

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Blockages to relating to God

Presented by Leo Douma

A man may deeply love his wife, who is also his best friend. There is no one he would rather spend time with. But he discovers that there are times when there are things that get in the way, there are times he avoids his wife. Like when he is too occupied with the demands of his work. Or when he hasn't done that job she asked him to do. You can love someone but there are times when stuff inside you gets in the way. It's like that in our relationship with God too. If you have experienced the joy of being forgiven, totally loved as a child of God, then you will want to spend time relating with God. So why is it then that, far too often, we don't relate with God as we should?

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Why is it that often we don't relate with God as we should? Well, if I get right down to it is sin. Sin is not about bingeing on that chocolate. The Greek word for sin literally means "missing the mark". It means we have failed to obey God and His laws for life. But sin is not just about breaking a rule. It's about daring to stand up and declare ourselves autonomous and rebelling against God.

Instead of being God-centred, we are self-centred. Sin is choosing our own will. We want to be the centre of our universe. When we do that, we set up a barrier between God and ourselves. Sin can make us arrogant and think we don't need God. When I have a nice home and the latest gadgets, I'm doing all right. I don't need God! But if life is not so good then often we still set up barriers. We won't let God love us because in our brokenness we can't even love ourselves. If you have been abused, you can end up hating who you are, and couldn't imagine God would love you as you are. The thing is we want to get away from God and be free and independent, but we end up making our lives miserable. Sin tears down all our relationships. We live in a world of alienation; people not really caring and loving each other; people using and abusing each other.

Sin is not a popular word any more. Martin Luther at the time of the Reformation was worried how he, a sinner could get right with an angry God. Today in Australia most people don't worry about this thing called "sin", mainly because we don't even think there is a God. But we cannot deny we that we experience sin. We see it in the fact that people worry about there being no point to life. "Why am I here?" is the heart cry of so many. This sense of alienation is all because of sin, our rebelling against God and putting ourselves in the centre of our own universe, doing what we want. Sin is experienced in the abuse of children and the weak. Abusers are typically self-centred people, doing what they want and not caring for others. We see sin in the corruption of business and government. We experience sin when we feel lonely, alienated from friends, not fully cared for by our own families. We experience sin when we feel separated from God. A sign once said "If God seems far away, guess who moved?"

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What are some of the ways our sin blocks our relationship with God? Let me list a number of them.

1. **Situations.** We find ourselves in an enticing situation and we are lured into sin. For example your friend has you over at the coffee shop and as you stir your latte she says “You want to hear the latest...?!!”
2. **Evasion.** We intentionally evade doing something we know God wants us to do. We know God wants us to tell the truth and be honest. But still we lie to impress the visitor who has come to our home.
3. **Laziness.** We simply do not make the effort to minister to those in need. The old lady down the road could really do with a visit, a friendly face to pass her lonely day, but we can’t be bothered.
4. **Factual.** We say we didn’t know it was a sin. We plead ignorance. “It’s not so bad when I call in sick, when I just want a day off. Everyone does it. Why is that so wrong?”
5. **Habits.** Because of years of not paying attention to the relationship God offers us, we have developed bad habits. If for years we couldn’t be bothered going to church regularly, well now the family expects we do other things on the weekend.
6. **Attitudes.** We have the attitude that it’s too early to go to heaven, we want to “enjoy” life a little more, when all the time we are missing the real joy of life - a fulfilling relationship with God. C.S Lewis once wrote: *“Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.”*
7. **Time.** We say we do not have the time to “be religious”, like reading the bible and praying and serving others. Yet, in fact our whole life can be an expression of our relationship with God. How you do your work can be an expression of your love for God.

When we act in the ways I have just mentioned we simply do not respect ourselves as children of God. When we sin we betray and belittle our own standing as children of the Father and create blockages in our relationship with God.

So how do we go about removing the blockages? First we must realise that God is a God who loves us and wants to forgive us. My favourite parable is the prodigal son. There we see the father, every day, looking down the road with deep longing to see if his boy is coming home. Remember the young man had virtually wanted the old man dead so he could get his inheritance and go off and live it up. Most fathers would not bother looking to see if the lad came back. And if he walked in the house I can imagine many a father saying “What are you doing here? You can turn around and go right back out that door.” But not God; He waits with open arms to welcome us back

When we realise God is so loving, it encourages us to come to him and tell him how sorry we are for putting the barriers in the way. We repent of our sin. We do this through prayer. I don’t mean just saying at the end of a prayer, “and forgive us our sins. Amen.” I mean spending time with God and telling him honestly how you have failed him and yourself.

The next ingredient is the dying to self. Jesus said (in Luke 9:23) “*If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*”. Denying yourself does not mean to make yourself a door mat. We notice how in that passage Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow him. So we are to act like Jesus would in the situation we find ourselves. Instead of following the sinful impulse that will be another obstacle to God, catch your breath before you say anything or do anything and ask yourself, what would Jesus say, what would he do. Now, you might not know what Jesus would do, but at least in that pause, you will think of Jesus and act more graciously.

Finally, we need spiritual direction to know God’s will for us. It comes by reading our bibles and looking often at the life of Jesus. It comes by recognizing the Spirit within and asking for his guidance. And it comes by walking the spiritual journey with a mature Christian friend. What each one of us needs is a friend who shares the faith by the way they live, and love and can teach us; some one whom we trust with our stuff and who will hold us accountable. And not just having one friend, but a community of believers, a church where we celebrate together the grace of God

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I think when it comes to removing the blockages in our relationship with God, prayer is the key ingredient. It is the key to combating sin and dealing with our alienation. You see, in prayer we recognize God for who he truly is. Prayer is practising the presence of God and allowing God to become the centre of our life. In prayer we recognise that God is present, he is near, very near. So near, he sees and hears all we do and say. It makes us think twice about what we do. Bonhoeffer says “*Life was intended to be loved from the centre, not at the centre.*” Why not spend time with God today, talking with Him from your heart? You can be honest with him about everything, because he is waiting with open arms to hear from you, and relate with you.