

Upper Path Valley Presbyterian Church
2020: The Global Year of the Bible
The Fifth Sunday of Easter
The Ninth Sunday of Quarantine from COVID-19

May 10, 2020

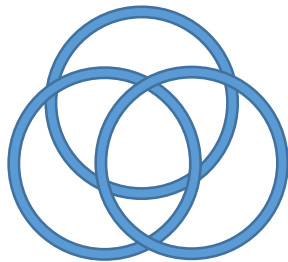
A Lamp and a Light, Part 17
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When you read the Bible, it's not hard to pick up on the message that relationships matter. Relationships matter! Gary Smalley in his book, *The DNA of Relationships* begins the book with these words written in capital letters:

LIFE IS RELATIONSHIPS; THE REST IS JUST DETAILS.
THIS IS THE GREATEST TRUTH.
EVERYTHING IN LIFE THAT TRULY MATTERS
CAN BE BOILED DOWN TO RELATIONSHIPS.

In this time of sheltering at home, social distancing, etc., both the value of our relationships with our family and our friends, our church family, and co-workers that we are missing, and the challenge of being in healthy relationships with those with whom we are sheltering has come to the forefront, hasn't it? Both the value and the challenge of our relationships has been exposed during this time.

God made us for relationship. God, who is himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the perfect picture of a unified relationship, made us in his image – made us for relationship. Listen to these words from Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness...". When God said "Let us make" he was referring to the perfect unified relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit represented by this visual.



One God, unified in mission & purpose, yet at the same time distinct in purpose. This is a great mystery and deserves a sermon or two or ten all for itself. But for now, let's think about why this is important for us.

We were made in God's image. We were made to be unified in our mission and our purpose as well – a mission & purpose **of glorifying God in all that we do and enjoying God together now and forever.**

So, who are we supposed to be in relationship with? Who makes up the three circles in our lives?

1. God
2. Others
3. Ourselves

From the very beginning, God desired for us to have a personal relationship with Him. From the moments of 'walking in the cool of the day' with Adam to God himself coming to earth to be with us through Jesus and then making a way that we can be in a relationship with him

unholy though we are, God has made his desire known. He knows us and he wants us to know Him. Listen to these words from Psalm 139 (NLT). Listen for how God knows us and tenderly loves us:

¹O Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.
²You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.
³You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.
⁴You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, Lord.
⁵You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.
⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!

⁷I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!
⁸If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave,⁹ you are there.
⁹If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
¹⁰even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.
¹¹I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night—
¹²but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.
To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.

¹³You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
¹⁵You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
¹⁶You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.

God knows us, and sent Jesus to us so that we could, in turn, know God. Listen to these words from Jesus found in John 14:1-9. It starts with very familiar words, often heard at funerals. But sometimes we stop reading a little too soon.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ¹My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ²And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ³You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁴Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know

the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

The first, and most important relationship circle we must settle as those made in the image of God, is our relationship with God. Once that relationship is forged, the others come a little easier because of the Holy Spirit who lives inside of those in relationship with God through Jesus, who then helps us to build healthy relationships with others and with ourselves. So, today, I'd like to help you begin that relationship (if you have not done so already). We need a willing heart, an open heart, and three words: Sorry, Thank you, and Please. "Lord, I am sorry for the many, many ways I have not lived as you made me to live. I am sorry for not acknowledging you as the Lord of my life. I am a total sinner – through and through – and only your mercy can save me. Thank you that you sent Jesus to be my savior. Thank you that he died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins, and that on the third day you rose him from the dead to show the way and make the way to NEW life here on earth and in heaven one day. Please come into my life through your Holy Spirit and cleanse me, comfort me, and help me to be like Jesus in this broken world." If you just spoke those words from a willing and open heart, "Welcome to the family of God!" Until day you were made in the image of God, but after today, after inviting Jesus to save & lead your life, you are now a child of God! Go to the first chapter of the gospel of John to read more about that! Then keep on reading! It's a great book in the Bible to start with!

Today being mother's day is why I felt led to go in this direction. Because though every card you might buy at a store for mother's day is all roses, hugs, and thank yous. But some people can't buy those cards because their mom wasn't that kind of mom. Some of you had or have absent moms, meaning moms who just aren't there with you or for you. Talk about a complicated relationship, right? Then there are the relationships with dads, siblings, friends, teachers, spouses, children, grandparents, greatgrandparents, ex-spouses, stepmoms and dads, foster parents, in-laws, (out-laws), cousins, boyfriends, girlfriends, fiances, you name it. Relationships with others are often very complicated and often very hard – especially if you already have a relationship with God and the other person doesn't have that same unifying-in-mission-and-purpose-relationship. It is hard. But it's not impossible. It takes work. It takes time. It takes intention. It takes setting healthy boundaries. And it takes lots of humility and prayer.

Listen to these words from Philippians 2:3,4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Breathe. Pray. And seek in action and in prayer the greatest good for the others in your lives – the goodness and grace of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That means that when we say we are disciples of Jesus then our lives should be a shining testimony to our relationship with God so that others around us would see and choose to explore, and by God's grace, believe.

When my mom was at the Shook Home towards the end of her life, I was the primary caregiver – the one paying her bills, taking her to doctor's appointments, etc. As is common, the primary caregiver gets the heat from the one receiving the care. My relationship with mom had never been super easy, but it certainly took a hit during that time. How did I get through it? I prayed this simple prayer, "Lord, please help me be Jesus to her today." And God really answered that prayer in some of the most distressing moments. Why wouldn't He? This is the goal for his children – that we would be Jesus to others in this very broken world.

So our first and most important relationship is with our Creator, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The next two are interchangeable in terms of importance. One is our relationship with others and the second is your relationship with yourself.

We need to be able to see ourselves honestly through God's eyes. We need to be open and willing to see where we need to learn and grow. We need to honor how God has made us with

the gifts, the interests, the talents, the passions, the resources, the tendencies, and the temptations that come alive within us and leverage all that for God's glory. When you're mad, you need to stop and really figure out why you are mad. Is it because you are hurt, you are jealous, you are afraid, etc. Taking the time to listen to your own thoughts and pay attention to your emotions not only helps you to get to a place of self-awareness, but also helps you take it all, truthfully, to Jesus for help and healing – which then helps you in your relationship with others!

This past week I was able to have a free hour of spiritual direction over zoom with a woman out in Colorado Springs, CO. Our denomination is making these hours available to ECO pastors during this crazy time of leading churches through a pandemic. At one point after sharing some things with her, she asked a very key question. It wasn't a comfortable moment when I realized what she was helping me see about myself. It certainly wasn't anything I wanted to post on Facebook or Instagram. But, oh so helpful! Oh, so freeing to understand my skewed motivations that were coming from a place of pain not peace.

Tensions are high in some of our closest relationships right now. I want to challenge you as I challenge myself to think about where you are and where God wants you to be in regards to your relationship with Him, your relationship with others, and your relationship with yourself. Wouldn't it be great to come out of this time of separation healthier than ever as those made joyfully and lovingly and intentionally in the image of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

Do you remember at the beginning of Lent that we prayed that God would cut off anything in us that was bearing no fruit for him, and that he would prune anything that was bearing fruit, but that he knew could bear more fruit. Maybe some of those things have to do with the relationships in our lives. Oh, Lord, please help us to become more as you have created us to be. Thanks be to God. Amen.