

Created for Fellowship

March 21, 2021

One of the hardest parts of the last year has been being cut off from family and friends. The telephone is useful, but not the same as being there. With Zoom we can both hear and see each other. But it isn't the same as talking in person. When we have been able to visit each other outside the masks and social distancing inhibit relationship building. And we need relationships with other people. It has been harder to relate to other people.

You may also have found it harder to relate to God this past year. Let me suggest several reasons.

Reasons you might find it harder to pray in a pandemic.

Grief makes it harder to relate to God.

We have all experienced grief this year. We are grieving the loss of normalcy. Grief can be debilitating. Grief includes a jumble of emotions that make it hard to function as we normally do. And that would include affecting your relationship with God.

Depression makes it harder to relate to God.

Some of you have told me of being depressed during this last year. Depressed people lack enthusiasm for anything, even good things, like relating to people or relating to God.

Anger makes it hard to relate to God.

Some of you have been feeling anger at God this past year. You are angry that God allowed this new virus to take hold in the human community. You are angry that it is so virulent and easily spread from person to person. You are angry that it has so restricted our lives.

And while you may not have consciously thought of being angry towards God, it has manifested itself in your lack of prayer. You have withdrawn from God, become distant from God. You may have done this without really thinking about it. Today is a good day to ask yourself if this is true of you.

Fear of God makes it hard to relate to God.

Some Christians have been feeling that this pandemic is part of God's wrath. You might be thinking of the virus as an act of judgment by God. You are thinking God is angry with the world, maybe with you in particular. And so, you have been avoiding God.

I have shared before an illustration of this from my life. Whenever my father got angry with me and punished me as a child, he stayed angry for awhile even after the spanking was over. And so I would avoid him for a time after the spanking. I did not want to experience any more of his wrath. Many of you can relate to that.

As a young man I thought of God in the same way. Whenever I had to confess sin to God, I believed God was angry with me for the rest of the day. Tomorrow I could get a fresh start. But for the rest of the day I considered God to be angry with me. So, I would not pray the rest of the day. I avoided God.

I know now that this was a mistaken belief. It was a misunderstanding of the Gospel. Nevertheless, that is how I felt at the time. And I acted on that feeling by avoiding fellowship with God.

Many people in our day are feeling that way about God. You are thinking God is angry with us, with you in particular. And so you are avoiding God.

Let me assure you that God is not angry with you. He is hurting for you. This Pandemic is not judgment upon you for your sins. God loves you. And he wants fellowship with you.

We were created for a relationship with God.

We were created for fellowship with God. We see God's desire for relationship in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:8 (NIV) Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

How God appeared to our first parents when they fellowshiped with Him in the garden isn't explained to us. I think God presented himself to them in some kind of visible body that veiled His glory. Years later he did the same when He visited Abraham (Gen. 18:1). The prophet Isaiah saw God represented in a physical form in a vision. So did the apostle John in the book of Revelation.

Note, that they were not surprised or shocked by this. They knew what the sound was and who it was. This was a common thing, God walking in the garden and conversing with them. They were used to God fellowshiping with them. In the beginning, before sin entered the world, mankind had close, loving fellowship with God. This was part of God's purpose in creating us.

God created us for fellowship with himself. That is not his only purpose. But it is one purpose. He created us for fellowship with himself.

In those early days everyone knew God. Everyone had a relationship with God. Even after the garden was closed to them, they knew God. They knew the importance of having a relationship with God.

As sin increased in the world, God quit relating to mankind visibly. Sin created a distance between God and man, a separation.

But the people knew what they had lost and wanted it back. They sought a relationship with God. We know this because of what it says at the end of Genesis 4.

Genesis 4:26 (NIV) At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

They wanted a relationship with God. Even as they sinned against God and each other, they knew they needed God. So, they began to pray. They began to call on the name of the Lord. They started praying.

We were created for a relationship with God. God points us to this all through the Bible.

Deuteronomy 4:7 (NIV) What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD (Yahweh) our God is near us whenever we pray to him?

This nearness of God is relationship.

Micah 6:6-7 (NIV) With what shall I come before the LORD (Yahweh) and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

The context of this passage, of the life of Micah the prophet, is that God was punishing the nation of Israel for sins. He was calling them to repentance. Some people were asking if maybe God would be happy with more temple sacrifices. They even postulate that God might accept child sacrifices, even though those were expressly forbidden. What does God want most from us? God answered these questions through Micah.

Micah 6:8 (NIV) He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

That last part speaks to relationship with God. Many focus on the word humbly. Being humble before God is important. But this word here is a modifier. When you have trouble understanding something in the Bible, take out the modifiers and see the base meaning of what is written. That basic meaning here is that God wants you to walk with him. The word walk is used figuratively here for live. God wants you to live with him. We are to live for God, but that is all some people do. God wants us to live with him. God wants relationship. God wants fellowship.

This verse speaks to the relationship God wants with us. This is what God has treasured ever since the beginning of creation. Near the beginning, in Genesis 5, we are given a list of descendants from Adam to Noah. One stands out. Enoch stands out because it is recorded that he walked with God.

Many people believe in a god, a creator. Few seek to walk with God. Few live in relationship with God. Yet this is what God wants most from us, to believe in him and trust in his goodness so that we live with him. This is affirmed also in the New Testament.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

James writes of this seeking of God.

James 4:8 (NIV) Come near to God and he will come near to you.

That is a promise. You can live in relationship with God.

Christian, now more than ever, you need to be living a close relationship to God. I am talking about living humbly with your God, enjoying him, trusting him, confiding in him, leaning on him for the strength and peace joy you need each day of this pandemic.

Make a daily appointment with God and keep it. Reach out to him in prayer. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. And even in the midst of these troubled days you will experience the joy of his salvation.