

Love God – Focusing on Relationship
Psalm 27:1-4
(GCF – August 23, 2009)

I. Introduction

Read the story from *Soul Graffiti*, by Mark Scandrette (pages 197-200)

Scandrette continues, “We often speak of our beliefs in terms of our rational with certain facts or truth statements (such as the authority of Scripture, human sinfulness, the deity of Christ, or a theory of atonement). Often the mind agrees with these statements of belief without the cooperation of the will or body. Is this why so many of us can maintain strong ‘beliefs’ that appear to have little or no bearing on how we live our lives? ...Our use of the phrase ‘I believe’ could more accurately be substituted with ‘I agree’ or ‘That makes sense to me’ rather than ‘I acted on this information with fidelity [allegiance, devotion] and trust.’”

Hear me today; I am deeply concerned about this!

Two weeks ago, I spoke about the difference between religion and being a genuine follower of Jesus Christ.

Even as we are proclaiming this message, many of you are being tested to see if you are religious or a genuinely growing follower of Christ.

Are you passing the test?

How are you handling difficult relationships? Are you pulling away from the fellowship, because someone has challenged you to grow, hurt your feelings, or not met your expectations?

Or are you pressing into your relationship with God and others through the hard times?

How are things going at work? At home? Do your responses to life situations coincide with what you claim to believe?

Although we all fall short, are your actions, words, and lifestyle honoring the one who you say is the Lord of your life and has forgiven you your sins?

There are times when I am truly confounded by the response of many Christians to loving confrontation or to the challenge to step up to something.

There are Christians who want to serve in ministry and then do not understand why, in light of their lifestyle, they are told they are not ready.

Or when someone in ministry is approached in an effort to help them grow in areas of weakness or sin, they are hurt.

Notice I am not talking the casual visitor, but those who have committed themselves to membership and want to serve in some capacity, but felt that how they lived their lives had no relevance as to whether they should be allowed to be in ministry or not.

In fact, they are shocked and hurt that someone would even talk to them about it!

I honestly am confounded. What do we think it means to be a member of the church, a follower of Christ, or to serve in ministry?

So, I come back (again) to our need to stay focused on loving God, loving people, and serving others.

In this context of loving God, loving people and serving others, we are challenged to enter into a genuine relationship with God through Jesus Christ, a relationship that changes the way we see ourselves and interact with others. A relationship that utterly and completely **transforms** our lives.

II. Focusing on Jesus Christ

God does not simply want us to practice our religion (follow a carefully prescribed set of rules and regulations); He wants us to enjoy a love **relationship** with Him!

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing-- if it really was for nothing? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” (Galatians 3:1-5, NIV)

True Christianity is an issue of the **heart!** It begins with an act of faith – entrusting ourselves, not just to a set of doctrines, but to the one who died for us.

With a changed *heart* comes a changed **life**. This change begins on the inside and works its way out. It is change that is grounded in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a question. Why did God send His one and only Son? What did God hope to accomplish through this?

We need to look at God’s original intention for creating us.

“When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden.” (Genesis 3:8, NLT)

Can you imagine the relationship? The love and joy shared between them? God literally came to the Garden of Eden and walked in fellowship with Adam and Eve.

But something drastic happened when they chose to rebel against God:

“...So they hid from the Lord God among the trees.” (Genesis 3:8, NLT)

Something has happened! Fellowship with God has been broken! Humanity has fallen!

Now, without God, they strike out on their own.

All they find is toilsome labor, war, heartache and confusion.

Humanity no longer knows its God!

But through the Old Testament, then in Christ and today, God is calling out and seeks to restore that broken relationship.

Listen to God’s response to the broken relationship: *“Then the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’”* (Genesis 3:9, NLT)

The whole of the Old Testament is a picture of God revealing Himself through the prophets, extending **love** and redemption to a stiff-necked people.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me.” (Matthew 23:37-38, NLT)

What is God looking for from His people? – God is calling us into a relationship!

Listen to the words of Jesus regarding eternal life.

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3, NIV)

This word is also used in describing intimacy between a husband and wife.

This life is not just something we will experience in heaven – it is something that God longs to share with you now.

God wants us to know Him intimately. So much so that even though some may think they are working hard FOR Him, He prefers they cultivate their relationship with Him.

God loves you with an intense love.

A love so great He sent His son to die, that your sins may be forgiven and your relationship with Him restored!!!!

He wants you to know His love and for you to love Him in return.

Do you find it difficult to serve God?
Difficult to be free of sin?
Difficult to share your faith with others?

Maybe it is because you do not intimately know God!

Religion won't motivate us to love and live completely for God – only relationship will.

When you know God and experience His love for you, you will **willingly** trust, love and obey Him

*“You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, 21 ‘Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!’? 22 Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. 23 These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. **But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.**”*
(Colossians 2:20-23, NLT)

If we just have religion there is no motivation to live a genuinely holy life; in fact, in the context of religion, we are usually more concerned about what others think of us than we are about how God thinks of us.

Or, we are more concerned about how others are acting instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our own hearts and lives.

When a man loves a woman, he does many things he wouldn't normally do because he wants her to be happy.

When you are excited about something you talk with others about that thing. Religion is dry and dead – not much to talk about – but a love relationship with Christ should be exciting and something you naturally talk about to others.

Religion brings death, but relationship brings **life**:

“He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Corinthians 3:6, NIV)

Often, I think we view the Old Testament as simply a record of laws and judgments, the letter so to speak.

But God's heart has always been to be in **covenant** relationship with His people.

In the context of sharing the law with Israel, God said, *“I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people.”* (Leviticus 26:12, NLT)

Later, David, who lived under the Old Covenant, made a most incredible statement: *“One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.”* (Psalm 27:4, NIV)

David longed for a relationship with God. In the midst of all the religious activity (sacrifices, rituals, etc.), David pursued God and knew God intimately – how about you?

III. Application

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5, NIV)

If Christ is in you, why do you continue to live out of your hurt, bitterness, unforgiveness, fear, and anger?

I understand that overcoming these issues can take time, but some of you have walked in these things for 10, 15, or 20 years as believers in Jesus!

I am being brutally honest here, but my heart is the heart of Paul the Apostle when he said, *“I am not sorry that I sent that severe letter to you, though I was sorry at first, for I know it was painful to you for a little while. 9 Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to repent and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. 10 For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.”* (2 Corinthians 7:8-10, NLT)

If we are going to be a people that love God, love people and serve others, we are going to have to learn to **apply** all our knowledge to the way we actually live our lives.

We need to exercise forgiveness to one another (this means you have been hurt), let go of our anger, fear and insecurity and learn who we truly are in Christ.

It means we do everything we can to maintain our focus on Christ and grow in our love for God.

Scripture to meditate on this week: Psalm 27:1-4