesus died on the cross to set us free**. We remember the words spoken by Isaiah the prophet in chapter 53:4-5. *Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* To God be the Glory…Amen.

Message 06 | Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Trials test our Relationships | Sermon Text: Ruth 1:1-20| Speakers: Lay people | October 29, 2017

Context: To set our story in context today it takes place during the time of the Judges, which ruled Israel for about 400 years prior to Israel having Kings. Our story reveals the Lord's faithfulness, even when we don't realize how faithful He is…He is always with us. Sometimes years must go by and then we are able to see the Lord's hand was upon us during the times where He seemed far away.

Text: *Naomi and Ruth*

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

[8] Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's
home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. [9] May the
Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud [10] and said to her, "We will go back with you to
your people."

[11] But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going
to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? [12] Return home, my daughters; I am
too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a
husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— [13] would you wait until they grew up? Would you
remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the
Lord's hand has gone out against me!"

[14] At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to
her.

[15] "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back
with her."

[16] But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I
will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. [17]
Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so
severely, if anything but death separates you and me." [18] When Naomi realized that Ruth was
determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

[19] So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem,
the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

[20] "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my
life very bitter. [21] I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me
Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

[22] So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law,
arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. **A story from God's word.**

As we begin our message today I want you to think about our theme which is <u>"Trials Test our Relationships",</u> that is our relationships with God and with others. When trials come and they will they test the very foundations of our relationship with God first which then impacts our relationship with others.

It is a fact that when there is a handicapped child in the home, a child dies of an accident or disease, one spouse has a disease for a long period of time like Multiple Sclerosis (MS) or a husband who has long term unemployment it causes extra stress in your relationship with God and with others. When this happens we often wonder…where is God in the midst of all of this? Also we may listen to the wrong voice when the enemy puts thoughts into our mind such as God is punishing you or you just don't have enough faith…lies that can leave us discouraged and doubting God is at work in our life. Maybe you have experience this in your life or know a friend who has.

In our story Naomi is in the midst of a great trial. She lost her husband Elimelech, her sons Mahlon and Kilion, and she has moved to a foreign country for a better life and that did not turn out very well.

When I have a strong relationship with God it enables me to have hope in the midst of my trials, which not only affects my relationship with God in a positive way but also those around me. But maybe my relationship with the Lord is frayed and I am barely hanging on then what? **The best thing to do is simply cry out to the Lord and be honest and say…Lord my faith is weak, I am angry about what is going on in my life…Lord please help me because I am weak and all alone, and do not know what to do.** Maybe you have felt this way in your life and as we continue our story I think this is what Naomi feels like. Many of us over the years have song the children's song "Jesus Loves Me" and when life seems to have turned against us we need to remind ourselves of it simple words…

Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

As we remember the love of Jesus He always encourages us with his word even in the most difficult of situations.

Psalm 34:17 says, the Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them for all their troubles. James 1:2-4 – Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

In our next part of the story Naomi hears there is food in Israel and decides to return home. She begins her journey with her two daughter-in-law's and heads toward Israel on a journey that would difficult with only women. Then Naomi has second thoughts and tells them to go back to their own families. *May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. [9] May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud [10] and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."*

[11] But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? [12] Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— [13] would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!"

[14] At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her. [15] "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

What is going on in this part of the passage that the Lord would like to teach us about relationships? **When my relationship with the Lord is under stress I can push away the very people the Lord has placed along side of me for support.** You see the enemy always wants to isolate us and take away our support so we are more easily discouraged and defeated. Some of you that are here today were at the First Choice Banquet just a few weeks ago to raise support for our local crisis pregnancy center. The keynote speaker told her story of her abortion as a teenager in 1974 where she was in an absolute crisis, and yet did not share what was going on with her mother.

In our shame, we think those who love us won't, but that is often a false assumption. Many years later she shared with her mother about what had happened that brought them closer together with many tears of love, support and encouragement. And sometimes the person the Lord has placed in our life to support us is himself, because everyone has abandoned us.

The Bible is filled with that same faithful promise to us: "*I will never leave you nor forsake you from* Joshua 1:5. Also it says in Hebrews 13:5, "*For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." Sometimes when we are in a crisis we need to hang on to those words and as Christians we may have friends or relatives that are in a crisis and the Lord has called you to be that friend, to be that advocate. They may not be familiar with the Lord or can call on those verses and as believers be aware of divine appointments to love and encourage one another…to be a life line.*

In the last part of our story Ruth refuses to leave Naomi because she chooses to that encourager, and will not let Naomi push her away. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. [17] Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." [18] When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. When they return to Bethlehem Naomi tells the people to call her Mara because the Almighty has made my life bitter…I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. And as they arrived it is time for the Barely harvest.

God does not stop working in our life when we become discouraged and feel the Lord has abandoned us, and he did not stop working in Jesus life when he was on the cross. Sometimes in life time must go by before we begin to recognize the work of God in the midst of our trials. Sometimes we may need to arrive in heaven before we understand the tapestry of our life, and how the Lord was at work. Maybe you have experienced this in your own life…where time went by and know you were able to see the hand of God in your life.

As Jesus walked toward Jerusalem leading up to Good Friday the greatest trial of his existence would take place. Most of his disciples would abandon him while he was on the cross, except John…known as the disciple Jesus loved. In addition, other faithful women gathered at the

cross…they were his supporters…they were his encouragers and although they probably did not say much…they were there…the ministry of presence.

Even Jesus asked the question as recorded in Matthew 27:46, "*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Jesus knew that he would be temporarily separated from God the moment he took upon himself the sins of the world because God cannot look on sin (Habakkuk 1:13). This separation was the "cup" Jesus had dreaded as he prayed in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). Jesus suffered this separation so we would never have to be separated from God, so we could be called to faith and have a relationship with the Lord and in the end, go to heaven. To God be the Glory. Amen.

Sermon Reflection

Message 07 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: In Eternity, Will You Be Known as a Soul Saver? | Acts 16:1-5, 2 Timothy 1:3-14, 4:9, 13, 21 | Speaker: Pastor Tom Graves |November 5, 2017

Context:

To set the first part of our story in context the book of Acts records three missionary journeys that Paul went on to spread the good news of Jesus. The first journey takes places about 46-49AD in the area of Galatia where Paul takes with him Barnabas who was a great encourager to Paul and fellow believers. The second missionary journey, which is the first part of our story today takes place 50-52 AD and is to the area of Greece and is recorded in Acts 15:36 to Acts 18:22.

While making preparations for his second journey Barnabas wanted to take along his cousin John Mark. But as a man of principle, "Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work." It may be that the young Mark was afraid of the difficulties ahead and therefore returned home to Jerusalem (13:13). We know that Paul's attitude to Mark changed later and he became once again a "helpful" colleague (Col. 4:10, 2 Tim. 4:11 and Philemon 24). Paul and Barnabas "had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and *sailed* for Cyprus" (15:39) to his home district.

And so, begins the **second missionary journey**. *Paul chooses Silas as his companion*, "the brothers commended him to *the grace of the Lord*, and he set off on the journey. He *went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches*" (15:40-41). Paul's second missionary

journey evidently began *round about February in the year 50* and ended perhaps in *spring 53.*
Acts 16:1-5
Text: *Paul's Second Missionary Journey*

Paul went first to Derbe and then to Lystra, where there was a young disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek. [2] Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium, [3] so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek. [4] Then they went from town to town, instructing the believers to follow the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. [5] So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew larger every day.

The second part of our story takes place after Paul's missionary journeys and while he is in prison. In this letter to Timothy Paul writes a farewell letter where he encourages Timothy to go on spreading the good news of Jesus.

2Timothy 1:3-14 | Encouragement to Be Faithful

[3] Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. [4] I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again.

[5] I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. [6] This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. [7] For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

[8] So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. [9] For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. [10] And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. [11] And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News.

[12] That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

[13] Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. [14] Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.

2 Timothy 4:9 - *Paul's Final Words*

[9] Timothy, please come as soon as you can.

2 Timothy 4:13 - When you come, be sure to bring the coat I left with Carpus at Troas. Also bring my books, and especially my papers.

2 Timothy 4:21- Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus sends you greetings, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters. A story from God's word.

As we look at the first part of the story in Acts chapter 16 we see that Paul meets a person of faith named Timothy who is well thought of by believers in Lystra and Iconium. **On our journey of faith, we need to be aware of and pray that the Lord would open our eyes to divine appointments.** In the course of our lifetime many people come on to our stage, but there are a small number of significant people that enter into our life that have a significant impact on us spiritually. For Paul, Timothy was one of those people, for Timothy it was Paul. But as we look at Timothy I want you to think of him as an iceberg floating in the water because when I look at an iceberg I only see a small portion of the iceberg. Underneath Timothy was a faithful mother and grandmother who passed along the faith that helped mold Timothy into a follower of Jesus.

As parents, we have the privilege of passing along the faith to our children, but as people of faith we also have the privilege of passing on the faith to those the Lord directs us to…that could be children, friends, family, and even strangers. Who was instrumental in your life in leading you to the Lord and helping you to grow in faith? Take time today to remember them and give the Lord thanks for sending them into your life…because they were divine appointments.

When Paul and Timothy went from town to town on their missionary journey there was instruction or discipleship that took place and the result of this discipleship was the church grew in faith and it grew larger. For the church to grow today we also need to be discipled as well as disciple others. Who in your life are you pouring into, to help them along their journey of faith, because discipleship is all about relationships? And just as we need to pour into others we also need others pouring into us…someone that is further along the journey then we are. Who in your life is pouring into you? If you don't have someone, be praying for the Lord to send a Paul into your life or if you are a lady a Paula.

In the next part of our story takes place after Paul has completed his missionary journeys and he is in prison for his faith, and while he is there he is writing Timothy to encourage him along his journey. Not only was Paul thankful for Timothy, but he remembered him in his prayers. **When we take time to give thanks and pray for important relationships in our life it not only changes our heart, but in a supernatural way it helps the person we are praying for.** It says in *James 5:16 – The prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective.*

As Timothy's mentor Paul reminds Timothy to fan into flames of the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. Rather than asking Timothy to restart a cold fire, Paul was encouraging him to fan a young fire to keep it at full flame. Timothy did not need new revelations or new gifts: he needed only to fan the gifts that God had given him. Think of the spiritual gifts the Lord has given you and what would happen if you began to fan those flames? You see the Lord's gifts are all about building up the Kingdom of God, and to build up the Kingdom we need to be in relationship with one another, for people are the church. Paul goes on to remind us as we go into the world to build up the Kingdom of God, that *the Lord does not give us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline.* The Lord wants to remind

us that we don't have to be afraid, but we can move in the power of the spirit, to love those around us and also to be self-disciplined. God has an amazing plan for our life, but there is a part for us to play. **When I am moving in the power of the spirit, love and self-disciplined the Kingdom of God is built up.** As a church and as individuals, the Lord is calling us forward, he is calling us to move in love and the power of the Holy Spirit, and he is calling us to be disciplined, because there are souls that hang in the balance. (Ponder that for a second…souls that hang in the balance.) Luke 10:2 says - *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. [2] He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*

The question is will we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit…will we pray the prayer from deep in our heart…Lord use me, mold me, to build your Kingdom of God? In eternity will you be known as a soul saver?

As we conclude Paul continues when he says… *[9] For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. [10] And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.*

We don't deserve to be saved, but we are because Jesus paid the price for our sins and has called us to faith, and he has an amazing plan for our life. A plan that includes building relationships with others so we can spread the good news of Jesus in the Harvest Field so souls can be saved.

Sermon Reflection

Message 08 | Series: Building Healthy Relationship | Theme: Tested by Abundance | 2 Chronicles 32:27-31 & 2 Kings 20:13-19 | Speaker: Paula Graves | November 12, 2017

Introduction:

We have spent the last seven weeks discussing relationships. Our poster theme is on of building tools and I am going to continue that analogy in this review. We've learned from the stories of Moses and Jesus that the foundational layer of relationship is our relationship with God. It is that relationship that guides and enables good relationship with ourselves, with others and with things.

The second layer of relationship is our relationship with ourselves. Only when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were sure of who they were in God's eyes could they be courageous enough to risk death when they would not bow to an idol. The crippled woman also was courageous. It was not culturally appropriate for any woman to touch a garment of a man, let alone a diseased, unclean woman touching the garment of a well-known rabbi. Jesus defined her as a child of Abraham, a child of faith in her covenantal God, and as such one who should be healed on the Sabbath despite religious rules.

The third layer of relationship is our relationship with others. It works best when we are rooted in our relationship with God and are able to see ourselves as God sees us. Then it is possible to pour into other people, so you can help them be the person that God designed them to be instead of trying to take something from them to prove who you are. Naomi had nothing to offer Ruth after the death of her husband and sons, yet Ruth wanted to be with Naomi because Naomi had introduced Ruth to the real God. Timothy was a young man when Paul met him.

When they met, Timothy would have had very little to offer Paul. Paul willingly discipled Timothy until Timothy became the leader of the church at Ephesus.

Now we begin to look at what our relationship with things should look like. Generally, this relationship is healthy when the relationships below it are healthy. If something is missing in the lower foundations, people often grasp at things to prop up what is missing. God has blessed us with our "stuff" so that we can do kingdom work. It is not sinful to be wealthy, but wealth can be a temptation for pride. As we consider this, we will be reflecting on the story of King Hezekiah today.

Context:

King Hezekiah was the 13th king of Judah. He was king of the southern kingdom of Judah for 29 years during which time the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians, and Judah itself was invaded by the Assyrians.[12] He is noted as a good king that wanted to follow the Lord. He pulls down many of the idols that had invaded the land during the reigns of the kings before him. He is a man of prayer and receives several miracles from God in answer to these prayers.

After the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, the Assyrian army continued on south and besieged the city of Jerusalem. There was an army of 185,000 well trained fighting men surrounding the walled city. Hezekiah prays and the prophet Isaiah predicts that they will not have to fight this battle. This comes true as the angel of the Lord slays the army and its leaders flee back to Assyria.

Shortly after or possibly concurrently, Hezekiah falls ill. Isaiah tells Hezekiah to put his house in order because he will die. Again, Hezekiah prays and the Lord answers with the extension of his life by fifteen years in which time God blesses him with success and wealth. It is at this point that our story begins:

A Story from the Word of God:

2 Chron. 32:27 Hezekiah was very wealthy and highly honored. He built special treasury buildings for his silver, gold, precious stones, and spices, and for his shields and other valuable items. 28 He also constructed many storehouses for his grain, new wine, and olive oil; and he made many stalls for his cattle and pens for his flocks of sheep and goats. 29 He built many towns and acquired vast flocks and herds, for God had given him great wealth. 30 He blocked up the upper spring of Gihon and brought the water down through a tunnel to the west side of the City of David. And so, he succeeded in everything he did.

2 Kings 20:12 Soon after this, the prince of Babylon, sent Hezekiah his best wishes and a gift, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been very sick.

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[12] Werse, N. R. (2016). Hezekiah, King of Judah. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, … W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

2Chro.32:31 However, when ambassadors arrived from Babylon to ask about the remarkable events that had taken place in the land, God withdrew from Hezekiah in order to test him and to see what was really in his heart.

2 Kings 20:13 Hezekiah received the Babylonian envoys and showed them everything in his treasure-houses—the silver, the gold, the spices, and the aromatic oils. He also took them to see his armory and showed them everything in his royal treasuries! There was nothing in his palace or kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

14 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked him, "What did those men want? Where were they from?"

Hezekiah replied, "They came from the distant land of Babylon."

15 "What did they see in your palace?" Isaiah asked.

"They saw everything," Hezekiah replied. "I showed them everything I own—all my royal treasuries."

16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Listen to this message from the Lord: 17 The time is coming when everything in your palace—all the treasures stored up by your ancestors until now—will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. 18 Some of your very own sons will be taken away into exile. They will become eunuchs who will serve in the palace of Babylon's king."

19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "This message you have given me from the Lord is good." For the king was thinking, "At least there will be peace and security during my lifetime."

A story from the Word of God

Did you find this a surprising story considering what we learned about Hezekiah in the context? He has received the miracle of an army disappearing and the miracle of a life extended, basically, he has been saved from death twice by the Lord. He shouldn't even be alive, let alone be rich. It is only because of the grace of God that he is still reigning, and God has blessed him with abundance. Yet, he proceeds to show off all his stuff to a foreign power who is a potential enemy. The story seems to imply that Hezekiah is taking credit for the riches and there is no mention of giving God any credit. What gives?

I think 2Chro.32:31 gives us insight into the situation: *"However, when ambassadors arrived from Babylon to ask about the remarkable events that had taken place in the land, God withdrew from Hezekiah in order to test him and to see what was really in his heart."*

God was testing Hezekiah through abundance. Now, generally, most of us think of God testing us in times of want or suffering. Hezekiah had been in those types of situations. In both the Assyrian attack and the life-threatening disease, there really was no human solution. It took a gracious, supernatural answer to prayer to bring a positive result in both cases. Hezekiah immediately turned to the Lord in each case. But many times, I've found it relatively easy to turn to God when I am powerless against a problem. There really isn't much choice.

When it says that God wants to know what is in Hezekiah's heart, it doesn't mean that God doesn't know what state Hezekiah's heart is in. God tests Hezekiah to reveal to Hezekiah where his heart is. God tests us, not to be mean, but to refine us, to lead us to repentance, and to deepen our faith.[13] Hezekiah has been through tough times, but now, in the midst of the "good life" who will Hezekiah give credit to?

Seven hundred years prior to Hezekiah, God through Moses had warned of this type of situation: Deut.8:11 "*Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. 12 For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, 13 and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! 14 Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God, who rescued you.* During the Exodus, God's people had had to depend on God for everything in the wilderness; food, water, and clothing that didn't wear out. When they came into the promised land they would be able to farm and conduct business and then they were at risk of thinking they had done everything themselves.

In the test, what kind of heart did Hezekiah have? Was he grateful and give God the glory for all the things God had done in his life and for all the riches God had given him? Unfortunately, no. Hezekiah seems to have more pride than thanksgiving in his heart. We, too, can fall into the same trap, Hezekiah did.

Today, is the second time we have been able to worship in the gym. Last week was the trial run and today, we are giving thanks for what the Lord has done for us. I believe God calls us to live with grateful hearts full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so we can carry out His purpose for His kingdom.

Col. 3: 12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.
16 Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

I think we can all see that we are called to live with thankful hearts. What can our story of Hezekiah teach us? I see three main points:

Don't forget what God has done!

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[13] Selman, M. J. (1994). 2 Chronicles: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 11, p. 537). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

Hezekiah appears to have forgotten what God had done. If God had not rescued him twice, he wouldn't even be living to receive gifts and riches. Scripture records Hezekiah's prayers of requests and then prayers of praise when those requests are miraculously answered by God. Here, in our story, Hezekiah seems to forget even to consult with God. Nothing is recorded about Hezekiah even checking with God to see if it would be okay to open the kingdom to foreign prying eyes. Also, nothing of giving credit to God is recorded. How different it would have been if as Hezekiah was giving the tour to the Babylonian ambassadors, if instead of taking the credit for the riches and power, he had given God all the credit. What a testimony that would have been.

Babylon was an enemy of Assyria. The country of Judah was also an enemy of Assyria. Perhaps, Hezekiah assumed that the enemy of my enemy must be my friend. Hezekiah also references that Babylon is far away. And again, assumes that they are too far away to attack Judah. We don't know for sure. But in this test of abundance by the Lord, Hezekiah seems to think that he can handle it just fine all by himself.

We need each other for accountability and encouragement.

Just as Hezekiah finishes with his grand tour, Isaiah comes on the scene. Now, Isaiah and Hezekiah had been through both miraculous victory over Assyrian and the healing of Hezekiah together. Isaiah routinely inquired of the Lord for Hezekiah. He often brought encouragement to Hezekiah. These were two men who walked in the faith together.

Now, in our story, Isaiah brings some accountability. He doesn't bring any accusations, he only asks three questions: "What did those men want? Where were they from? What did they see in your palace?" Hezekiah is forced to stop and think over what he has done.

"Without consulting either the Lord or Isaiah, Hezekiah has showed the envoys his vast treasures, his abundant food supplies, and his military provisions. God had given Hezekiah great wealth, so the visitors were impressed. It is difficult to picture a king gladly showing a potential enemy his whole arsenal and wealth, but such is the power of flattery. Just as his forefather David succumbed to the lust of the flesh, and Solomon yielded to vanity and pomp, so Hezekiah, one of Judah's most admired kings, yielded to flattery and pride."[14]

Then Isaiah goes on to give Hezekiah a word from the Lord, and it is not a positive word. Everything he has shown the Babylonian officials will be taken back to Babylon. Even Hezekiah's descendants will be taken and will end up as servants in the palace at Babylon. We know this prophecy is fulfilled. Daniel was a descendant of Hezekiah and just as Isaiah said, ended up serving the king of Babylon.

God is good.

Hezekiah could have denied and complained about the prophecy that Isaiah brought, but he doesn't. The first words out of Hezekiah's mouth are "The message from the Lord is good."

[14] Walker, L. L., Elmer A. Martens. (2005). *Cornerstone biblical commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, & Lamentations* (Vol. 8, p. 162). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

He has received much good from the Lord and even though he has momentarily forgotten all the Lord has done for him, he does humble himself and acknowledge that God's will is good.

The text goes onto explain Hezekiah's thoughts which aren't the most flattering. He is simply relieved that the judgment won't happen in his lifetime. It is hard to say from scripture if Hezekiah simply doesn't care about what will happen to his descendants and nation in the future or if he understands that years of rebellion prior to his time are the reason for judgment to come. God will be using an exile of 70 years in Babylon to refine His people. As the people are being marched to this exile, Jeremiah tells them, The Lord says, Jer.29:11 *For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.* Yes, this is the context of the often-quoted verse.

You may say, this is all fine and an interesting story, but we live in the time after Christ and we also have the power of the Holy Spirit available to us. What could the story of Hezekiah, a king who lived over 2500 years ago, teach us today? I believe the story of Hezekiah still demonstrates how to live our lives with a grateful heart.

Don't forget what God has done!

Is God testing you with abundance? We, too, are at risk of forgetting what God has done for us because we have blessings in abundance. We need to remember what God has done for us and for our church as we prepare to move forward. We are approaching the holiday of Thanksgiving which we can use as a time to count our blessings.

Jesus has come to pay the price for our sins, to restore our relationship with the Father forever. Sometimes, we have heard this message so often, we begin to take it for granted and forget how important it is. God knows in our sinful humanness, we forget. Jesus gives us a way to remember Him in communion. Luke 22: 19 *He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me*." Communion is the time to receive forgiveness of sins and remember what Jesus has done for us.

It is always good practice to find some way to memorialize what God has done for you. You can journal, keep pictures or mementos of special times with God. As you remember and recount what God has done, it leads to praise and worship. In fact, thankfulness is key to turning on our brain's relational circuits. God had designed our brains with an area for relationship. In times of high negative emotion, such as anger, fear, or shame, these circuits will begin to shut down. Two things can turn them back on, joy and thankfulness. When we begin to count our blessings, we literally are turning on our relationship center so that we can enjoy our relationship with God and with others. The Biblical advice to be thankful is backed by modern neuroscience.[15]

[15] Karl Lehman, http://www.immanuelapproach.com/pdf/Chapters6-12%28Draft%29ImmAppBook.pdf, 1-2.

We need each other for accountability and encouragement.

We all have our weak points and Satan loves to attack them. Great men of the Bible are not perfect, David struggled with lust, Solomon with riches, and Hezekiah with pride. Each of us has a weak point and each of us needs encouragement. There are also times when we need someone to hold us accountable and point out blind spots. By definition, a blind spot is something we can't see, but friends that care about us may see them clearly. We need relationships that are safe but still honest. Just as Hezekiah needed Isaiah to question what he was doing, there are times we need others to do the same for us. I believe God has designed us to be better together.

This is one reason we need to be in small groups. Worship is good and necessary, but it is difficult to get to know others well in a structured setting. Small groups have more time and space to get to really know and care for each other. There is more time for individual prayer. Each of us needs someone to encourage and hold them accountable and we each should be doing that for others, also.

God is good.

I believe God designed us for relationship with Him and wants the best for us. True love is a choice and God structured his creation so that we have a choice to follow. Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God's one rule and brought sin into the world. God has been working at reconciling humankind since then. First, He made a covenant with Abraham. God was faithful to this agreement, but humankind was not. Finally, God sent His own Son into our world to model a faithful, obedient life and ultimately to die on the cross. This paid the blood price for our disobedience and opened a way for us to be reconciled to God. When we believe in and trust Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit begins to transform us and enables us to spend eternity with our God.

When we realize and remember what God has done for us, it leads to thanks, a grateful heart that is full of praise. The reality of God's love allows us to build healthy relationships with others and puts the temporary things of this world in perspective. God is good.

As we close, let's spend a few minutes considering:

Are you being tested by abundance?

Have you forgotten what God has done for you in the past?

What do you need to receive and give encouragement and accountability?

Message 09 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Being Rich Toward God| Luke 12:13-31 | Speaker: Pastor Tom Graves | November 19, 2017

Context:

A large crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another and Jesus began to speak first to his disciples telling them to be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. The Pharisees while claiming to be God's representatives were worldly, not very loving, and appear to be people who don't have faith because they did not acknowledge the Son of Man. To build healthy relationship with ourselves, others and things we must first undergird all of that with our relationship with the Lord.

Text:

13 Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's
estate with me." 14 Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as
that?" 15 Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how
much you own."

16 Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. 17 He said
to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' 18 Then he said, 'I know! I'll
tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and
other goods. 19 And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for
years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!" ' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool!

You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' [21] "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

[22] Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. [23] For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. [24] Look at the ravens. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! [25] Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? [26] And if worry can't accomplish a little thing like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things?

[27] "Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. [28] And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

[29] "And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. [30] These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. [31] Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need. [32] "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. [33] "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. [34] Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. A story from God's word.

I want to begin by looking at the context of our story when Jesus tells the disciples to be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. What does it mean to be on guard? This means to be watchful, be aware of, or protect yourself from something. To be a hypocrite originally meant to be an actor, to wear a mask or play a role. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for wearing a mask of piety that concealed their inner corruption. Jesus was telling the disciples to guard themselves against wearing a mask and pretending to be someone you are not, which is really deception. Why is this so dangerous? As people of God it is hard to move along in our faith journey when we put a mask on hiding the issues we need to deal with. **If we truly want the character of Christ, we must expose our weaknesses, and stop pretending. God calls us to be transparent. The first part of James 5:16 says, "***Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* That is an amazing promise…when we confess our sins and pray for each other we receive healing. I love that word…healed…that is an amazing promise.

The Bible tells us that when Solomon built the temple, he laid the foundation with "large stones, costly stones, and hewn stones" (1 Kin. 5:17). Apparently, he wanted the foundation to be the best, even though no one would see it. God is building a spiritual house, and we are the spiritual stones. (see 1 Pet.2:5). As we look at relationship with things the most important part is the foundation…our relationship with God because it transforms my heart on how I see things. As we move into our text we begin to see how important that foundation is. *[3] Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me*." *[14] Jesus*

replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" [15] Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." Again, we see the word guard…a warning this time about the dangers of greed, and how life is not measured by what we own. In the world in which we live you would think that life is all about things that we own, but that is only a deception by the enemy to keep our focus off the Lord, to keep our focus off eternity, and to place our focus on ourselves and today.

To illustrate this lack of perspective Jesus tells a story about a Rich man. *"A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. [17] He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' [18] Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. [19] And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!" ' [20] "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' [21] "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."*

By keeping our focus on today we are robbed of an eternal perspective and what is really important…a rich relationship with God. Our enemy knows that when we have a rich relationship with God it changes everything…our relationship with ourselves, each other, and things. A rich relationship with God leads to being generous which is the antidote of being selfish and is the model of Jesus.

[22] Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. [23] For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. Jesus continued to highlight the priorities of those who want to follow him. Just as our attitude toward money should be different than the world our view of life in general should be different. As a believer, we don't need to worry, but we can place our concerns in the hands of our heavenly Father. Can you see how a rich relationship with the Lord begins to change our priorities?

Jesus tells us *[29] "And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. [30] These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. [31] Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.* Clearly God's people should have different priorities from the "pagan world" (12:30) because they have the eternal perspective. Jesus told his disciples to *seek the kingdom of God.* **To "seek the kingdom" means to submit to God's sovereignty or control today, to work for the future coming of his kingdom.** So many spend their time worrying about the basics of life, but Jesus says to seek the kingdom, and the basics *shall be added to you.* Christ's promise is not that kingdom seekers will get everything they desire but that the necessities for faith and service will be in abundance. When God's children have their priorities right, they can trust that God will always care for them. They may not become rich, but they will not lack what they need. *Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. **9** "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Being rich towards God and seeking the Kingdom may not always unfold like we think as illustrated in the true story of a priest named Maximilian Kolbe a prisoner in a German concentration camp during WWII. Survivors of the Auschwitz prison tell of Kolbe's actions while they were prisoners. Before bedtime, he would visit the bunks at night asking the prisoners if they wanted prayer. Others tell of times when he shared his small rations with others and how he would wait to be the last in line to receive food or treatment (which often meant he would receive none).

During his months at Auschwitz, Maximilian led others to act in peace by his own examples. He urged the prisoners to pray for their captors, to show peace to the guards and to overcome evil with good. His words and deeds inspired the prisoners and made him a much-respected leader in the camp. Maximilian Kolbe's last act of heroism would come in July of 1941. Auschwitz had a rule that if anyone attempted to escape, ten men from the same bunker would be executed. One man from Kolbe's block went missing. Franciszek Gajowniczek was one of the men selected and cried out in dismay "my poor wife! My poor children! What will they do?" Moved with compassion, Kolbe stepped forward and asked the officer if he could take the man's place.

Maximilian Kolbe and the 9 other men were thrown into the starvation bunker. To ease their suffering, Kolbe led the men in songs and prayers each day. Eventually, the men began to die and after two weeks only four remained. Needing the cell for more victims, the remaining four were injected with poison on August 14, 1941. Bruno Borgowiec, one of the men stationed in the starvation bunker recalls that Maximilian was the only person conscious during the injection. He shocked those watching when he raised his arm for the injection and prayed for the executioner.

Almost 2000 years ago our Lord Jesus took our place, took our punishment and bore our sin on the cross at Calvary. While Jesus hung on the cross the first words he spoke were, "*Forgive them Father he said for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:24* Sometimes we forget me included what Jesus has done for us…we go about our life and forget to just say…Thank you Lord for taking my place. Jesus tells us in *John 10:11 I am the good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* Being Rich Toward God…something to think about. Amen.

Message 10 | Series: Building Healthy Relationships | Theme: Whose Kingdom are you Building? | 1 Cor. 3:1-15 | Speaker: Pastor Tom Graves | November 26, 2017

Context:

Today we come to a conclusion of our series called "Building Healthy Relationships. As we have previously studies the key to building a healthy relationship with ourselves, others and things is strong relationship with the Lord. Today in our message we want to focus on Building the Kingdom of God, because an easy trap to fall into is building your own kingdom not God's…telling the world…look what I did and being filled with pride.

To set our story in context Paul wrote this letter *to the church of God in Corinth* while he was visiting Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1–20:1). Paul knew the Corinthian church well because he had spent eighteen months in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18). While in Ephesus Paul had heard about problems in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11) and writes them a letter.

As Paul begins his letter he is very encouraging to the church in Corinth telling them who they are in Christ reminding them that they have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people *everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours."* Paul finds the church in Corinth suffering from division and tells them to keep their eyes on Jesus who has amazing things ahead for those who believe. It says in 1 Cor. 2:9.*"No eye* has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those

who love him." While Paul is very encouraging in his letter to the church in Corinth the letter reveals the foundational problem is immature faith.

Paul goes on to write…Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. [2] I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, [3] for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? [4] When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

[5] After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. [6] I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. [7] It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. [8] The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. [9] For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

[10] Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. [11] For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. [12] Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. [13] But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. [14] If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. [15] But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. A story from God's word.

As we begin let's go back to our context of our story where Paul writes, *"I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.* What is Paul trying to communicate to the people of Corinth? Why is that so important to them and to us today?

He is trying to communicate to them who they are? Who are they? A child of God…that is our identity. Say that with me…I am a child of God. Also, what is God doing in our life? He is making us Holy by Jesus Christ. What Paul is doing is redirecting the church in Corinth to look up…look up to Jesus…refocus on the cross and take the focus off themselves. What Paul is telling them is… when we begin to focus on Jesus, that is when we start to mature in the faith and begin to build the Kingdom of God.

Then in Cor. 2:9 Paul reminds the believers what the Lord has ahead for them. 1 Cor. 2:9. *That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."* Paul points out in this verse that human senses and understanding cannot begin to comprehend what God has prepared for those who love

him. This verse reminds us of what Paul writes in Romans 2:4 – *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?* What is Paul's goal as he talks to the church in Corinth? To bring repentance…For them to turn from their sin and turn toward God. **When we remember in our heart who we are in Christ, and what the Lord has done and will do for us it humbles us leading us to repentance. When we do so it changes our perspective, because life is all about building the Lord's Kingdom.**

As we move into the text Paul tells them…*Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ.* [2] *I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,* [3] *for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?* [4] *When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?*

What is the Lord trying to teach us in this passage about the people in Corinth? It appears that the people have not progressed in their Christian faith and are stuck as baby Christians resulting in divisions, quarreling and living like people of the world. In addition, because people have not matured they can't be taught the deeper things of the faith because they are not ready.

On a positive note when I begin to mature in my faith and begin to eat solid food God begins to give me His desires for my life and His Kingdom. How can I tell if I am becoming more mature in the faith? I begin to have a greater desire to be in worship then anything the world can offer. (Think about that) In addition I begin to have a thirst for God's word, to pray, to lead by the Holy Spirit, and to be discipled. As these changes begin to take place in my life the Lord begins to open my eyes to people around me that may have never been there before. I begin to see people in need, people who need prayer, and people who don't know the Lord. My heart begins to change and it begins to break for those who don't know Jesus to the point I am willing to move out of my comfort zone to reach out to them with the love of Jesus. As the Lord changes my heart my priorities in life begin to change and the Lord gives me a sense of urgency to be a harvester in the harvest field.

The question may be how do I get started on my journey to mature in the faith and to get off the milk if that is where I am at? It may sound simple…but I believe the best way is to just pray and ask God….be honest. Lord change my heart so I want what you want for my life. Believe me…you begin to pray that prayer and you will be amazed what begins to happen in your life.

As we turn to the last part of our story I want to ask you a question and that is…Does the Lord reward us for our work on this earth, or when believers go to heaven they all get the same. Let's see what the Lord's word says. [8] *The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.* [9] *For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.* So, the answer to the questions is the Lord does reward us for our work. What else does Paul say.

[10] Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. [11] For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. [12] Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. [13] But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. [14] If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. [15] But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

The Lord tells us there are different kinds of building materials when you build on his foundation. There are those who are building their own kingdom with their own motives and they are building we wood, hay and straw. Those who are building God's kingdom with heavenly motives are building with gold, silver, and Jewels. Paul goes on to say that the works of the unbelievers are tested…they are place in a furnace to see what they are worth, because in the end your true motives will be revealed.

Paul's words are a challenge to believers to have the right motives because people's eternal lives hang in the balance. As the church, we can play a key role in building God's Kingdom by leading people to faith, making disciples and being aware of divine appointments. Like the time Paul and Silas were in prison for telling people about the good news of Jesus.

[23] After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. [24] Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. [25] About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. [26] Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. [27] The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. [28] But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" [29] The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. [30] He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

[31] They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." [32] Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. [33] At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. [34] The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

As we look at this story as Paul was living out the Christian faith he brought the Kingdom of God to the prisoners who it says in verse 25 were listening and the jailer was listening also. When a crisis happened, when the earthquake stuck when Paul said, "Don't harm yourself we are still here…the jailer fell before Paul and asked him...what must I do to be saved. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be save you and your household. By living out the faith Paul was given an opportunity to witness to the jailer and lead him and his family to Jesus. It says the jailer was filled with joy. By humbly living out his faith Paul was building the Kingdom and one more family

was able to hear about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus who died and rose again to save men's souls. To God be the glory. Amen. SERMON REFLECTION