

Fellowship with God

Loving God with all your Heart Part 5

Luke 10:38-42 7-10-11

Summary: Experiencing God (fellowship with God) means consciously enjoying an expression of one of His attributes toward you. There are many ways to do that. When it comes to work, do it by eliminating those things God did not call you to do, appreciating the importance of God-given tasks, enjoying the fact that you are joining God at His side, and enjoying being a tool in His hand. If your work is burdensome the way to find rest is to come to Christ in fellowship.

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Luke 10:38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. **39** She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **40** But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" **41** "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, **42** but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Introduction

Jesus is on the road again. His whole ministry was one road trip after another, and road trips for Jesus went kind of slow because He did them on foot. Hour after hour, walking the hot, dusty, dangerous roads until He finally arrives at a village. Will there be someone in that village who will open their home to Him and all His disciples and give them some food and a place to sleep? Sometimes there was, other times there was not. But this time there was.

Luke 10:38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

Now, what impact would that verse have on the original readers after reading the Good Samaritan story? First Century Christians who are just learning what Christianity is all about – when they read this verse I think they would say, “Bingo – Nice job, Martha. You hit the nail right on the head for what Christianity is all about. Hospitality is right at the core of the Christian life.” The lesson of the Good Samaritan is crystal-clear – religion that leaves a needy person in the ditch is worthless. True religion rolls up its sleeves and serves and gives. And that is exactly what Martha is doing. In verse 40 it says she was making **preparations**. The Greek work is *diakonia*. She was doing what deacons do (serving).

And so right on the heels of a story on the importance of hospitality and serving and giving we immediately get this verse about Jesus traveling, He is in need of some food and lodging, and this dear woman steps up and opens her home to Him. So when you read through Luke you get to Martha in verse 38 of chapter 10 and you think, “Ah ha – now here is an example of someone getting it right.”

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

Ooh – now that would raise some eyebrows in that culture. We do not think anything of it in our culture, but in that culture women were not allowed to do this. Sitting at the feet of a rabbi was the posture of a disciple. If you wanted to become a disciple of a famous rabbi you had to be accepted by him as a student, and that was a prestigious position. And it was never, never open to a woman. Women were not permitted to become disciples of a rabbi or be taught the Word of God. That was only for men. Women were to stick to domestic tasks, like Martha was doing. So the original readers would have seen verse 38 and thought, “Martha – perfect example of what a woman should be doing in that situation. But Mary – she has gone off the rails.” And so there is every expectation that Mary would be the one who is rebuked and Martha praised. But watch what happens.

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better

That is a double shock. First the cultural shock of Jesus saying it is OK for women to be right there alongside men as full blown disciples. And on top of that the contextual curve ball that Jesus throws right after the parable of the Good Samaritan about the importance of taking action and serving and giving – now this story of one woman who is working her fingers to the bone serving and another who is just sitting there, and Jesus rebukes the one who is busy and praises the other one.

So what was it that Mary did right and that Martha did wrong? Was Martha wrong to prepare the meal? Raise your hand if you have ever spent an hour preparing a meal. Are all these people a bunch of Martha's who should have spent those hours in prayer instead? Should we all just become monks and go off to a monastery somewhere and pray all day every day? If we take it that way I don't know what we are going to do with the Good Samaritan story – or the whole rest of the New Testament for that matter. We know service and ministry are important. It is not wrong to serve.

So what was it that Mary got right and Martha got wrong? Whatever it was Mary did right it was not only right, but it was the most important thing in the whole world. And beyond that – it is the only thing in the whole wide world that matters at all.

42 only one thing is needed.

This thing that Mary did is the only thing in life that matters. Remember our math quiz from last time? If only one thing matters how many other things matter? Zero. Is it important for you to go out

and earn a living for your family? Does it matter if you show up at work tomorrow? No – not unless you do it in a way that accomplishes what Mary was doing. Does it matter if you love your spouse or take care of your kids? Not at all, unless you are doing what Mary was doing.

The problem is, how do you do what Mary was doing when Jesus is not physically present? What does it mean to draw near to someone who is both invisible and omnipresent? How do you do it? And when you have done it – how do you know for sure if it has happened or not? Is it just a positional thing that you just believe has happened apart from experience? Or is it something you actually experience and while it is happening you can tell it is happening?

Review

The role of experience

That is where we left off last time – talking about experience. Just to refresh your memory a little bit – we talked about the two errors that people tend to fall into when it comes to the role of experience in the Christian life. Some people fall into the error of using their experiences to determine what is true and what is and is not from God. “This thing happened, it seemed so real and so good – so it must be from God.” That is a huge mistake. If you follow that method then you will always be fooled every time Satan comes as an angel of light.

Other people see that mistake and go off in the other direction of downplaying the importance of experience. They say the only thing that matters is truth, and religious experiences are not important and should not be sought after. That is not only a mistake, but it is absurd. The greatest command is to love God. All expressions of love are experiences, are they not? If you have love in your heart for someone, and you express that love, if there is no experience – and it is only done in theory – that is not an expression of love.

Experiencing God = Enjoying His Attributes

i. Must be an experience of God’s attributes

So what is the proper role of experience in the Christian life? And what does it even mean to experience God? If you look up the word “experience” in the dictionary here is the definition you get: an experience is something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through. So what does it mean to experience God? It means to undergo a personal encounter with Him. But how do you encounter someone you cannot see or touch? When you encounter another human being you encounter a body. When you encounter God, what is it that you encounter? Very simple – His attributes. The ONLY things we know about God are the things He has revealed, and we call those His attributes. So experiencing God means undergoing God’s expression of one or more of His attributes toward you in a given moment. If God expresses kindness toward you, you have just *experienced* God. If He grants you some of His wisdom, you just experienced God. If you receive mercy from Him – that is a religious experience.

Does not have to be unusual or miraculous

People get so confused about this because they have been trained to think that a religious experience or an experience of God must be something strange or unusual or mystical or out of the ordinary or miraculous. That is not the case at all. Any time God expresses any attribute toward you, it is proper to say you have experienced God at that moment. If God is keeping the laws of physics the same today as they were yesterday so you can count on them – you are experiencing God’s faithfulness. If Satan is not succeeding in his efforts to destroy you at this moment, you are experiencing God’s refuge-like protection. If you can think clearly and can understand and appreciate

these principles I am explaining – you are experiencing God’s wisdom and enlightenment. That is what it means to experience God.

And if that is a let-down to you – if you think, “Oh brother, that’s all it means to experience God” and you are disappointed – then there is a strong possibility that the real craving of your heart is not God at all, but rather miracles. There are many, many people who care more about miracles than about God Himself. If God expresses one hundred of His attributes toward them in a day, and He performs one thousand mighty acts of providence, but does no miracles – they are disappointed. They feel like God hasn’t done much that day.

That is sad, because if the only time we can experience the presence of God is when something unusual happens, then by definition we will usually not experience God. Spectacular experiences of God are wonderful, but so are the regular, common, everyday experiences of God. And if all we care about are the spectacular ones we are like the woman who only loves her husband when they are on a cruise ship, but cannot enjoy his presence at home. A woman like that does not actually love her husband; she just loves cruises. And a Christian who is only satisfied with miracles and cannot enjoy God’s presence when He reveals Himself in non-miraculous ways does not really love God; he just loves spectacle and drama and miracles.

ii. Must be Personal (awareness)

Now, having said all that let me add this – it is not enough to experience God. We need much more than an experience of God. What we need is a *personal* experience of God, which means we have to be aware of what is going on. If God expresses one of His attributes toward you but you are oblivious to it, then it is an experience, but it is not a *personal* experience. For example, does a rock experience God’s faithfulness? God is faithful to cause the sun to rise every morning – does a rock experience that? Well, sort of. The rock gets shined on every morning. But that is not a *personal* experience because the rock has no awareness of what is going on. If I sneak out into the parking lot and leave an anonymous gift on the seat of your car, will that do anything to cause any love in your heart toward me? No. It has no effect on our friendship unless you know it was from me. If God showers you with expressions of His goodness and love but you are not aware of what is going on, it is not a personal experience of God and it will do nothing to increase your love for Him.

iii. Must be Satisfying

So it has to be an experience of His attributes and it has to be personal, so you are consciously aware of what is happening. But even when both of those are in place – that is still not enough. People in hell are having a personal experience of God’s wrath. What we really need is an experience of God’s presence that is both personal and satisfying (or delightful). If I leave a gift for you in your car and you know it is from me, but you think I left it there for some sinister motive, or out of duty, and it does not seem to you like a gesture of real love – it is not going to do anything for our friendship. To increase your love for a person you have to have personal experiences with them that are delightful and satisfying.

Blindness

“If all God’s gifts are good, is it even possible to have a personal experience of one of them that is not delightful or satisfying?”

Yes it is, because of spiritual blindness. It is possible for our vision to become so dull that we are incapable of appreciating what is so wonderful and marvelous about God’s good gifts. Isn’t it true that sometimes you think about the cross and it has no real impact on your heart, and other times it brings tears to your eyes? Why is it that you can read a Psalm about God as a refuge one day and it has no impact on you at all, and at another time in your life you read that same psalm and you are so thrilled and amazed it fills you with joy and you cannot stop talking about it? It is not because God is more

beautiful one day than the other day – it is because one day you are blind to that aspect of His beauty and the other day your eyes are opened to see it clearly. Every single one of God’s countless attributes would set us singing and shouting for joy if our eyes were opened wide enough to see the beauty of them. There is not a single attribute of God that wouldn’t thrill and satisfy your soul if you saw it clearly enough.

So, how do you do what Mary did when Jesus is not physically on earth? Three parts:

- God expresses a particular attribute toward you
- You consciously recognize it as a gesture of God’s goodness and love for you
- Your eyes are opened to appreciate what is wonderful about it so that you truly enjoy it

When all three of those components are there you have experienced God in a way that will increase your love for Him. That is what experiencing God means. That is what Mary was doing and Martha was not doing.

Fellowship

But the thing is, saying all that is kind of a mouthful. If every time I want to refer to that I have to say, “God expresses one of His attributes toward you, and you undergo a personal experience of it by realizing what it is, appreciating what is so wonderful and beautiful about it, and enjoying it as an expression of God’s love, so that it is a personal experience that increases your desire for and delight in God” – that is just too much verbiage to repeat over and over. So is there some shorthand we can use to describe all that? Maybe one single word that Scripture uses to encapsulate all that? Yes – it is the word *fellowship*. That is fellowship with God. That is the biblical term.

So let me ask you this – is prayer an act of fellowship with God? It depends. If all you do is say things to God, then no. But if you enjoy being listened to by Him, then yes. One of God’s attributes is that He cares about what is on your heart, and He listens attentively and is moved by what is important to you. So if you are talking to Him and He is listening intently, and you are able to appreciate what is so amazing and wonderful about being listened to that way, and you enjoy it as a specific expression of His love for you in particular at that moment, then your prayer is an act of fellowship with Him.

When you come here on Sunday morning and we sing together, is that an act of fellowship with God? Not automatically. If you just enjoy the music, enjoy singing – that in itself is nothing. An atheist could do that. But to the degree that your singing is an expression of your enjoyment of a personal experience of one or more of His attributes, then it is fellowship with God. That is why we pick songs that focus so much on His attributes, and read Scriptures that focus on His attributes, and before the service we show those slides that are meditations on His attributes.

So prayer and singing are not automatically fellowship with God, but they can be. But what else? What other ways can a person follow Mary’s example and experience fellowship with God? You can have fellowship with God in prayer by enjoying being listened to by Him. You can have fellowship with God during the sermon by enjoying the process of being enlightened by Him, as you submissively learn at His feet. You can have fellowship with God...

- in times of danger by enjoying being sheltered and protected by Him, as you run into His refuge,
- or by enjoying being strengthened by Him as you feel His power through your trials when He takes you by the hand,
- or by enjoying being healed and restored by Him as you lie on His operating table
- or by enjoying being searched by Him and thoroughly known by Him, as you stand before His omniscient, purifying gaze
- or even by being chastised by Him as you walk with Him to the woodshed, knowing He is only doing you good
- or by enjoying being conformed to Christ’s image by Him as you are shaped on His potter’s wheel,

- or by suffering with the Lord Jesus, as you join Him at the cross.
That is a sampling of some of the various ways you can have fellowship with God.

Making your Work Fellowship with God

And in the weeks to come we will go into some more detail on those forms of fellowship as well as others. But for the rest of our time this morning I would like to focus on the form of fellowship with God that Martha was missing. What Martha did not understand was how to have fellowship with Christ while *working*. How do you draw near to God and enjoy a delightful, satisfying personal experience of His presence while preparing a meal? Pick the least enjoyable, most aggravating and stressful aspect of your work. How could you make *that* a delightful, satisfying experience of the presence of God? Or is that even possible?

Can you imagine if it were? Can you imagine what your life would be like if that part of your work brought you joy and satisfaction and delight instead of irritation and frustration? If Martha were here she would raise her hand and say, “No, I can’t imagine that.” At least not in Luke 10.

What Martha Did Wrong

See if this sounds like you.

40 Martha was distracted by all the preparations...

And Jesus says...

41 "Martha, Martha you are worried and upset

She was distracted, worried, upset, troubled, bothered, flustered, anxious. On top of that she was upset with Mary for not helping and with Jesus for not caring that Mary’s not helping.

40 ...She came to [Jesus] and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

She was stressed out. Dinner is in fifteen minutes, and she still has forty minutes worth of things to do. She running around, trying to get the table ready, picking up the house – “Are there enough chairs ... all these Disciples...? This isn’t going to be enough water – someone needs to run down to the well and get some more. What’s that smell? Oh no, - the rolls are burning!” Martha is tearing her hair out trying to get things together, there are twenty things left to do and Mary is just sitting there! You know how that feels. You are running around frantically trying to get all the work done and everyone else is just sitting around. And you are thinking, “Am I the only one who can see all these dishes? Am I the only person in this family who has eyes and can see that the trash is flowing over onto the floor and needs to be taken out? No one else around here can see this cat throw-up in the middle of the carpet?” When your work becomes burdensome you not only get frustrated with your work load, but you get frustrated with everyone around you for not helping.

When work becomes burdensome there are two possibilities:

And when that happens there are two possibilities:

1. *God has not assigned this task to you*

It could be that the load is too heavy because it is not a load Christ has given you. That is one possibility with Martha. It could be that she was turning the meal into more of a production than it needed to be. Sometimes we pile work on our plate that God has not put there, and then we get mad at

everyone around us for not helping. How many times has a wife become short with her husband and irritable with the kids because she is scrambling around trying to make the house immaculate before some guest arrives, and the reality is God never required her to have an immaculate house for that guest? Jesus' yoke is easy and light and not burdensome – but the yokes that we place on ourselves – they tend to be unbearably heavy. Someone in your life has expectations, and you feel like you have to have that person's approval, or you feel like you have to have everyone's approval, so you just do everything everybody expects of you, or you just pile expectations on yourself so you can live up to your prideful ideals for yourself, and before long you are completely snowed under and unable to do the things God has called you to do because you are so busy with all the things you assigned to yourself. The tasks you have put on your own plate take up all the hours in the day, and then you look at the things God is calling you to do and it is overwhelming. So you resent God for requiring you to do something you don't have time for – when in reality you would have plenty of time if you did only what God required and nothing else.

Oppressive idols

We turn the praise of men, or the opinions of men into an idol. And serving an idol is hard because unlike God, our idols do not supply us with any of the power we need to serve them.

Isaiah 46:1 The idols that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary.

Idols make lots of demands but supply no power, so you have to lug them around and supply all the power yourself.

2. You are serving in the wrong way (not coming to Christ)

So when we get stressed out in serving the Lord one possibility is we are serving in ways He never called us to serve. But there is also another possibility. It could be that it is something God called you to do, but it is overwhelming to you because you are not using that task as a means of fellowship with God. Martha's work is burdensome to her because fellowship with Christ is the last thing on her mind. She is like the priests in Malachi 1, who were serving God but the whole time they were saying, "What a burden."

Malachi 1:6 ...where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. ... 10 "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you

Why? What were they doing wrong?

13 And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously

The ministry that God had called them to do is portrayed as a banquet but they sit down at the banquet and sniff at it and turn up their noses and say, "OK, we'll eat from this table, but what a burden this is."

Ministry is a gift/feast!

Mark this – it is very important. Serving God is not a gift from you to God; it is a gift from God to you. He is the spring of living water – you honor Him by drinking, not by dumping in your little bucket of water to contribute to the spring. Hospitality with other needy people means giving and serving. But hospitality for Christ – welcoming Christ means receiving from Him. When you change dirty diapers, or do your homework at school, or clean your garage or deal with some really needy

person at church; you are not doing God a favor; God is doing you a favor. It is like when you were five years old and your dad let you sit on his lap and hold the steering wheel because you wanted to “drive.” Were you helping your dad out? No – it was actually extra work for him. He was not doing it to get a break from steering; he only did it as a gift to you, so you could do a grown-up thing and participate in driving the car. So what if you start complaining about it and grumbling about how burdensome it is to have to hold that steering wheel? Time to climb back in the back seat.

How about a 2-year-old who wants to give mom a birthday present? Mom says, “OK,” and then has to drive the kid to Wal Mart, help him pick something out, pay for it, drive back home, help the kid wrap it, then he can present his gift to mom. Why would mom be willing to do all that work? One reason – as a gift to the child – to allow that child to have the joy of expressing his love to his mom. But if they get half-way through the process and he starts moaning about how burdensome the whole thing is – she might as well turn around and just go back home. Why? Because what does mom get out of this whole thing? Does she get anything out of it? Sure – she gets the joy of having her child express his love to her. But if he is griping and complaining about it the whole time, then the one thing mom could get out of it is destroyed and she gets nothing out of it, and he gets nothing out of it, so there is no point.

“Does that mean when my work gets burdensome I should just quit?” No, we do not have the option of quitting a task God gave us.

i. Appreciate the Importance of your Work

And here is why – the service tasks that God gives us are not like the meaningless little tasks we give our children. When God places a man at the helm of a family and calls him to lead that family, that is not like you letting your 5-year-old pretend to drive. If you let your child hold the steering wheel, and he gets distracted or loses interest and lets go of the wheel – you will be right there to grab it so nothing bad will happen. So in reality, the kid is not actually doing anything so it makes no difference if he does a good job or poor job. That kind of work is meaningless. But God does not give us meaningless work. He gives us what Blaise Pascal called “the dignity of causality.” He grants us the dignity of actually causing outcomes. God calls me to lead my family, and that job has real meaning. If I let go of the wheel, God will actually allow the whole family to run into the ditch. If there is no real possibility of crashing then you are not really driving. It is just the Disneyland ride where you can turn the steering wheel however you want but the ride still stays on the track. That is not real driving. God has granted us the dignity of having real tasks – meaningful, eternally important tasks that will have a good or bad outcome based on our faithfulness. That is a high and holy honor! It is a high and holy privilege to untie the laces on the sandals of the feet of the King of kings. It is a high and holy privilege to do anything that the Almighty commissions you to do. The importance of a task is not measured by how much money people pay for it, or how prestigious it is in human eyes, or how many people it affects. The only determining factor on the importance of a task is God’s calling. If God gave you a task – that is the utmost in importance. If He did not; it is a waste of time. If you become the President of the United States and you find a cure for cancer and you achieve world peace but God did not call you to do any of that, then it is a pathetic, meaningless waste of time. But if the great King of kings and Lord of lords commissions you to scrape gum off the bottom of someone’s shoe – that is a high and holy privilege. Any time God grants you the dignity of a God-given task, that is an awesome privilege. And if that task is hard – it is that much greater a privilege (to be able to do something hard for His sake). Next time you are tempted to grumble about doing the laundry, don’t say, “I have to serve my family” – say, “I get to serve my God in this way! I get to enjoy the grand privilege of serving the King of kings by serving this family that He died for.” I think one of the most ridiculous comments is when a Christian housewife says, “I don’t have a job.” A woman who is married has been assigned an awesome task – the task of being a wife to her husband in a way that puts on display the kind of love with which the Church honors the great Bridegroom in heaven. If she went from that to being the CEO of IBM or Microsoft that would be a HUGE step down. God forgive us for how lightly

we take the assignments He graciously grants to us.

ii. Enjoy Working at God's Side

So step 1 in making your work fellowship with God is realizing and appreciating and enjoying the staggering importance of your God-given task. Secondly, give some thought to the fact that when you are doing something God called you to do you are walking side-by-side with God. You are actually joining Him in His work. You are working on the same project He is working on. You are in step with Him, working at His side. Enjoy that!

iii. Enjoy Being Used by Him

Third – enjoy being used as a tool in His hand. In the movie Toy Story, all the toys have one great desire – they all want to be played with by the kid who owned them. They loved being played with by him. If you can transfer that image a little bit to a toolbox, and picture a bunch of animated tools in the box talking about how much they long to be used by the craftsman. They all want the sensation of being held in his hand and being used to create some beautiful thing. That should be the story of the Church. We all look to the great Craftsman and long to experience the sensation of being a tool in His great hand. Then you realize that every single time you ever do something God has called you to do – like wake up in the middle of the night to care for a child, or do that one task at your job that is so hard for you to do – when you do that you are being picked up out of the toolbox and used by the grand Architect of human history to play a role – you are getting the nod from the coach to go into the game here in crunch time in the last days; it does not take much thought to realize what an awesome thing that really is. So when our work becomes burdensome it is a sign that we are either doing something God never called us to do, or He did call us to do it and we are doing it with our back to Him, forgoing the fellowship with Him that is available to us at that moment.

Conclusion: Come to Jesus

So what should you do if your work is stressing you out? What do you do when you find yourself anxious and agitated and irritated and aggravated and worked up and stressed out and snowed under with your daily responsibilities and your work is a burden? What did Jesus say to do when you are weary and burdened? He said, “Come to me.”

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

If your work is weighing you down then your work is not a coming to Christ. And the solution is not to quit your job. The solution is not to reduce the stress of your job. The solution is not to imagine yourself in a beautiful meadow with violins playing somewhere. The solution is to make your work a drawing near to Christ. Martha's mistake was she was trying to give to God instead of receive from Him. She forgot serving Him was a banquet and so it turned into a burden. And when that happens the result is a self-oriented focus. Just listen to her.

40 ..., "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Trying to give to God always results in self-pity. But make all your work and all your service a receiving from God, a feasting at His banquet table, an enjoyment of being used as a tool in His hand, a joining in partnership with Him in His great work, a personal enjoyment of His attributes; if you do that then your work will be a drawing near to Christ. You will be coming to Him and Jesus said if you

come to Him then you WILL find rest for your soul.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.