

FILL 'ER UP!

LUKE 10:40-42

“Having a personal relationship with God.” Sometimes we forget how odd that language and idea is for many people who didn't grow up in the church. A few question if there even is a God. Many question whether you can ever know God personally. Some believe that such an idea sounds vaguely elitist or just downright silly from a scientific, empirical perspective. But others – more than we might imagine, in fact - are intrigued by and open to the possibility of knowing God personally. Having a personal relationship with God - that's what I want to explore with you this morning in our second week of Outflow. For those of you who are visiting with us today, we're in the midst of a five week all church emphasis called Outflow. It's helping us as members and friends of this congregation to grapple with what it means to be outwardly-focused as individuals as well as a church. Before we can overflow and flow out in ministry and service to others, we need to have a living, growing and authentic relationship with Him. Outflow starts with inflow! God flows into you in the person of His Son, Jesus, fills up the inner, spiritual part of your life with Himself and then enables you to start flowing out to other people.

Now just as the happiness of, say, your marriage depends on how you're relating to your spouse, being filled to overflowing spiritually depends on the kind of relationship you're experiencing with God. So, how is it with you and God this morning? What kind of relationship do you have? What kind of relationship would you *like* to have? Part of how you answer that question may well depend on your perception of God. You might be aware that many people think God is just like their dad. I'm not sure why – perhaps because it's common to think of God as our heavenly Father. If you had a great dad – supportive, loving, nurturing, and full of integrity – you have less baggage to get rid of when it comes to a relationship with God. You just do! But what if your dad was (or is) abusive, critical, harsh, discouraging, disinterested, or weak? The fact is that you might be projecting on to God the failures of your dad.

Then, what *is* God like? Here's an immensely important truth to get into your head, first, and then let it trickle down into your heart. God is exactly like Jesus! That's what the Bible says many times. For instance, Jesus Himself said, “The Father and I are one.” (John 10:30 NLT). Or how about this exchange between Jesus and one of His disciples, Philip? “Philip said, ‘Master, show us the Father; then we'll be content.’ (Jesus said,) ‘You've been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don't understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, “Where is the Father?”’” (John 14:8-9 MSG) Elsewhere we read these words, “Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.... For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.” (Colossians 1:15; 2:9 NLT) That's why you need to read the Bible – and particularly the New Testament – because it will introduce you to Jesus.

You'll find there that Jesus is generosity personified. After all, He died for you. You'll discover that Jesus is accepting without being soft. In other words, He met people where they were at but never willingly left them there. You'll discern that Jesus was forgiving without being enabling. If you want a lesson on how to hate the sin but love the sinner, get to know Jesus. You'll be amazed at how interested Jesus is in you personally and of what value He believes you to be. And as you get to know Him and what He is like, you can be very sure that God Himself is just like Jesus. Get to know Jesus and then you'll now exactly what God Himself is like! That's the only way to begin correcting the distortions each of us have about who God is and what it means to know Him personally. In light of that fact, you can be sure that...

JESUS DOES RELATIONSHIPS DIFFERENTLY.

The famous poet, W.H. Auden once said, "Almost all of our relationships begin and most of them continue as forms of mutual exploitation, a mental or physical barrier to be terminated when one or both parties run out of goods." Okay, that's a bit cynical, to be sure, but there's a lot of truth in his observation. The fact is that most human relationships are essentially self-serving. There is a very real – conscious or unconscious – calculation that goes on in most human relationships: "What's in it for me?" Jesus is different? Yes, indeed! As you read about Him in the New Testament, it becomes clear that Jesus didn't seek out relationships with people for what He could get from them. He wasn't looking for acceptance or status or for people to meet His needs or for folk who would somehow make Him look good.

Consider some of the people with whom Jesus had a personal relationship. There was Simon Peter who became the leader of His disciples. He was about as blue collar and rough around the edges as you could find. He worked with fish all day. I imagine he had a unique and powerful odor most of the time. It's also obvious he had anger management issues and probably an attention deficit disorder of some kind. If you need further proof that Jesus just wasn't into appearances, you need look no further than Peter. There was Nicodemus who was a Bible scholar and respected leader. He was about as far a contrast from Peter as you could imagine. You might recall that Nicodemus and Jesus had this very interesting conversation one night. Jesus wasn't either repulsed or attracted by this man's reputation or education. He patiently explained to Nicodemus how a person could have a relationship with God. So your reputation and educational level is meaningless in terms of God wanting to relate to you.

Do you remember Martha and Mary, two sisters, who had a friendship with Jesus? Another sibling, brother Lazarus, had invited Jesus to a big dinner party at his home and Martha took charge of all the preparations. Now, Martha might have invented the well-known saying, "If you want something done, you've got to do it yourself!" Even though Martha volunteered for this job, she got stressed out and overwhelmed by it. Then she got irritated with her sister, Mary, for not

helping. Mary was content just to hang out with Jesus and listen to every word that He said. Listen to how Jesus dealt with this situation. “But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in, interrupting them. ‘Master, don't you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand.’ The Master said, “Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it's the main course, and won't be taken from her.” (Luke 10:40-42 MSG) Jesus isn't interested in what you can do for Him. He wants you to be with Him so that He can fill you up. I love that easily overlooked verse that describes Jesus' intent in picking those first twelve followers we call the disciples. “He settled on twelve, and designated them apostles. The plan was that they would be with him, and he would send them out to proclaim the Word.” (Mark 3:14 MSG) Notice that Jesus' first priority was relationship – “that they would be with Him.”

Now, I think Mary was on to something. But it's always tempting to try and find one formula or one template for having a relationship with God that is supposed to fit everybody. I believe that's a big mistake, because...

ALL OF US APPROACH JESUS DIFFERENTLY.

You can learn a lot from people who've followed Jesus longer than you have about how to have a relationship with God. But imitation isn't always a good idea. What brings one person close to Jesus won't necessarily work for somebody else.

For example, Peter was loud and messy in his relationship with Jesus. Peter was your quintessential speak first and think later kind of personality. Jesus would praise him for something he did one minute and chastise him the next for something bone-headed he did. There was always plenty of drama in Peter's relationship with Jesus – lots of in your face dialogue. You might look at that kind of relationship and cringe. The good news is that you don't have to be like Peter. Some folk are more like Nicodemus – slow and steady. Nicodemus was cautious and careful when it came to Jesus. He wanted to check Jesus out fully before making any commitments. He talked to Jesus in the middle of the night because he didn't want to draw undue attention. But it's evident that the relationship grew just the same. Everyone has a unique way relating to and approaching Jesus.

Martha, for instance, was quick and capable. Nobody had to tell Martha what to do. She saw a need, went after it and expected others to do the same. She was a walking, talking action figure! And that shows up in her relationship with Jesus. It was all about faith in action. True, she had to work a little harder at this whole business of sitting still and spending time with Jesus thing. Mary, on the other hand, was easygoing and relational. You've probably heard about or read that people are either task-oriented or people-oriented. It's not that one is right and the other wrong; it's simply how you've been wired up by God in terms of

personality. Martha was task-oriented: go here, do this, get that done. Mary was people-oriented. Relationships were more important to her than tasks. Mary wanted to soak up what Jesus had to say. She needed to spend time with Him to be happy and feel connected.

Peter, Nicodemus, Martha and Mary - four very different personalities! They each approached Jesus in their own way based on their unique personalities. Jesus meets you where you are with all the character traits and experiences that make you unique. Everyone approaches Jesus differently. Yes, to be sure, there are common denominators that ought to show up in the life of every Jesus follower. Like what? You need to spend time in prayer, reading the Bible, worship, with other Jesus followers for the purpose of building each other up and serving others and showing them Jesus' love in practical ways. But the fact is that some of you might have a greater capacity for prayer and alone time with God than others. Others of you really connect with God through singing hymns or praise songs. Others of you don't even want to hear yourself sing! Some of you might be more action oriented. You just love to serve and do things for the Lord. Others have a motor that runs a little less frenetically. That's OK! Jesus wants to have the kind of relationship with you that will fill you up. There is no one way that happens. Find what works for you and go for it!

While a missionary named Steve was serving in Paraguay, a Maka Indian named Rafael came to sit on his porch. Steve was eating and went out to see what he wanted. Rafael responded in his language, "Ham, henek met." Again, Steve asked what he could do for him, but the answer was the same. "Ham, henek met" which means "I don't want anything; I have just come near." Steve understood what Rafael was saying but not its significance. Steve later shared the incident with a local veteran missionary. He explained that it was Rafael's way of honoring Steve. He really didn't want anything; he just wanted to sit on his porch. He found satisfaction and pleasure just being near Steve. Have you learned yet the immense joy of simply being with Jesus, being hear Jesus? Ham, henek met. Lord Jesus, I don't want anything. I have just come near."

But here's an interesting question: "How will I know I'm doing the things that fill me up?" That's the third point in today's message. When you're tapped into Jesus, it won't be long before you start to overflow. In other words, ...

CONNECTING WITH JESUS PRODUCES OUTFLOW.

Peter, Nicodemus and Mary were deeply transformed by their relationships with Jesus. They began to relate to others differently. They became less self-centered and more interested in pouring out the compassion, joy and power they'd received from Jesus. For instance, Peter's life after Jesus filled him up was marked by courage and compassion. You remember the story of how he cowardly denied even knowing Jesus the night before the crucifixion. But after the Holy Spirit filled him up, he was speaking to crowds boldly about Jesus and

being a channel of God's healing power. By way of example, Peter encountered a crippled beggar on his way to the Temple to pray. "Peter said, 'I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!' He grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant his feet and ankles became firm. He jumped to his feet and walked." (Acts 3:6-8 MSG) Connecting with Jesus produces outflow.

Nicodemus was the one who sought an interview with Jesus by night. Why? He was fearful of other people's opinions. But later on we observe that Nicodemus was glad to be identified with Jesus even at the risk of personal loss. He was the only one who stood up for Jesus in the court when He was accused. After the crucifixion, he risked his life and reputation by asking for Jesus' body after His death and, then, wrapping Jesus' body in 75 pounds of expensive spices. In those days, you only did that for a close family member. His love for Jesus became greater than his fear of people. Connecting with Jesus produces outflow.

The effect of Jesus on Mary was astounding. "...Mary came in with a jar of very expensive aromatic oils, anointed and massaged Jesus' feet, and then wiped them with her hair. The fragrance of the oils filled the house. Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, even then getting ready to betray him, said, 'Why wasn't this oil sold and the money given to the poor? It would have easily brought three hundred silver pieces.' He said this not because he cared two cents about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of their common funds, but also embezzled them. Jesus said, 'Let her alone. She's anticipating and honoring the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you. You don't always have me.'" (John 12:3-8 MSG) You could say that a relationship with Jesus prompted Mary to an extravagant and self-forgetting love. Three hundred pieces of silver was the equivalent of an average annual household income. That last time I saw an estimate on the median household income right now put it at about \$50,000 annually. What was Mary thinking? Clearly, she wasn't thinking about herself, however, or what others thought of her. She simply could not show Jesus enough love. Connecting with Jesus produces outflow.

Erwin McManus is a pastor and author. When his son, Aaron, was five or six he began asking Erwin, "What does God's voice sound like?" Erwin didn't know how to answer. A few years later, Aaron went off to his first junior high camp. In the middle of the week, Erwin went up to visit Aaron. He learned that Aaron had gotten into some kind of disagreement with another kid and had actually started to assault him but had been held back by his friends. He was unrepentant, wanted to leave camp, pulled together his stuff, and shoved it into the car. Erwin asked him for a last talk before they drove away. They sat on two large rocks in the middle of the woods. "Aaron," he asked, "is there any voice inside you telling you what you should do?" "Yes," he nodded. "What's the voice telling you?" "That I should stay and work it out." "Can you identify that voice?" "Yes," he said immediately, "It's God." It was the moment Erwin had waited for. "Aaron," I said, "do you realize what just happened? You heard God's voice. He spoke to you

from within your soul. Forget everything else that's happened. God spoke to you and you were able to recognize him."

Erwin will never forget Aaron's response: "Well, I'm still not doing what God said." Erwin explained to him that that was his choice, but this is what would happen. If he rejected the voice of God coming from deep within and chose to disobey his guidance, his heart would become hardened, and his ears would become dull. If he continued on this path, there would be a day when he would never again hear the voice of God. There would come a day when he would deny that God even speaks or has ever spoken to him. But if he treasured God's voice however it comes to him—through the Scriptures, through his conscience—and responded to him with obedience, then his heart would be softened, and his ears would always be able to hear the whisper of God into his soul. Aaron chose to stay.

God wants to have a relationship with you. He wants to fill you so you'll overflow. But it won't always be easy to have a relationship with Him. Maintaining a connection with God can be frustrating at times. Allowing Him to fill you will mean an emptying of self. Just like Aaron discovered, there will be times when He will want you to do what you'd rather not do. You can be full or you can be empty. The choice really is up to you. Connecting with Jesus will fill you up so that you can flow out.