

Matt. 12:49-50; Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 3:16 SermonNotes, 10/07/07
Six Ways to Be Good Friends: Plan A

Introduction

The title for the first talk in this series comes from a book by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, entitled, How People Grow. In it, one of the authors tells how his decision to become a Christian resulted in an immediate sense of joy and enthusiasm. Shortly afterwards, however, he settled back into some unhelpful habits and realized that he needed God to work some internal changes. He prayed but seemed to make little progress. Somewhere along the way a friend connected him with a Christian couple that took him in and mentored him. God used this couple tremendously, but somehow this wasn't what how he'd expected God would bring about change. He writes...

One day, sometime later and after going into counseling myself, I realized my depression and my feelings of emptiness were gone. I actually felt good about life and about me. As I examined my feelings, I discovered I was both happy and disappointed. God had changed my life. My life had taken a 180-degree turn. But God had not healed me when I had sought healing. He had not supernaturally "zapped" me. God's supernatural zapping seemed like Plan A to me. As I talked about this disappointment, people told me the same thing over and over again: "But God uses people too." I hated hearing that phrase. I had wanted God to touch my depression instantaneously and heal me. Instead, he used people to help me. I came to call this God's Plan B. I thought that when God supernaturally intervened and healed, it was Plan A. And this was true spiritual healing. When God used people to heal, it was the "inferior," although effective, Plan B. I accepted that I was one of those people who got Plan B. So there I was, grateful and somewhat disappointed at my grade B healing. It was good, but felt more like sitting in the bleachers than in the box seats. Then, one day I made a discovery in Scripture that changed my way of viewing Plan B: "From who the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16). [HPG 119-120]

The striking news is that God loves us through people. He changes us, grows us, encourages us, etc, through the human beings around us. We might think it an unorthodox plan, but in reality, it fits in perfectly with how God has always operated. This morning we'll take a look at God's tendency to work through people and we'll explore what the Bible says about how we should view the people around us.

God Has Always Worked Through People [Special Place]

Starting with the first problem in history, Adam's loneliness immediately after creation, God has shown a bias for using people to take care of needs. In fact, in a backhanded kind of way, it is interesting to note that the only creatures God empowered to be able to destroy creation were people. Of course, this is what they did. What would God do? He decided to redeem the broken world (hallelujah). But how would he do it? You guessed it: people. First there was Abraham, of whom God said, "all the people on earth will be blessed through you (Gen. 12:3). Then there was Jacob, of whom he said (again), "All people on earth will be blessed through you (Gen. 28:14). Then Moses, through whom God brought salvation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt and Ten Commandments describing how to live. In fact, 26 times, the Bible says that God said or did something through Moses. And when all that (plus the others God worked through in the Old Testament) wasn't enough, God decided to fix it for good by inhabiting the world as a person. Through that person, Jesus Christ, God justified, saved, brought eternal life, performed miracles, etc. to ensure the final redemption of the world. Taking his people-working bias even further, after initiating and guaranteeing this redemptive work, Jesus in essence said, "Now you people carry it on." He then worked through incompetent disciples and an antagonistic Saul to carry on the world's greatest work. Putting total confidence in them, he said, "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:20). Paul sums up God's plan in this way, "We are therefore

Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us (2 Cor. 5:20). When God wants to get something done, the question isn't how, but whom?

The result is that we ought to elevate the importance we place on people, not just with respect to their value, but also with respect to their function in our lives. Is it more miraculous when God makes things happen apart from people or through people? Who's to say? The bottom line is that God has always worked through people.

So take a look around you. These creatures are the only ones ever made who were given the power to destroy God's creation. Of course, on the positive side, they were the only ones of whom God ever said, "made in my image." Through one of these, God's pursuit of redeeming what he'd made began. And as one of these, God inhabited our culture through Jesus Christ. We need an elevated sense of the value and function of people.

Since people play such an important role, let's define what that role is.

What is a Fellow Christ Follower?

The Bible uses a number of metaphors to help us understand what our fellow Christ followers are to us. Probably the two most famous ones are the "family" and the "body." Fellow Christ followers are to be our family. "Pointing to his disciples, [Jesus] said, "Here are my mother and brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:49)." John and Paul also use this language. Fellow Christ followers are also part of the same body with us. "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:4-5). But the metaphor I want to focus on is the metaphor of the temple.

- *1Cor. 3:16* Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?
- *1Pet. 2:4* As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—
5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- After explaining how we have confidence by the blood of Christ to enter the temple, the writer says, *Heb. 10:24* And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. *25* Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The people around you, the church, are the residence of God. If you want to get close to God, get close to these people. Someone will say, "but God is everywhere!" Yes, this is true. But God's presence is manifest to greater or lesser degrees. Heaven is the place where God's presence is most manifest, for example. Today, God is especially resident in the church. If you want to draw near to and experience God, drawn near to your brothers and sisters. They are God's plan for you.

[Analogy of the GPS]

In the coming weeks, we are going to help each other embrace Plan A. This series is about how we become someone through whom God can work to bless others. In the next weeks we're going to unleash our intentional discipleship plan and our Opiso blog. These tools are going to help you develop Christ-focused relationships where God's presence can be widely manifest in your life. So, in order to take advantage of all this, you'll want to make sure that you are in one of the groups that is available.

Prayer: Lord, help us to be your temple.