

“Straight Talk with God”

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*ILLUSTRATION: Flat Tire Story

The title of this sermon is “Straight Talk with God.” Let us pray.

1. Real Faith Requires Real Relationship

It is commonly said that relationship is a two-way street. In other words, relationship is not possible in one direction only. There must be a two-way connection in order for it to work. Many of you know I am getting married next year (Praise God!), and every premarital counselor I have heard thus far has told me the same thing: “Communication is key.” Why? Because that is how a relationship-connection is maintained and developed over time. Furthermore, one of the biggest mishaps in relationships is misunderstanding one another, which is usually the byproduct of miscommunication, or a lack of communication. And all the married folks said...

Lately we’ve been riding along on the journey of Jeremiah throughout Scripture, and we’ve found that he had to learn this communication stuff with God. Newsflash! It’s not all rainbows and butterflies in this game of Life. Sometimes there are bumps and bruises on the road. There are occasions where things don’t go as expected, and we must learn to lean into God in those crucial moments. Allow me to put it this way... Walking with God is what I picture marriage to be like. It is ups and downs. It is highs and lows. There are peaks and valleys, yet God is with us through it all. God is in covenant relationship with his people, and he is faithful even when we are not. God meant his vows when he said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” and that is just as true today as it was way back when for Jeremiah.

You see, God called the man to be a mouthpiece for him at the young age of twenty-one. In a modern-day context, it would be as if God was saying, “If you’re old enough to drink, you’re old enough to preach!” Reluctantly, Jeremiah agreed, and God forewarned him that his message would be unpopular. He would be despised by many in his audience, because they were a rebellious people, but God promised to be with him to protect and defend him. God was first real honest with Jeremiah, and Jeremiah was real honest with God in return. He let God know his fears and apprehensions about answering “Yes” to the call. Jeremiah counted the cost, which is a wise thing to do. Then he agreed to do God’s will for his life, and he made history because of it. Let it be known, courage is not the absence of fear; it is what you do in the face of it.

This type of real relationship with God does not develop by accident. It is cultivated daily in the place of prayer. Jeremiah heard God because he sought God. As it is written, “Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near.” Jeremiah did just that, and an authentic connection with his Creator began. As stated, real faith requires real relationship, which leads me to my next point...

2. Real Relationship Requires Real Talk

Now I’m going to borrow an effective illustration from this book we are reading as a congregation, *Run with the Horses*, by Eugene Peterson. Imagine you are at a fine-dining restaurant, and you have booked reservations for yourself and a significant other. The reservations have placed you in the VIP room, a spot that is quieter than the rest of the restaurant. It is more reserved and secluded, creating an intimate feel. The lights are dim, and the table is set. There is subtle noise in the background, but it is not distracting by any means. You will have to deal with the waiter in order to place your orders. Perhaps you will enjoy some special drinks to start, and you might have to send your broccoli back later if it’s too cold. You may even thank the waiter at the end and leave him a generous tip. But the focus is clearly on the experience and the conversation you are about to have with this special someone, the center of your affections.

That is what prayer is intended to be like. You have put forth effort in setting time and space aside to spend with that significant other – in this case, God. The problem for many of us, myself included at times, is that special someone whom we are so absorbed with is actually called ‘SELF.’ Yes, you heard me right, ‘SELF.’ More often than we would like to admit, our thoughts, our moods, our concerns, and our interests are primarily focused on SELF, and God takes the lowly place of the waiter. We only talk to him when we need him. He is someone to whom we give orders, make complaints, and maybe, at the end, give thanks. He is not the priority, and he is not our heart’s greatest desire. ☹

I don’t know about you, but when I first read this, my heart was struck. This was me, and it had been me for some time, only I was unaware of it. The only response I could think of was to hit my knees and say, “God, I’m sorry. I want to give you first place in my life again.” You see, our culture is captivated by the idea of SELF. We live in this consumer-driven world that is centered around SELF. By golly, even Christmas Day has become about SELF! We just want to skip the Thanksgiving part and go straight to unwrapping presents. Isn’t that the truth??

I'm convinced that's why Christmas music is played long before Thanksgiving begins, because we really don't care too much about that holiday. Ask any young person in the room, do we not care more about getting than giving? And yet, giving is what the season is all about. "For God so loved the world that he gave..." Oh, but y'all don't wanna hear that. Let's get back to Jeremiah. Jeremiah had this point figured out. As a praying prophet, he had cultivated a history with God. He had developed a real relationship with God, and in the Scriptures we see his real talk with God as evidence of that. Let's hear his words again, this time in the Message version, which has a way of cutting straight to the heart of what the writer was trying to say.

***Jeremiah 15:15, 17-18 MSG** – "You know where I am, God! Remember what I'm doing here... I never joined the party crowd in their laughter and their fun. Led by you, I went off by myself. You'd filled me with indignation. Their sin had me seething. But why, why this chronic pain, this ever worsening wound and no healing in sight? You're nothing, God, but a mirage, a lovely oasis in the distance—and then nothing!"

- Call it harsh, if you will, but Jeremiah wore no religious masks in his approach toward God. He didn't pretend to be pious in false humility, either. Instead, he was utterly honest and transparent with God about his feelings. He vented all of his emotions and frustrations regarding his unfortunate circumstances. And here's what strikes me most about this passage; God replied! Yes, God heard Jeremiah's complaints and talked back. He did not ignore the man or his circumstances. Instead, that level of authenticity with God actually elicited a response from Heaven, and a quick one at that. This leads me to my third and final point...

3. Real Talk Releases Real Answers

Now that we've heard a fresh take on Jeremiah's complaints, let's hear Heaven's response:

***Jeremiah 15:19-21 MSG** – "This is how God answered me: "Take back those words, and I'll take you back. Then you'll stand tall before me. Use words truly and well. Don't stoop to cheap whining. Then, but only then, you'll speak for me. Let your words change them. Don't change your words to suit them. I'll turn you into a steel wall, a thick steel wall, impregnable. They'll attack you but won't put a dent in you because I'm at your side, defending and delivering... I'll deliver you from the grip of the wicked. I'll get you out of the clutch of the ruthless."

I absolutely love this, because it reveals something splendid about our God... Not only was he listening to his complaining servant, and not only did he respond to him, but he wasn't panicked! God wasn't falling off his throne due to the direness of Jeremiah's situation. Isn't that great? I think sometimes we get into our heads that Heaven isn't interested in our requests, or maybe things are just too busy up there, so our prayers aren't heard or answered in a timely fashion. Or worse, we think we're unworthy to approach God in prayer. Our lives are just too twisted, and our circumstances are just too ugly. But it's a lie. It's all a lie. In fact, the father of lies would love nothing more than for us to believe those things. Why? Because he knows that prayer changes things! Prayer produces results! Prayer is powerful! So, of course, the devil himself will do anything to get you centered on yourSELF and away from the place of prayer.

The beautiful thing about prayer is that it can take place anytime and anywhere, but it requires one key element: humility. Prayer requires a realization of dependency on a Being much higher than one's own self. In contrast, pride is the opposite of that. Pride exalts self, not God, to the highest place and ultimately leads to one's downfall. As it is written, "The proud shall be brought low, but the humble shall be exalted." Do yourself a favor, friend. Start praying today. Don't be fake and full of yourself like some are; be real and raw like Jeremiah. I assure you, God can handle it. He is strong enough to save. No matter how drastic your circumstances are, his arm is too weak for nothing. It doesn't matter how deep a hole you may have dug for yourself, his reach is not too short to scoop you out. Jesus's name literally means 'Savior,' so call upon it. Can we say his name together? '*JESUS. JESUS. JESUS.*' What a beautiful name it is. If you want an effective prayer life, get used to saying that name. It suffices, even when words fail.

- How can you be more honest with God, and yourself, in the place of prayer today?
- What would your life look like if you put your trust in Jesus instead of yourself?

Please take some time to ponder these, and remember:

- Real faith requires real relationship
- Real relationship requires real talk
- Real talk releases real answers

Would you put your hand on your heart as I pray for you today?