

## **It's About the Relationship**

There is a lot going on in this world. So much that it's hard to process it all. North Korean is actively developing nuclear weapons. We have made a deal with Iran under the pretenses of preventing them from developing nuclear weapons. But there is so much that raises suspicion in that deal that it's hard to find comfort in that statement. And then there's ISIS. A driving force of fanatics bent on eradicating anything and anyone they interpret as standing in their way. And the United States seems fine with sitting by and watching happen. Raising nothing more than what appears to be a token effort to stop them.

As a result of ISIS, there's a whole hoard of refugees looking for a place they can rest their head. Which in itself can hardly be considered their fault. And one would not have to reason very far to come to the conclusion that it would be our Christian duty to help them. Yet within that group there are those who would cause chaos wherever they go. And any country that chooses to provide refugees asylum risks providing ISIS with a perfect opportunity for entry into that country.

But, here in our own country things are better, right? Well, not really. We are dealing with a whole new resurgence of divisiveness. A cause that has its roots in very real truth and very real suffering. Yet it's hard to understand how to deal with the topic of "racism" when those who scream it the loudest seem so racist themselves. So unmoving in their apparent desire for retribution over healing.

And then there's the ever present topic of equal rights for all. Which in itself is a worthy platform and goal. However, in this case that platform has become a revolution of individual rights over morality. An agenda that is being crammed down our throats with a chaser of tolerance and inclusiveness. A banner of equality raised by those who preach the rights of free speech, freedom of religion, and the right to live their lives as they see fit. Yet those same people are the first to accuse anyone with an opposing view point of being narrow minded and intolerant and promoting hatred.

And then there's politics. I think I'll leave that one right there. There's just really not much to say. Or maybe that I should say. All I can do is shake my head.

And, as if all of that isn't enough, every single one of us has our own personal challenges to face. Several of you, like me, have had to face and are stilling facing serious health issues. I mean, when you go in for a routine checkup and that results in a diagnosis of cancer, that's scary! And my own brush with that disease has been pretty, well, benign. I mean, it was caught early, and it's gone.

For that I am very thankful. However, some of you are dealing with very serious health issues. Even going through what I went through, I still can only imagine what that is like.

And then beyond that there's the "normal" life issues we all face at one time or another. Relationship issues, financial issues, work issues. It goes on and on.

It's no wonder we deal with problems with anxiety and worry! Taking a hard look at the issues of this life is a really good way to make yourself feel inadequate. But, really, where does anxiety and worry get you? To be honest, in my experience, I've never found that worrying was much help. In fact, I've found the only real thing it accomplishes is to suck the energy right out of me. I've not encountered much else in life that will make me less motivated and make me feel more defeated than worry and anxiety. When I've given into it, I've not wanted to pray. And even when I did pray, my prayers were not generally as heart felt and sincere as they are when I'm not eaten up by worry and anxiety. On top of that, I didn't really want to spend time in devotion or worship. You see worry and anxiety really only accomplish one thing. And that is to distract you. It distracts you from the blessings God has given you, it makes it hard to be truly thankful. And it distracts you from your relationship with God.

Let's open up our bibles to Philippians 4:4-7.

You see, God doesn't want us to be anxious. About anything. He wants us to worship Him. He wants us to act in a manner that is in keeping with a child of His. He wants us to pray and bring our burdens to Him. And in return He promises us His peace.

But what about fear? Anxiety and fear are related but not really the same. Where anxiety distracts and paralyzes, fear causes sudden and rash decisions and action. Fear doesn't just distract, but can cause you to flee in any direction, as long as it's away from whatever is scaring you. Most of the time that is away from where God wants us to be. Or it may have you standing up and fighting with little regard for who is caught in the crossfire. It may also have the same effect as anxiety and worry in that it immobilizes you.

Fear, like anxiety and worry, is not from God. In 2 Timothy 1:7 we are told *"for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."*

In Joshua 1:9 God tells us *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

I've dealt with my share of fear. And I've dealt with my share of anxiety. However, what I've dealt with more is anger. Not rage, really. More like disgust. And one of the issues that I have had the hardest time dealing with in the past few years is same-sex marriage. The reason is very simple. It wouldn't bother me as much if they had called it a civil-union. But, to insist on calling it marriage... That's what bothers me. Because, as we can see in Ephesians 5:22 - 23, 25 where it says *"22 – 23 Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior"* and in *"25 – Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"*, Christ's relationship and love for the church is used as the model for Godly marriage.

And that's not the only area of our changing society and culture that causes me that kind of anger and disgust.

But, the problem with getting angry about what I see going on in our country is that in my anger I too become distracted. I'm forget the state I myself was in when God revealed Himself to me. In Romans 8:6-8 *"For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*

And also what He did for me when saved me. Titus 3:4 – 7 *"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit"*

You see, the people of this world are in no different shape than I was in when Christ met me. Without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, they will be unable to submit to God's law. And when I look at it that way, I realize that what the people of this world need is the saving knowledge of Christ. Because sin is the problem.

So I guess the point I'm making is we can deal with all the hard, heavy, icky issues in this world in many ways. But, really, the only way that is going to work is by following what we read earlier in Philippians 4:4-7. So let's read it again.

To get through all of the scary issues in this life, we need to work on our vertical relationship with God. As long as we are distracted by anything horizontal and kept from looking up to Him, we will fail. We maintain and build our relationship with God by praising and thanking Him for all He's done for us, by spending time real and meaningful time reading his Holy Word, and in prayer and supplication.

In conclusion, we have a wonderful gift from God. We need to remember where it came from and who has the power:

2 Corinthians 4:7-10