



The Message and the Messenger

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:11-20

Bible Teacher Ben Stuart

1. Ben talked about our (humanity's) collective sense that we are not where we are meant to be and how we all feel that need to transform in order to meet our full potential. That was placed in us by God so that we would desire to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Often though, we replace that we other desires for transformation.
 - a. How do you see this to be true in your life?
 - b. Have you ever thought "if only I could fix _____, or achieve, _____ I would be better?" If only I were more _____.
 - c. What is it for you?
 - d. According to 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, what is our full potential/purpose?
 - e. What is it that causes us to transform into our full potential?
 - f. And what does it look like when we reach our full potential?

2. Ben mentioned in his sermon that the "remedy for anxiety is intimacy with God." Paul calls this, "being reconciled to God."
 - a. What does it look like to have intimacy with God? (See Study Deeper)
 - b. What does it look like for you to "draw near to God?"
 - c. How does intimacy with God calm our anxieties?
 - d. What anxieties are you currently carrying and how can you surrender those anxieties to God?

3. We are rescued to go and be rescuers. We, like Abraham, are blessed to be a blessing. See Genesis 22:17-18.
 - a. How have you been blessed by God? In addition to the greatest blessing of all, salvation, what gifts and resources has God given you?
 - b. How can you use those to be a blessing to someone else? Who do you know who could benefit from those gifts?

4. Read Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:33, and Luke 9:23-24. Francis Chan says in his book Crazy Love, "God doesn't call us to be comfortable. He calls us to trust Him so completely that we are unafraid to put ourselves in situations where we will be in trouble if He doesn't come through."

- a. How important is comfort to you? Do you find yourself making decisions based on what is safe and what is comfortable?
- b. If God doesn't call us to a life of safety and comfort, what does he call us to instead?
- c. When is a time you felt you were truly walking by faith?
- d. Could you, like Ben, see that He was preparing you for it all along? How did God prepare you for that time?
- e. How did He show Himself faithful?
- f. Where do you sense God calling you out of your comfort zone to a place where you are forced to trust Him and for the sake of pointing others to Him?

Challenge: We have been reconciled to God through Christ and are now His ambassadors. Ben says that when we realize that our purpose is to be ambassadors, our faith becomes less about safety/security and more about strategy. How is God preparing you to join in saving others? How is God moving you out of what's comfortable in order to spread the Gospel?

Prayer: Father God, we confess that we crave comfort. That we are often afraid to put ourselves in uncertain situations where we don't know the outcome or how someone will react. God, we desire to follow you no matter the cost. We desire to unashamedly declare your goodness and the good news of your son Jesus with the people in our lives. God, give us the opportunity to be your messenger. Draw us close to you so that we can love people from an overflow of our intimate relationship with you. God, thank you that you give us the opportunity to enter into the work you are doing, drawing people into relationship with you, building the kingdom of God here on earth. Thank you for the relentless, persistent love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross. Sparing no cost for our rescue. Let us now be the rescuers to a lost and dying world. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

STUDY DEEPER

How to Have Intimacy with God

Intimacy with God is available to you. It is as accessible to you as God's promises. And God's invitation to you to enjoy intimate fellowship with him is that thing that is putting your faith to the test more than anything else (James 1:2-4).

The Heart of Intimacy

Intimacy is what we call the experience of really knowing and being known by another person. We frequently use spatial language when describing this experience. An intimate friend is someone we feel very close to; they know us at a deep level. If something happens that damages

the intimacy with our friend, they feel distant from us. Or a person who doesn't know us intimately knows us at a superficial level.

But of course intimacy is not spatial but relational. We all know what it's like to be sitting right next to a person with whom we feel distant and we can feel close to a person who is four thousand miles away.

“Biblical knowledge is far better than gold when it fuels our trust in God. Otherwise, it only fuels our pride.”

What makes us feel intimate with another person? While there are many ingredients to intimacy and each intimate relationship we have has a different recipe, common to all of them is trust. We cannot be intimate with a person we don't trust.

Trust is at the heart of intimacy. The more we trust someone, the closer we let them get to us. The degree to which trust is compromised in a relationship is the degree to which intimacy evaporates.

The Heart of Intimacy with God

This is as true in our relationship with God as it is in our relationships with other human beings. Our experience of God's nearness or distance is not a description of his actual proximity to us, but of our experience of intimacy with him. Scripture shows us that God is intimate with those who trust him. The more we trust God, the more intimately we come to know him. A felt distance from God is often due to a disruption in trust, such as a sin or disappointment.

This reality is vitally important to understand. As Christians, we want to experience intimacy with God. With the psalmist we say, “for me it is good to be near God” (Psalm 73:28). And we want to heed James's exhortation and realize its promise: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8). But we can seek that nearness in ways that don't produce it.

Intimacy Is More Than Knowledge

One common mistake is thinking that nearness to God can be achieved through knowledge accumulation. Now, of course, to intimately know God, we must know crucial things about God. Jesus said, “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32) and he pointed out that many worship what they do not know (John 4:22).

But never in the history of the Christian church has so much theological knowledge been available to so many people as it is today. The American church enjoys perhaps the greatest

amount of this abundance. We are awash in Bible translations, good books, insightful articles, recorded sermons, interviews, movies, documentaries, music, and more. And much of it very good. It is right for us to be very thankful.

But America is not abounding in Enochs (or finding them frequently disappearing), saints who walk with God in a profoundly intimate way (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). Why? Because knowledge is not synonymous with trust. That's why Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, some who possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture,

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5:39–40)

Biblical knowledge is far better than gold when it fuels our trust in God, because it fuels our intimacy with God (Psalm 19:10). But when biblical knowledge replaces our trust in God, it only fuels our pride (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Why Aesthetic Experiences Fail

Another common mistake is trying to achieve intimacy with God through subjective aesthetic experiences. We might call it a “Field of Dreams” approach: If we build the right environment, God will “come.”

Some pursue this in high liturgical environments designed to inspire an experience of transcendence and mystery. Others pursue it in contemporary worship events designed to inspire an experience of immanence. Others chase revivals, thinking that proximity to God's power will result in proximity to God. If we truly trust God, such environments can encourage our intimacy with God. But none of them inherently possesses the power to conjure God's nearness to us.

“God is impressed with our faith, not our feats.”

Think of it like this: A candlelit dinner with romantic music may encourage a sweet moment of relational intimacy between a husband and wife, but only to the degree that the environment encourages and deepens their mutual trust and love. If there's relational distance between them due to a lack of trust, the aesthetics themselves have no power to bridge the distance. Only restoring the trust will do that.

How We Draw Near to God

The secret to drawing near to God and having him draw near to us is revealed clearly in the Bible: we draw near to God through faith in Christ who alone gives us access to him (Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:25; Philippians 3:9), and we put our trust in all of “his precious and very great promises” which find their Yes to us in Christ (2 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

God is impressed with our faith, not our feats. Where faith is lacking, he is not pleased with the quantity of our knowledge or the quality of our aesthetic events. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6) When God sees someone whose heart fully trusts his promises and lives by them, God comes to strongly support that saint (2 Chronicles 16:9) and manifests himself to him:

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21)

God’s Invitation to Intimacy

“What you must trust God most for right now is where he means for you to draw closer to him.”

God wants intimacy with you. Christ has done all the hard work in the cross to make it possible. All he requires is that you believe in him (John 14:1). He wants you to trust him with all your heart (Proverbs 3:5).

Which means his invitation to you to enjoy intimacy with him is the providences in your life that are testing your faith more than anything else. What you must trust God most for right now is where he means for you to draw closer to him.

It is likely an invitation that your flesh wants to decline. But as you read your Bible, do not the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) all agree with James and Peter that the greatest testing of faith is the path to the greatest joy (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:8–9)? And do they not agree with Paul that it is not worth comparing to the joy of knowing Christ and the coming glory (Philippians 3:8; Romans 8:18)?

Intimacy with God often occurs in the places where we must trust him most. Heaven on earth is the inexpressible joy and the peace that surpasses understanding that comes from trusting God wholly (Philippians 4:6–7). For, as the old hymn writer said, “they who trust him wholly find him wholly true.”