

## It's a Beautiful Life: Living In, Living Out

"Identified"

10-16-15

Text: 1 John 3:1-3



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*"Have you ever experienced a time in your life that you felt that God was delighting in you? Was it because you had done something 'remarkable' for him, or because you, yourself, were remarkable?"*

*"How can you tell you are living lovingly?"*

*"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men..."* John 12:32

*"How could you not love a God like that? Why would you attempt to challenge the reliability and vulnerability of such love? Why won't you let yourself be loved?"*

*"Whose voice reinforced your chosen-ness? Whose voice did you hear which interrupted your pursuit of beloved-ness? Who silenced God's voice within you and began to re-form who you are?"*

*"It is always true to some extent that we make our images of God. It is even truer that our image of God makes us."* Brennan Manning

*"What false images of God might you need to abandon in order to better love him? How might the settled-ness of his love for you invite you to reject harmful images of yourself?"*

*"Do you find it challenging to accept that you are the beloved of God? Are you convinced that he is not simply disappointed with you, but that you are a disappointment to him?"*

*"Would you say that most of your actions are motivated by love or fear? How can you tell? What are some of the characteristics of actions motivated by love? By fear?"*

*"If I really knew God's love, I might stop trying to find love in \_\_\_\_\_?"*

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**Teaching Notes...**

**With incredible patience and passion, God pursues us in such a way as to eliminate any reason that we might have for resisting his advances— for doubting his good intentions toward us.**

He understands our hesitations. He refuses to coerce or corner us, but simply offers himself to us. As we retreat in fear, he seems to give us "space" so as not to increase our anxiety. He simply waits for that moment when we realize that we are safer with him than with anyone else.

*"It's complicated"* [response I got from someone when I inquired about a certain situation in their lives]. Perhaps it's a good way of addressing the cumulative **"mess"** we are in.

*"It's complicated"* (*hard to understand, hard to explain, hard to deal with, many; many interconnected parts*). Life is not easily summarized; it's not always quantifiable. It's hard to explain. Too many moving parts.

Yet, it's the beginning of the *"good news"* [Frederick Buechner, *"The gospel is bad news before it is good news."*] The bad news: we're a mess. We may be a more polished, more "re-arranged", more socially acceptable, more uniquely medicated mess... but still a mess.

**It's not until we observe the unprovoked movements of God toward us (grace) that we are made aware of the depth of our brokenness-- the gravity of our situation apart from him.**

The good news: as we better understand just how complicated and entangled our lives really are, we better appreciate the tenacious nature of God's love for us and the scope of his restorative action.

**Church is at its best when:**

... it is still surprised by grace; still captured by the idea that *"nothing can separate us from God's love"* (Romans 8:39).

... it sees me, but sees something else. When it, delights in me so that I can feel something other than shame and pressure.

... it understands that brokenness is not the objective--- wholeness is.

... it is willing to declare that beyond my irritability, my isolation, my eating too much, drinking too much is a battle--- a war against everything I formerly trusted and of which I am having difficulty living free.

... it will join me in discerning God's Spirit at work, but won't patronize me.

... it says, ***"You don't have to live that like anymore!"***

*"Who am I, really?"* There's always the person that I long to be (and suspect that I was meant to be), and the person that I believe I am (and likely always will be). Who of us does not relish the notion of jettisoning all of our "old self" and becoming someone new? It's complicated. **Sin is to mistake ourselves for someone else!**

Everyone and everything is ***"groaning"***! (Romans 8) We have the Spirit groaning for us to come to some sense of revelation concerning our chosen-ness. We have the world 'groaning' for us to know who we are and to take our rightful place as loving stewards. Even we ourselves, Paul says, groan within ourselves. It means that sometimes the internal struggle to "become" (flourish) is so intense that it can't be reduced to words.

**Perhaps the most indispensable work of the Spirit is not convicting us of sin, but convincing us of the Father heart of God: his deep, lavish love for us.**

With the coming of the Spirit to *'temple in us'* (1 Corinthians 3), Paul would have us to know that we have a new heart, with new motivations, new God-ward impulses and a new way of thinking about life.

It doesn't mean that we are without sin, simply without pretense. We don't have to "fake it", anymore.

1 John 4:18 "...perfect love dispels all fear".

### **Not being loved completely, perfectly: it's the one rational fear.**

Fear is what always fills that vacuum in us where love has been deficient. Anywhere in our experiences where there is a breach of love, we adopt a *false persona*. We have to, because the person that we really are is assumed to have been un-loveable; unworthy. Any area of your life that demands that you perform, that you posture, that you achieve is being motivated by fear, not love.

"I will not leave you orphaned..." John 14:18 ["orphanity"]

I suppose, over time, we have all developed "*abandonment issues*". We all suffer some degree of "*separation anxiety*". It's what sin does to us. We all fear being left "by" ourselves; left "to" ourselves.

If I am left "**by**" myself, I am left to conclude my worthlessness. Shame.

If I'm left "**to**" myself, I've got to figure out how to make life work. How to protect myself (cover) while maintaining the appearance of centeredness.

### **All of us long to be the expression of the "imago-dei": to be imprinted by God.**

"Imprinting" is when a young animal fixates on the first object of its experience. It follows it and comes to form its sense of who it is and how it is to respond based on that initial experience.

I believe, as humanity, our earliest recollections are of God. The image of God is never forfeited in us. It's part of our creative-DNA. It's why God's first response to sin (Adam and Eve's devastating movement) was "pursuit". To ensure that we knew that love was never in jeopardy.

Over time, that image is either clarified or tarnished by the story in which we choose to live. Layer upon layer of image-dulling thought and practice.

### **"Dearly loved children" (Ephesians 5:1).**

It is the non-negotiable point of origination. It says that if, by any means, you decide that your relationship with God is contingent upon your performance, you lose your glory and so does God, because what is most glorious about God is that he IS love; what is most glorious about us is that we are the be-loved.

**Those who know God know love and know that they are not yet as they *will be*. We can't see who we really are but we are perpetually compelled to jettison anything that competes with our image-bearing identity; anything that encourages us to behave in ways that are inauthentic and disingenuous--- not as dearly loved children.**

### **The premise of the Story is this: I only discover who I am when I know who God is. Any other version of myself, or God, diminishes us both.**

I think it's this idea of discovering who we already are that seems to characterize the transformational process (e.g. Jacob: child of covenant, formed in the context of blessing, yet wrestling with God and man because he failed to assimilate such truths). He was already blessed, already loved, already identified as belonging to God, yet he became subject to other pursuits, other labels (deceiver), other sources of making life work.

*“How can you tell you are living lovingly?”*

► **You are “spacious”.**

*“fear has to do with judgment...”* (1 John 4)

Here’s the really crippling paradox: we are terrified of being exposed to another and assessed as “not enough”, but we have this innate need for self-revelation... for intimacy. For knowing and being known.

When you are spacious, you are willing to let yourself out and let others in, therefore, your relationships have depth to them. You listen more than you talk. You are committed to being available to the other, without demanding equal time.

► **You are less controlled by others.**

You are able to receive affirmation and praise without it *puffing you up* and you are able to receive criticism without it *tearing you down*.

► **Your experience of having been forgiven allows you to love freely** (without keeping lists or setting limits to your generosity). *“Those who have been forgiven much, love much...”* (Luke 7). We still carry the wounds we have experienced because of others, but we refuse to use those wounds as an excuse to wound others and withhold love.

► **You are secure.**

You have plenty of “emotional-capital”. Life is less of a risk. You are free to explore, within the boundaries of “the worthy life”.

Deuteronomy 33:12 *Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, ... the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.*

Psalms 112:8 *His heart is secure, he will have no fear...*

God gives us (2) indispensable gifts for the process:

**Confession---** is an invitation to live out “in the open”; to “come out of hiding”. It’s the unsettling confrontation with all that upon which we have learned to rely for love.

**Repentance---** the gift that God gives us which not only allows us to admit our brokenness, but provides the courage to actually choose a less self-destructive path for our lives.

The process is time-consuming and often painful, but the very source of the joy your heart desires.

**In Jesus, the suffering soul and the suffering God meet.**

It’s only at this point that such a struggle makes sense. It’s only at this point that we can be ‘saved’. Jesus embodies all of the brokenness, shame, and dysfunctionality of humanity for us to ensure we would no longer be identified by it, but identified with him.

*“If I be lifted up, I will draw all men...”* John 12:32

*“How could you not love a God like that? Why would you attempt to challenge the reliability and vulnerability of such love? Why won’t you let yourself be loved?”*

## Supplemental...

- Here's the genius, I propose, of Christianity:

Instead of insisting that we perform (to be noticed, to be validated), it begins by conferring value and worth upon us and then simply invites us to live as if it's true (Ephesians 5:2).

It says that our marred character is never irreversible and that our creative-status (image bearers) is never jeopardized by our righteousness quotient. Things can be really valuable and still be lost or tarnished.

It puts us into "adoptive families" and declares that we belong and invites us to allow this new God-family to supplant all of the challenges of our family or origin.

### **All of God's good creation is formed out of the sound of his voice.**

This is how everything God started: God spoke and what he spoke created reality. Everything he speaks established for us "**authority**"--- meaningful grounds for action.

*"Let there be light and there was \_\_\_\_\_."* Let there be novae and solar systems and chickens and marmots... *"Let us make man in our image...and God breathed into them the breath of life..."* (Genesis).

- We are the voice of God, the imagination of God, wrapped up in flesh and bone and sinew and ligaments. We seem to be the only creation, spoken into existence, that wrestles with its reality; that challenges its inherent goodness.

I have had some really beautiful voices in my life; the ones that affirm and validate; that secure and support. Most of us hear other voices. Voices that degrade and de-humanize. The voices that told you that you "*were the only one*", only to be abandoned for another one. The voice of the one who said "*I love you*", then abused and mis-used you.