

Bringing God into the Equation

In this class we have covered so much ground, including good listening; anxiety; depression; marital issues; caring for the sick, aging, dying; addiction; and co-dependency. We've seen what the Bible teaches on these different subjects as well as how practically to help hurting people facing these realities. Now we are going to focus on bringing people to God so that they can get His help in the situation.

Over and over, Jesus directed people to God rather than himself (Mark 10:17-18; John 5:19, 30; 8:28-29; 12:49-50; 14:10). Jesus modeled the connection to God that all of us should strive for. Consequently, one key way we can help hurting people is to direct them to pray to God (James 5:13-18). If God doesn't answer the prayer right away, our job is to encourage the person we're helping to persevere in prayer with dogged determination (Luke 18:1-8).

Depending on how much experience the people whom we are helping have with God, we may need to teach them to pray just as Jesus taught his disciples. Ultimately, our goal is to help people have their own relationships with God, not to depend on us for that connection. If people we are working with have no relationship with God, we should also look for opportunities to share the gospel message with them (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:12).

What is the connection between faith and healing? Some folks believe that faith not only makes healing possible but even necessitates it. This doctrine has a number of names, but often goes by the moniker, "Word of Faith." This movement teaches that poverty and suffering result from a lack of faith. Thus, someone with a disability, preventing gainful employment, is to blame for failing to believe enough. Sadly, this can result in blaming the victim instead of other possible causes such as the fallenness of our present evil age. Now, we can have little doubt that Jesus taught several important truths about the importance of faith.

- Jesus called his disciples "you of little faith," teaching the incredible power of believing (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 17:20; 21:21-22)
- Jesus said to those seeking healing, "your faith has made you well" (Matthew 9:22, 29)
- Jesus did not do many mighty works in his hometown because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58)

Thus, faith is the great activating cause that makes healing possible. However, we must recognize the difference between necessary and sufficient causes. Faith is (usually) necessary, but it will not guarantee healing. (Lazarus' resurrection would be an exception, since he was dead when he got his miracle.) So, faith is incredibly important, but it does not compel God to act or guarantee a desired outcome.

We don't have to guess about this, because we have two clear examples in Scripture when prayers went unanswered.

- Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and God didn't give him what he wanted (Luke 22:42)

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- Paul repeatedly prayed for the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh but didn't get delivered (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

Sometimes the answers to our prayers are "No." Other times we are doing something or not doing something necessary. For example, Scripture teaches us that sin can close God's ears to our prayers (Isaiah 59:1-3; Proverbs 15:29; 21:13; 1 Peter 3:7). Still other times we need to persevere tenaciously in prayer for years. It's important not to set false expectations for people. We must convey the balance between our faith and God's sovereignty to act as He pleases. We pray, we believe, and we pursue healing, but ultimately, it's up to Him; and we have to be ok with the answer "not yet" or even "no." We do not serve God for what He can do for us, but because He is supremely worthy of our hearts.

Lastly, as Christians we are open to both spiritual and secular ways of helping hurting people. We believe in prayer and miracles as well as living righteously. However, we also recognize the good that can come from psychiatry, counselling, and other lifestyle changes. Even so, as Christians when we help hurting people, our primary role is always to bring God into the situation.

Our story – Our history/story is very important. Where we came from, how we reacted to our daily stories, what we allow into our lives now, and what we discard from the past are vitally important.

Some come from a believing family, but not from perfection. Some come from an unbelieving family, fraught with dysfunction and sin and yet having good qualities to hold onto. Our first relationships are with our mother and father. They teach us by modeling God's love, compassion, and judgment. Modeling is very important. If children see parents living the Word as it says in Deuteronomy 6 when we lie down, walk along the road, while working and eating, they will take on that modeling as their behavior.

Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we are set free from the bondage of sin and can live in the newness of life. We can unplug from ourselves as the source of life and plug into God and Jesus Christ as our source of life.

How? How do I take this wonderful news of healing and deliverance and live it out in my life and help others to do the same?

We have two kingdoms we have to draw from. One, the Kingdom of God is where the Scriptures, God's Word, obeyed brings about life now and in the Kingdom when Christ returns. The kingdom of the world, or Satan's kingdom, brings about decadence and defilement now and results in the second death.

James 1:21 Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Humankind has a spiritual battleground.

1 Cor. 2:14 The person without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. A person needs to accept Christ. Sometimes people say they are Christian but really do not know or believe on Jesus the Messiah.

We need to hear the truth from God about who He is and who we are. We "hear" God through several different ways: reading the Scriptures and asking God to speak to us through them; by prayer and having silent time to listen to God; by talking with other believers; and directly by revelation and inspiration. When I know deep in my heart something just happened that had to be God, only He knew or only He could have brought it to pass, that is when my faith soars and I feel so wonderfully loved by God. I can share my experience, and it can inspire others, but others cannot experience my experience for their own. Our job as helpers is to assist others in building their relationship with God so that they can experience Him on their own and with God leading the way.

So many times I have strongly suggested we do not "fix" people's problems. When a person is taught how to go to God and get answers to prayer, that person's faith is built and will then

repeat the process over and over to receive the goodness that God has to offer, the compassion He bestows on us, and His favor and love.

We want to be able to pray with people with faith. People sometimes need to lean a bit on our faith until they mature into their own faith. If you are reticent to pray with people or to pray in a fellowship or church, you may have to ask God to help you get over the fear. We all cannot pray at once, but when prompted by holy spirit to pray, we need to obey that rather than our fear (or another term could be phobia).

In praying with others, there are situations that we need to be aware of that hinder faith in prayer.

What roadblocks one may have toward having a close relationship with God are many. Here are some of the most prevalent ones:

Rejection and Acceptance – the feeling of being cast aside, discarded or defective

- Stems from adoption, abandonment, I wish you had never been born, you never do anything right, abuse of all kinds, etc.
- Outcomes from rejection: feelings of worthlessness, self-hatred, depression, inability to express feelings, resentment, and unforgiveness.
 - We need to learn to forgive others and ourselves and accept our true identity in Christ.
 - Unforgiveness is one of the biggest contributors that deters us from hearing God.

When sorting through a person's story, it is important to watch for times where there is obvious unwillingness to forgive. When the time is appropriate, go to the Bible, and let the person read and see what the Word says about the importance of not holding transgressions against others or ourselves.

Ungodly vows or oaths also hinder us from being in a close relationship with God. Sometimes we don't even remember what it was we vowed. It may be something like..."I vow I will never let anyone hurt me again." We need to renounce those vows and only attach ourselves to God and Christ, not to worldly pains and circumstances.

Sin patterns keep us from having the relationship with God we want to have. He doesn't separate Himself from us, but we hinder our relationship by willfully sinning. Be diligent to notice where people may be hiding from their sin patterns or just don't seem to care. Lovingly assisting someone through Scripture and prayer to repent is a very godly thing. Again, do this with care and love. Sin deceives us, and we have to pray for ourselves and others not be deceived.

If you are a parent or grandparent, be about being a godly one. Mothering is vital and pivotal in a person's life. Father's care of protection and provision is foundational for a child to learn about God. Just don't do sin the first time.

Fears keep us from going to God in prayer in faith.

Have a support system of trusted pastors, teachers of the Word, godly friends, and family that will work with you when problems arise.

How do we know it is God speaking to us? In a nutshell...

- It does not contradict anything in the Word.
- It fits with the book of James' description of wisdom.
 - James 3:15-1 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Help people to listen to God, obey God, have a relationship with God, and to have a balance in life.

Scenario:

Alice is 25 years old, single, Christian, and has a full-time 9-5 office job. She lives with a roommate whom she met in college, and they remained friends. Alice has been going to church more, attending weeknight fellowship, and becoming more involved with helping out at the church. You and Alice are talking, and she opens up about how she doesn't know what to do about her roommate and she doesn't know how to pray for her. Alice explains that the roommate is coming home drunk and is smoking pot in the apartment. She doesn't do her dirty dishes which are left all over the apartment. Alice likes her friend and is close to her. She wants to help her stop drinking so much and to take better care of herself and the apartment. Alice is telling you how she orchestrates events or situations that force the roommate to have to help her clean or stay home with Alice instead of going out until late hours. Alice has mentioned about God to her friend, but she has not really picked up on it. At the end of Alice sharing her story with you, she says that she is "mothering" too much by paying bills, rent, and credit card debt for her roommate. She says she is just venting, but she is visibly upset over this situation. It is obviously causing her a lot of confusion and unrest.

1. After using good closed, open, and clarifying questions, and seeking God's wisdom, what do you see as issues here for Alice that are detrimental to good relationships?
2. How would you prioritize them?
3. What are some ways you bring up the topic?

4. How is Alice practicing the Scriptures, and where is she missing what the Word says by her actions?
5. What does Alice think about herself in relationship to her roommate? Are there boundary problems here? What do you think Alice is trying to accomplish for herself with this relationship?
6. How can you lead Alice to a better understanding of the Word so she can make her own decisions about whether to live (or not) with her roommate?

Some material was adapted from Encounter Seminar from Christian Fellowship Church, Ashburn, VA.

Community Activity:

Joe has a reputation that precedes him. He has been a Christian for a long time and has been involved with his church for years. It just appears that whatever he is involved in, others complain about his controlling ways. Those who are less mature as Christians seem to get swallowed up by his actions and behaviors, and they get hurt and sometimes bitter and leave the fellowship. There really is no one thing a person could say that he does that stirs things up so much. But the evidence is in the hurt and pain his words and actions cause to others. Sometimes it is pitting one against the other. Sometimes it is spreading hurtful rumors; sometimes it is confronting people harshly and with little or no evidence of the sin. You have seen this happening over and over. Joe is your friend. Somehow you have avoided the focus of his negative attention. You are restless and know that God wants you to do something...He has told you to go talk with Joe about this. Yikes!

1. After much prayer and getting guidance from God, what are some tools you have to use to help you talk with Joe?
2. Would you be afraid because you might be the next one to get the negative focused attention? How might helping him affect you?
3. What do you think the main problem really is for Joe?
4. How would you prioritize working with these issues?
5. To what Scriptures or passages would you go to help Joe see what the Word says?
6. If he denies everything and tells you that you are the one who can't get along with people, what would your responses be? (Be careful not to be defensive.)
7. Christ loved the unlovable. Would it be hard for you to love Joe as Christ does?
8. What feelings/actions would you have to watch out for so that you don't bring them into the helping process and cloud it with your stuff?

Mary Ann Yaconis is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Mary Ann Yaconis' Personal Meeting Room

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