

## “Life with Others”

Colossians 3:1-17

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • August 16, 2015

Well again today we're talking about the *With God* life - what it means to live our daily lives *with* God as opposed to trying to do it all ourselves, which is exhausting. We talked about spending our **time** with God, choosing to acknowledge and invite God's presence into each moment, whatever we're doing. I don't know about you, but that practice has really helped me these past few weeks. Then last week we talked about being with God with our **minds**, having a conscious awareness of Him in our thought life.

Today we want to talk about being with God in our relationships. About twenty years ago a philosopher named Jimmy Buffet said, "Relationships, relationships. We all got 'em, we all want 'em, but what do we do with 'em?" What do we do with them? Quick show of hands, anybody ever have a difficult relationship with someone? Anyone ever had trouble getting people to do what you need them to do? This morning we're going to talk about how to fix that.

Let's start with what relationships are. A relationship is defined as the way two or more people are *connected*. Relationships involve connection. That connection could be biological (your "blood" relatives), or emotional (a marriage or friendship). There are lots of different kinds of relationships. You don't have the same relationship with your boss or your coworker that you have with a spouse or a child. But in each case there is still some kind of connection. Remember from last week that our mind involves these connections with other people. The development of your own mind depends on your connections with other people.

Here's the thing - every relationship in your life is an opportunity for the *With God* life. In each of your relationships you can either grow closer to Christ or push Him away. In his wonderful little book, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that Christians never meet one-on-one. They always meet in the presence

of Christ. Jesus said, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." We usually quote that verse whenever only two or three people show up. But Jesus is reminding us that anytime His followers meet one another that He is also there. I don't always recognize or acknowledge it, but it's reality.

Sadly, I think we as Christians forget that a lot. Too often it's the people we're closest to that we tend to hurt the most. When we're with our family or with our church family, we act like God is *not* present. We choose the not-God life.

In the Bible we read about a man named Joseph. You remember Joseph. He was the flashy dresser. He was also daddy's favorite. In the story of Joseph we find a contrast between relationships with God and without God. Joseph's older brothers - half brothers, actually - were jealous. They knew that Joseph was their father's favorite. They wanted to kill him but instead decided to sell him to gypsies. If you have a brother or sister perhaps you've had the same thoughts. But they actually did it. They sold Joseph into slavery and told their father that he was dead. So would this be an example of the *with God* life or the *without God* life? The correct answer would be without God.

Last week in Florida a 10-year-old boy went to a neighbor's apartment and asked if he could ride the other kid's bike. The kid told him no. So the boy goes home and gets a gas can, pours gasoline on the door and door mat, rings the doorbell and lights the door on fire. In his mind the other child's only value was in his stuff.

When we keep God out of our relationships we tend to divide people into categories. Whenever we encounter people we size them up. Are they useful to me or not? What advantage is this person to me? We try to figure out what we can get. Can I make a sale? Does he know someone important that can help me? Can I get some sexual gratification? Can I borrow your bike? What's in it for me?

Our society has been engaged in an ongoing debate over sexuality and marriage that is dividing our country like never before. The root of the problem is that when we reduce sex to just recreation, to just the physical pleasure, we make it all about ourselves. It's about what I get out of it. But God designed sex to be so much more. It's a picture of the permanent oneness of a man and a woman. Ultimately the purpose is to point us to God. The purpose of marriage, according to the Bible, is to demonstrate to the world the relationship between Jesus and the Church. Relationships without God in the middle of them become self-serving and people get hurt.

But there's a better way. The *With God* life. I can have God present in my relationships. Jesus can redeem even the hardest of relationships. Broken marriages can get fixed. Children and parents can get along. Siblings who haven't spoken in years can come together. Recently two firefighters in New Jersey had spent twelve hours fighting a fire. When they were done, before going home they stopped to grab a bite to eat in a local diner. The waitress overheard their discussion about the fire. When it was time to bring their check, instead she brought a note that said she had heard them talking and that she had paid their bill herself to say thanks. The news story doesn't say, but this is what a with God life looks like.

The firefighters when home and posted on Facebook what had happened. They suggested that their friends go eat at that diner and that they tip this woman generously. They also discovered that the waitress had a fundraising campaign online to raise money for a handicap van for her quadriplegic father. They spread the word. Within a couple of days she had more than three times the amount she needed. God was at work in their relationships.

After Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery he rose to a prominent position in Egypt. He was basically Pharaoh's number two guy. Over and over in the story we're told that God was with Joseph. He was with Joseph when he ran Potiphar's business and He was with

Joseph in prison. Because Joseph lived the *with God* life, he had engineered a program in Egypt to store up grain for an upcoming famine. The famine affected the whole region, including Joseph's family. His brothers came to Egypt to buy some food. Joseph recognized them but they didn't recognize him. Joseph had to make a decision – with God or without God. He chose with. Joseph forgave his brothers and their relationship was restored.

Deep down inside, what each of us really wants is to be loved and to love. We want to be part of relationships where we feel appreciated and valued. The Bible is clear that real transformation only takes place in community. The church should be that kind of community. This should be the kind of place where people experience the life-changing power of Jesus through deep relationships with each other. So why is it so hard? And how do we go about building those relationships?

Colossians chapter three shows us a pretty good place to start. This passage gives us a picture of *with God* relationships. First, Paul begins by reminding us who we are. He reminds of our true identity. He says, "For you have died." That's part of what baptism symbolizes. "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." He says that we don't belong to the world anymore so stop thinking about worldly things. Think about God instead.

Next he gives us a list of things we need to get rid of from our lives - anger, hate, slander, foul language, and lying. He mentions covetousness and evil desire and sexual immorality and says those are basically idolatry. They are about what *I* want. You could think of each of these as bricks in a wall. When you get enough of these *without God* desires, the wall gets in the way of our relationships.

Then Paul gives us a list of characteristics of relationships with God in the center – compassion, kindness, humility, and patience. Forgiveness is a big one. If you are going to have successful relationships where Christ is present, you must learn to forgive other people. You must learn to forgive because God has forgiven

you and you must learn to forgive in the way that God has forgiven you – self sacrifice.

Finally, Paul mentions love. Verse 14 says, “And above all these put on love.” Dallas Willard said that to love someone is to will their highest good before God. It’s to say, “I want God’s best for you.” It’s impossible to hate someone when you are praying for God to truly bless him. That’s why Paul says when you love someone, the two of you are bound together in perfect harmony.

With God in the center of each of your relationships you will finally get to experience the peace of Christ. Why wouldn’t you? If Jesus is in your relationships, if you never say anything you wouldn’t say to Jesus, then there’s never any reason to be worried about what someone thinks. Instead, the word of Christ dwells in you richly. You will teach one another. You will worship together. And you will be thankful. You won’t be able to help it. That’s the *with God* life.

*Amen*