

Just Because I Love You!

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man...And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring” (Acts 17:24-28, ESV).

The longer I serve Him, the more I realize that the Christian life and journey is not so much about rules, regulations, and requirements as it is about relationship; my loving connection with my loving, merciful, compassionate holy, righteous, God. Such a bond is not based merely out of fear for judgment and punishment. It is about respect, reverence, and relationship.

What we do, don't do; say, don't say, is more about pleasing Him than it is about a “must.” It is cheap to minimize a relationship to a list of obligations. Must everything come down to a heaven or hell issue? Can we maturely move from the “got to” to “want to” stages in our lifestyle and walk in holiness?

I would be the first to agree, relationships take work. Daily effort! It doesn't come easily but it is worth the pursuit. Francis Chan in his book, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God*, writes, “If life is a river, then pursuing Christ requires swimming upstream. When we stop swimming, or actively following Him, we automatically begin to be swept downstream.” We are “slowly floating away from Christ.”

Unfortunately, for many, “little in their lives propels them toward Christ.”

Our relationship with the Lord Jesus is biblically compared to a marriage.

“Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church — a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness” (Ephesians 5:25-27, MSG).

“For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ. But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent” (2 Corinthians 11:2-3, NLT).

Ever sit back and analyze how one fosters a relationship? It is done very carefully and many times deliberately. You work at it! Not everything in human marriage is a divorce issue. It is more about pleasing our partner. There are lots of things one does just to please their spouse. Those involved in healthy relationships stay away from things that would be annoying and irritating to one's partner.

In marriage, it is common, and certainly important that the loving couple spend time with each other, build trust, prove faithfulness, and seek to please each other. Self-centeredness; each focusing on themselves, never builds a strong relationship. It takes commitment, putting one's heart into it, and spending time together to really get to know someone.

To maintain the correct relationship with one's spouse, he/she must keep himself/herself only for him/her. To maintain the correct

relationship with God one must spiritually keep himself/herself only for Him. Holiness is a sign that one is walking and living closer to Him. It isn't coincidental. It is intentional.

You cannot maintain a relationship with God and the devil at the same time. You cannot serve two masters. "No worker can serve two bosses: He'll either hate the first and love the second or adore the first and despise the second" (Luke 16:13, MSG).

During the process of writing this lesson I checked out an online discussion from a couple of friends. The dialogue was fascinating. One wrote, "Everything I do should be out of love for Him not because someone tells me to do it. It must be from the heart."

"I obey Him willingly because I love Him. I follow His word, His ways, and His commands."

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, ESV).

"Obedience stems out of my love."

No wonder Francis Chan writes, "We never grow closer to God when we just live life; it takes deliberate pursuit and attentiveness."

"If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you.... he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth..." (John 14:15-18, MSG).

I love that! See how it is about relationships. Jesus did not leave us without a Friend. He was with us. Now, He is in us; our special friend, the Spirit of Truth.

"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be

changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you" (Romans 12:2, MSG).

A dear friend, Barbara Westberg, related the following story gleaned from her volunteer work at a nearby nursing home. She was visiting a new resident. Mrs. Little told her that her husband worked in the oil field. They did not have any children but she did not get involved in the social activities of the town. She wanted to be free to go with him when he wanted her to. She said he would come in at any time and say, "Go with me." She would stop everything just for the opportunity of a few minutes with him. She said, "He was my life." As she talked, Barbara got a fresh glimpse of what it meant to "live for Jesus." Mrs. Little lived for her husband. Everything she did was to please him. Because she wanted to be available when he called, she didn't do a lot of things she could have done. She dressed to please him. She cooked meals to please him. She dropped everything to be with him. She "lived for him." That is a lot like holiness.

Holiness and Our Relationship with God

Holiness refers to "apartness" or "otherness" and also relates to God's pure and righteous actions. God does what is right. He never does what is wrong. That would be against His nature. We mirror God's character and activity. Let me repeat a previous point. Holiness is not only about rules, requirements, restraints, and regulations. It is about living for God and pleasing Him. We are apart from the world, separated to God, and reserved for Him.

Righteousness is about having a right relationship and right living. We can only be righteous when we are in a right relationship

with God. It encourages us to practice right living, and living holy lives.

Holiness is asking, "Jesus, what would you have me to do?" The acid test of whether something questionable should be done or not is, "Would it be more pleasing to the Lord for me to do this or not do it?"

Holiness is about taking care of the temple of the Holy Spirit. Keep it clean! It is about living "That he may please him who hath chosen him" (2 Timothy 2:4).

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Holiness is about a right relationship with God and others. If one does not have a right relationship with others, his relationship with God is severely hampered and hindered. See 1 John 4:16-21.

Mark Uzupan in "The Power of Holiness" contends that as we separate from the world, and unto God, it causes relationship and with that relationship comes power. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12).

He said, "Holiness means conformity to the character and will of God. It means thinking as God thinks, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, and acting as Jesus would act."

"What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of

body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1, ESV).

A love story unfolds in a garden. A suitor did not want to be alone. He was perfect love, but needed someone to love. Adam was created. Eve followed. Adam and Eve had a great relationship with God. He came down in the cool of the day. He walked and talked with them. Unfortunately, they disobeyed. They willfully took the fruit of sin. Man fell. Their sin was a failure to take God at His word. They failed to trust Him. Their relationship with God was broken. The right to fellowship and right standing were lost.

Eventually, God robed Himself in flesh, stepped into earth, and bought back His prized possession (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). We are likened to His bride.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:13-14, NKJV).

God never gives up on us. Even when we are unfaithful, He remains forever faithful. "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul" (Psalm 143:8, NIV).

Sin Breaks Our Relationship with God

God takes us just as we are, but He refuses to leave us there. We mature in our relationship and our lives manifest fruits of maturity.

Eve knew good. That was not the problem. She wanted to know evil.

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,

she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6).

Lust of the eyes	Craving for sensual pleasure, forbidden longing, and passionate desires.
Lust of the flesh	Greedy longings of the mind.
Pride of life	Assurance in one’s own resources or in the stability of worldly things (AMP).

Sin is pleasing “self” instead of pleasing God. It makes it all about me:

1. I think it looks good.
2. I think it will taste good.
3. I want to be smarter.

Four young men went on a worldwide journey in a search for the epic life. Their findings and feelings are chronicled in their book entitled *Four Souls*. Here is what they say about sin: “Sin is ‘missing the mark,’ but what we really need to understand is that sin causes death of relationship. That is why God hates sin so deeply—because He is so passionate about our love relationship with Him and with others.” “Sin is anything that breaks relationship—first with God, and second with others.” “...Sin brings death to relationship. The fact that our bodies will someday die is part of it, but physical death is nothing compared to relational death. Adam and Eve eventually died because they ate the apple, but far more terrible was the fact that their pure communion with God was lost. Soon after, we saw the brokenness that resulted in human relationships when Cain killed Abel.” “Sin is any thought or action that breaks relationships, either between humans or between humans and God. Stealing, murder, adultery, envy,

jealousy, malice, etc. are all sins for this very reason—because these things damage, or even completely destroy, relationships....The good news is not merely that we can go to heaven; it is that our relationships may once again be made right. Our relationship with God and with humans is restored...His sacrifice of Himself made it possible for us to reenter relationship with God.”

When we turn from sin, which is biblically called “repentance,” and are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, our relationship with God is restored. To maintain that relationship we stay away from sin. Of course, occasionally we fail. But, we go back to God, our faithful Advocate (1 John 2:1), and He is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:7, 9). To continue to build our trusting, faithful relationship, we conform to His will and likeness, through a loving relationship of holiness. Because we are His, we become more like Him, and insistently endeavor to please Him.