

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Engaging with God

Presented by Harry Goodhew

INTRODUCTION

There's great dignity in simply being human. We know of no other creature quite like us. We are endowed with so many capacities, capable of some much that is good and sadly just as capable of so much that's evil and reprehensible. Spectacular as all that undoubtedly is there is something that outstrips all else: we have been created for fellowship with the One who dreamed us up.

The opening chapters of the Bible's first book Genesis and the closing chapters of the last book the Revelation of St. John both locate human beings in a relationship with their maker that pulsates with glory, joy, and love.

The call the Bible issues summoning us back to God is a call to a personal relationship with our Maker and Redeemer. It flows out of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Those momentous events both certify the sincerity of the call and highlight the cost God has paid to make it possible. This morning, after this music, I'd like to explore with you some aspects of that special friendship into which God is calling us.

SEGMENT 1

So let's talk about relating to God. First up, it's of fundamental importance that we recognise that we are talking about relating intimately and personally with the Living God, that is, to the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists, and to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a fundamental principle that the Bible lays down for our enjoyment of this relationship. It's expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews, in chapter 11, and at verse 6. It says that "... without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" or as another translation expresses that last part of the verse "he proves himself a rewarder of those who seek him".

On this basis, if we want to draw near to the Living God we must first of all believe in him. Yes, that means believing that he is, but also that we believe that he is as he has revealed himself to us in the pages of Scripture, and in Jesus: that he is holy, all powerful, knowing everything, purposeful, loving us beyond our wildest imaginings, and existing in a dimension and magnitude of reality quite beyond the reach of our greatest and most profound intellects.

There are lots of implications that flow from this but one in particular is relevant to our consideration: there is no point in approaching him with any suggestion of pretence. Why, well he knows us perfectly, both our better selves and our very worst selves. Ultimately any positive change that might take place in us will flow from him – his people are his workmanship. So we do not need to pretend or to hide. We come to him as we are. We will certainly need to be adjusting our lives constantly so as to walk comfortably with him but, in it all, he will be the one working in us to will and to do his good pleasure. So we can, and should, be fearlessly honest about ourselves

The second fundamental element is that we grasp and maintain the conviction that “he proves himself a rewarder of those who seek him”. Jesus emphasised this point when he was teaching about prayer: “... seek and you will find...” he said. If you and I would draw closer to God in our daily life we must hold fast to the expectation that he rewards those who seek him. Whatever difficulties and hindrances we may encounter in seeking to draw closer to God, if we hold to the fact that God will reward us with a deeper engagement with himself and with a continuing rearrangement of our lives so as to please him more and more, we will not be put off. We will continue with the quest to know him better.

OK, so what’s next? Well, more after this music.

SEGMENT 2

Any relationship, if it is to develop, needs the investment of effort. It’s no different when it comes to drawing closer to God. There are at least three things you and I need if we are to make progress in our walk with God.

First up, we need time, time to be quiet, time to read, time to think, time to pray, and time to listen. I put this first because without making some space for God and for conversation with him we will make little progress. I know how busy life can get. I do not deny the difficulties of making a time to concentrate on the things of eternity. But it’s like eating, if your too busy to eat you will die; die from malnutrition and starvation. Quick gulps of fast foods may keep you alive but you’ll not be very healthy. We need to make time to engage with God

Perhaps initially it’s not how much time but how you use the time you have. We need to be able to have long enough to close out other things and to focus on God. That too can be difficult but, with practise, we learn to do better.

Bound up with making time goes the helpful arrangement of having a place to be quiet: a chair perhaps, a room or the corner of a room, your motor vehicle, your shed, your laundry, wherever. As long as it is quiet and without disturbance, it will serve your purpose. It becomes your sacred space.

Along with time and place we need a Bible. It is the chief medium through which God communicates with us. It is here that we learn and re-learn who God is, hear him address us, and discover his will for our lives. We need to read it, prayerfully, thoughtfully and responsively and it helps to keep a note book to record things that speak to us. This form of listening to God takes time, I mean, not simply some time each day; it needs to be something we do over time, over the years of our life, a regular habit.

We must learn to read not only to understand and to reflect but also to respond. If we are to grow in God then what we read, understand, and reflect upon, needs to become the subject of our prayers, the topics of our conversation with our heavenly Father. It is in these conversations that we grow in our relationship with him. That may not always be easy. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was burdened and prayed desperately as he surrendered his will to the task which the will of his Father had set before him. But God is the rewarder of those who seek him and his Spirit strengthens his people.

SEGMENT 3

I have highlighted “time” and “a Bible” as two necessary requirements if we are to develop our relationship with God. Let me now add a third. We need “friends”. Living with God and living for God is not a solitary task. God means us to be related to others in the endeavour to live with him. We are meant to assist each other in this life of fellowship with God. Our church family, our small group for prayer and study, a circle of friends with whom we can share our experiences, all have a necessary part in the process. Being together is

not simply for the increase of knowledge. We aim to facilitate one another in learning to practise those graces that express our relationship with God and which are the fruit of his Spirit's work in our lives.

This matter is the subject of a major section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Listen to what he writes:

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, ... ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Nor is our circle of 'friends' limited to those with whom we actually come into physical contact. There are men and women of God around the world who have written, and are writing, books that can be of immense spiritual help as we seek to relate more closely to God. Reading for the sake of spiritual growth is a discipline to be cultivated. It too requires time. Perhaps it may be possible for us to turn off our television half an hour earlier so we can use that time to read.

CONCLUSION

The Scotsman George Macdonald was a writer of great skill and spiritual insight. He once wrote: "As the world must be redeemed in a few men to begin with, so the soul is redeemed in a few of its thoughts and works and ways to begin with: it takes a long time to finish the new creation of this redemption".

So let's determine with "time", "a Bible", and our "friends", to do all we can to hasten that process in our own lives both for God's glory and for our own eternal good.