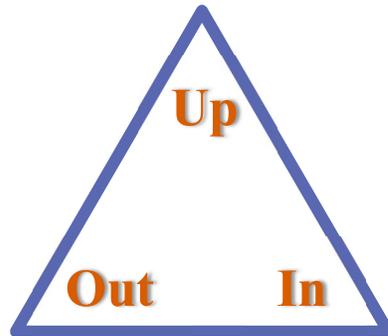


A
Passionate
LIFE

Devotional Guide
Week 3 - What does
God want from Me
Anyway?

DVD Notes

My spiritual life is defined by three relationships: (Micah 6:8)



UP – _____

Micah calls us to walk humbly, not _____ humbly with God

Jesus walked with God by _____ His Father

God would like to be with me for more than just my
_____.

IN- _____

Jesus had circles of _____ that he “did
life” with

To love mercy, I not only need to love giving it, I need to love
_____ it too.

Out – Do Justly

Doing Justly is doing _____ to those outside
my circle

If I don't have an outlet for _____, they
become stagnant in my life

Passion in my life grows from _____ these three
relationships.

Day 1

Power Walking

You would think walking should be just about the most natural thing in the world for most human beings to do. Unless you have suffered an injury, or deal with a physical disability, you've been walking for longer than you can remember. It wasn't that long ago that my age overtook my ability and I tore a tendon in my foot. Then suddenly what had been something I didn't give a second thought to suddenly became both painful and complicated.

When I was a teenager, I think some of my friends and I must have been reverting to the pre-walking days. I'm sure it was just the fact that my feet were growing fast enough that I couldn't always keep track of them. And my Phys Ed coach never missed a chance to point out our stumbles. "Walk much, or just read about it?" was her inevitable smart remark (she really did love us and we loved her).

On top of all that trouble comes the fact that walking has rules. Who knew? Something you've been doing since you were a toddler actually has rules? If you are a power walker it certainly does. Power Walkers can really cover the ground (even if they do look more than a little odd doing it.) But to qualify for power walking, you must obey certain rules, otherwise it isn't a power walk.

In fact, you don't even have to join a power walking club to run into walking rules. Just try to navigate down a busy sidewalk and you'll run into some walking rules, especially if you grew up driving on the left-hand side of the road. Nobody tells you the rules, but everybody seems to know that you keep to your right (in America). If you're on a collision course with some other pedestrian, you make brief eye contact and decide who will give the right of way based on a complex set of social cues and body language.

How could something that is supposed to be so natural be that complicated? Not a bad question if you're walking in the mall, or in your Christian walk, for that matter. It doesn't take too long as a follower of Jesus before you find out that walking has rules. There are rules about what we are supposed to eat and not eat, how we're supposed to dress, who we're supposed to hang out with. There are things you're supposed

to say and some things you most definitely should not say. And the vast majority of these rules aren't actually written down in the Christian's handbook anywhere. It's stuff you're supposed to watch and learn.

Ever been in sitting in church and somebody does an amazing job on a piece of music? Everybody wants to tell the performer how much they appreciated their music and while the rest of the church says a hearty, "Amen" one poor soul (maybe it was you) starts clapping. You just got the memo about the fact that in church, we don't clap to show our appreciation, we say a Biblical word that only church people understand. Unless, of course, you attend a church that has decided that clapping is OK to do there, so go right ahead. But not in time with the music, unless your church has decided that's all right too.

See what I mean? A spiritual walk can be complicated! But should that be the case? Does it have to be that hard to figure out what God expects of us? Fortunately, the answer is a resounding "NO!" though I suspect we'll always be tempted to make it more complicated than it should be.

Walking the Walk

In the Old Testament book of Micah, God is really struggling with the children of Israel precisely because of our human tendency to make simple things very complicated. I think it makes us feel more important somehow when we can master all the rules we create for ourselves. In this situation, they had taken the different sacrifices God had asked them to observe (which can seem complicated already) and made them much more complicated and elaborate than God had spelled out. They kept acting like it was their sacrifices and how well they did them that would impress God and make for a good relationship with him.

God was so frustrated with all of the pomp and meaningless rituals that He finally bursts out with this very simple formula that defines the simple heart of every relationship you'll ever have.

Read Micah 6:8:

What three things does God tell his people are at the heart of what God wants?

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. This is what God tells us defines what is “good.” Jesus made a very similar type of statement to one earnest young man who thought that because following God was so important it must also be complicated. He wanted to know what it took to please God. Jesus told him that everything in the Old Testament hung on four words; love God and love people (Matthew 22:37-40).

Here in Micah, the prophet breaks the same idea out in slightly different terms that take us to something a lot deeper than just a good memory verse. When we take a closer look at those three simple phrases, it becomes apparent that they are more than little phrases that roll off the tongue. God was telling us that the sum of everything He expects of us boils down to maintaining three healthy relationships.

*The sum of everything
God expects of us boils
down to maintaining
three healthy
relationships.*

What does God require of me? He expects me to Do Justly. This immediately points me to how I treat the people who aren't a part of my circle. These are my OUT relationships. How do I act toward “the others?” When I interact with people who aren't a part of my family (spiritual or biological), am I doing right by them?

When He tells me to Love Mercy, He gets a lot closer to home. How do I manage the relationships I have with those immediately connected to me? These are my IN relationships. How do I treat not just my biological family, but my spiritual family as well? In my family, justice isn't usually my main concern, though it is certainly is helpful. With those I live with everyday, it is mercy that glues my relationships together.

I have OUT relationships, IN relationships, and last, but most importantly, God calls me to walk humbly with him. This is my UP relationship. There's nothing that can mess up my relationship with God faster than getting confused over which one of us is actually God. Maybe that sounds silly to hear it, but when I forget to walk humbly with God, I can start acting like I could do a better job at running my little corner of the world better than He can.

The Triangle

That's what God says defines the essence of His expectations. Do justly to others, love my people in mercy, and walk humbly with God. Get these three relationships in balance and you've got it figured out.

No sweat, right? If it were as easily done as it is said I suppose the world would be a lot better place. But we do know that Jesus understood the triangle and lived out these three relationships in perfect balance.

Read Luke 6:12-20:

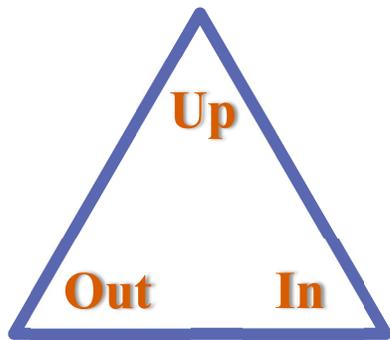
Identify where do you see the UP, the IN, and the OUT in this story?

UP:

IN:

OUT:

This is the triangle, and it's a great symbol to represent the heart of God's desire for me as I build a relationship with Him. As Jesus lived out His life among us, He modeled every day how to balance these three relationships in His life. In fact, that was exactly why He came.



The most fundamental truth of scripture is that you and I were created to be in relationship. These three relationships define every aspect of my life. And they are exactly what the devil targeted when he snuck into the Garden of Eden.

Read Genesis 3:1-19:

Identify where all three relationships were affected by sin

UP:

IN:

OUT:

The most fundamental truth of scripture is that you and I were created to be in relationship.

You and I were created to be in relationship, and not just with other human beings. We were designed to be in an intimate relationship with God; a relationship He intended to be personal and dynamic. When sin came in and drove a wedge between human beings and God, He wasn't satisfied leaving things where they stood. God wants a relationship with us and He wasn't willing to settle for it being a long-distance relationship.

Right off the bat He made a promise to Adam and Eve that someone would come to fix the damage they had done. There was a coming Seed who would crush the serpent's head. This was good news and something they both started looking for with eager anticipation.

Read Genesis 4:1:

What do you think the connection is between God’s promise and the name Eve gave to their firstborn son, which means “gotten.”

Cain certainly wasn’t the promised one, was he? What a crushing disappointment to see the one who hoped would be a deliverer end up being a murderer instead. As we’ve already discovered, God had a plan and a timetable. There was not only a Kairos moment coming, but it would happen at specific Chronos moment.

But God wasn’t content to sit back and leave the world to its fate while He waited. Instead, He involved humanity in the plan to deliver their Deliverer. He called a man named Abraham and promised to make him a great nation. He established a covenant with Abraham and promised to maintain that relationship with him and his descendants forever.

A covenant is a formal agreement defining the terms of a specific relationship. In most cases, it was a legal agreement that protected both parties in the relationship and defined how they would relate to each other. This covenant relationship forms the basis for the entire Old Testament.

The covenant was God’s way of rebuilding the relationship that had been severed by sin, and not just for the children of Israel. God initiated a covenant with Israel with the specific intent that when people would look at the Israelites, they would get a glimpse of a God who was reaching out to them in love.

All of those rules and laws God gave them weren’t the handiwork of some cosmic killjoy or a legalistic sourpuss. Check out your answer to a question we looked at last week when we read the 10 commandments. I asked you what the basis for God’s authority was in giving the laws. God pointed out that He had already rescued the Israelites and made them His people. They had been saved by grace. The law was intended to define how to have healthy relationships with the world, with my family circles and with my God. And all those rules and regulations were about

I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. ... I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. Leviticus 26:9-12

a specific witness God wanted His people to show to the world. If they would follow those rules and practices, the culture around them would see the picture of a God they would be interested in.

But things didn't work out so well with that plan did they? Not because of God, but because of the Israelites. But God just wouldn't give up on the idea of having a personal relationship with His creation. No matter how far away Israel wandered, God would bring them back. And it was through that relationship that God himself showed up. God wanted to fix the relationship between us and Him so badly that He put Himself on the line in the person of Jesus Christ.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Ephesians 2:13

God became one of us. He showed up here to live out the covenant that we had promised to live out with God and failed. But where we failed, Jesus succeeded. And when it came time to call in the contract, it was Jesus who took on the penalties for failing to keep the contract instead of us. And because he fulfilled any obligations we failed to fulfill, the life He rose to live is His to offer to any He wishes. And because He wants a relationship with you and me, He offers that new life to us.

This is what Paul calls being, "In Christ." It's one of his favorite expressions and it shows up all through his letters to different churches.

Read Ephesians 2:13:

What does the blood of Christ make possible for us? Use the space below to rewrite this passage and personalize it using your name.

Being in Christ means that the life He lived and the relationships He modeled are available to us because of his sacrifice. In Luke 22:29-30 Jesus explained as much to his disciples while they were in the middle of arguing about who would get the best seat in the house. Jesus used it as a Kairos moment to explain that it wasn't the important who would get special privileges in His Kingdom. Anybody who followed Him would be given a seat at the table and have the same access to the Father that Jesus did.

Talk about an incredible promise! The New Covenant has the same terms as the Old Covenant, but it's based on the true Son of Israel, Jesus Christ. Because the contract is with Him, if I'm in Him, I am a part of the contract with God. The relationships that were broken can begin find healing.

That's what makes the triangle possible, and it's an exciting journey. Let's dive in.

Day 2

On the Upward Way

Around 150 years ago a young woman named Ellen White had a vision. It had a powerful impact on a small group of believers that were reeling from what historians call, "The Great Disappointment." It had a powerful impact on me growing up as a part of the Seventh-day Adventist community of faith and how I thought about my "walk" with God.

As the fall of 1844 approached, upwards of 10, 000 people were waiting in anticipation that Jesus would return. A Baptist farmer by the name of William Miller had discovered an exciting message in the prophecies of Daniel. Reluctant to preach at first, he had finally begun to share his insights and found that others saw the same thing in those prophecies. Now they waited for Jesus to return.

The date that had been predicted came and went, and the disappointment followed. As a part of this group, Ellen White was struggling desperately with her own disappointment. One day, as she was praying, she felt as though she were rising up above the earth, which appeared dark. She described looking around for the "Advent people" (one of the names given to those who were waiting for the second coming) and not being able to see them. An angel directed her to look a little higher. This is how she described what she saw.

At this I raised my eyes, and saw a straight and narrow path, cast up high above the world. On this path the Advent people were traveling to the city, which was at the farther end of the path. They had a bright light set up behind them at the beginning of the path, which an angel told me was the midnight cry. This light shone all

along the path and gave light for their feet so that they might not stumble. If they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the city, they were safe. – Ellen White, Early Writings, p. 14

If you're not familiar with the term, "midnight cry," it comes from a parable Jesus told about 5 wise and 5 foolish young women waiting for the bridegroom to come and take them into the wedding party. The cry went out at midnight that the bridegroom was coming. The Advent believers saw the parallels with their own experience in discovering the prophecy that pointed to Jesus returning soon.

She went on to say that as the people walked up the path they got tired. Some would look to Jesus and be encouraged, but others denied the light coming from behind them, and it went out. Then they would trip and fall into the darkness of the world below.

It proved to be a powerful encouragement for those believers that were struggling with disappointment. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus as you journey and He will keep you from falling. That was the point of the vision and it's a good one. But somehow, I also took away a couple of other points that I'm not sure were supposed to be included in the message.

I got the idea that walking with God was pretty tricky. The path was narrow and steep and one missed step could send you plummeting into the darkness. There was only room for one at a time on the path so this was something you had to do yourself. And if you didn't do it just right, you could lose your way and not make it to the end.

I want to be clear that I was wrong in my interpretation. This vision wasn't even about how I walk with God. I just put that stuff together on my own. But I don't think I'm the only one who does things like that. I can take things God intended to be pretty straight forward and get them all tangled up in my head.

Walk the walk, don't talk the walk

That's particularly true with the first part of our triangle; the UP relationship of walking humbly with God. I know that is the third relationship listed in Micah 6:8, but it is the foundation for both the others. If I am confused in my UP relationship, the IN and the OUT can get tangled too.

You’ve probably heard our UP relationship described with the metaphor, “The Christian Walk.” It’s an excellent description of what our relationship with God is supposed to be like, but the phrase has become pretty cliché over the years. And it isn’t very descriptive of the way many people live their lives with God. If we wanted to be more accurate, we would describe it as the Christian Talk, because that’s way we do.

When we do spend personal time with God, we do most, if not all, of the talking. When we’re in church, the preacher does most of the talking. And when we’re not in either of those places, we may or may not think much about God at all.

But God chose the metaphor of a walk from the very beginning to describe what it is supposed to be like spending time with Him. God came looking for Adam by taking a walk in the garden (Genesis 3:8) When Jesus called His disciples his very first invitation was to take a walk with Him. (Mark 1:17). One of the more mysterious stories in the Bible has to do with a walk.

Read Genesis 5:21-24:

What happened to Enoch?

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. Genesis 5:21-24

That’s a bit of an abrupt ending to the story, isn’t it? Whatever did happen to Enoch, it happened while he was walking with God. The act of walking with God must have been an incredibly intimate thing. One of my favorite Bible quips comes from this passage. One preacher said that God and Enoch got so close as they walked together that one day, when they realized how far they’d gone God said to Enoch, “Look, we’re closer to my house than yours. Why don’t you just come home with me.”

I think that’s a beautiful picture of the “Christian Walk.” When Micah considered what God “requires” of us, he didn’t say, “talk humbly with God.” He said “walk.” What, then does it really mean to walk with God? Before we overthink this too much, or over-spiritualize the issue, let’s think it through from the perspective of the people who wrote it.

In the ancient world, there weren’t a lot of transportation options available to the average person. If you were going to go somewhere, you

walked there. It was that simple. And that meant time together. While you walked you talked. If you passed through a village, you'd stop at the market together. If it rained, you'd huddle under a tree together until the storm passed. When night fell, you'd eat supper and sleep by the fire together.

This is how Jesus and the disciples spent their days. They walked together. This is what is at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus. That phrase didn't start out as some sort of spiritual idea. It was a literal, practical statement. Jesus said, "Follow me," and the disciples started walking with Him. Obviously that very practical action carried a lot of incredible spiritual things with it, but at the heart of following Jesus is the idea that we are doing everyday life with Him.

Walking Back to Kansas

All this makes walking with God sound so natural. Why then is it so difficult for us to build and maintain that UP relationship in our lives? If we can begin to answer that question, we'll be well on our way toward that Kingdom Life Jesus introduced and invited us to walk in.

The answer begins with recognizing where we're not. You remember that famous line that Dorothy says in *The Wizard of Oz*. "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." We're not in the Garden anymore, where walking with God was as automatic as breathing in and out. We're a long way from home and, until Jesus, nobody knew the way back. But thanks to Jesus, I can begin learning to walk with God toward the kingdom.

Any journey like that will be a daily walk with ups and downs. We won't get it right on the first try. Can you remember when you learned to ride a bike. That didn't happen on the first try. There were probably some scrapes and bruises along the way. But you got it. Toddlers spend weeks working up to those first steps and many more after that in getting their balance. Walking with God is a habit that must develop over time and practice. So, don't give up!

Since you're probably already at some stage in growing your UP relationship with God, let's consider a few tips that can strengthen what you've already discovered and make that walk even more natural.

At the heart of following Jesus is the idea that we are doing everyday life with Him.

1. Be a Copycat

When my son was much younger, I would occasionally catch him copying me out of the corner of my eye. He would be trying to stand like I was standing, or do what I was doing. Every so often I would find him standing in my shoes and trying to walk. I doubt I have to tell you what that did for my heart to see my son trying to imitate his dad.

Can you imagine what it does for the heart of God if He were to see you trying to imitate Him? Remember that we are formed in God’s image. Every positive emotion reflects something even better and more complete in the heart of God. God is proud of you when He sees your efforts to follow in His footsteps.

This is how Jesus described the secret of His walk with God.

Read John 5:19:

Which of the five senses did Jesus say He used to determine what He should be doing? What does that say about the relationship between Jesus and God the Father?

Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. John 5:19

Jesus watches what His Father does and does the same thing. Then Jesus turned around and invited the disciples to experience the same kind of relationship with both Jesus and His Father. Once, when Philip asked Jesus if He would show them the Father, Jesus was so confident in how closely he’d been following His father he could say, “If you’ve seen me, you have seen the Father.” (John 14:9)

The example Jesus gave us is incredibly helpful in making an invisible and infinite God more tangible for us. But in the 21st century, Jesus is in heaven and we’re back to a rather invisible and intangible Holy Spirit that we’re supposed to have daily connection with. How do you copy something you can’t even see?

The Apostle Paul has an interesting solution. He writes in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of

Christ.” If you are struggling to know what your walk with God should look like, find someone who is walking with God and copy them.

What are some risks of making another human being your pattern to follow? What qualities should you look for in someone you choose to follow?

2. Answer the Invitation You Already Have

God is the instigator of our relationship with Him. He is the one who is seeking us out, trying to connect with us. It’s been that way from the Garden of Eden down to the present. Our sense of distance from God is coming from us, not from Him

So, any impulse to connect with God is actually a response to a God who has been calling out to us already. When I reach out in prayer, I’m reaching toward a God who is already reaching toward me. When I offer praises to God, I’m responding to blessings He initiated. When I give of my time or money, it is a response to a God who is already given so much to us. There is a standing invitation from the Father to walk with Him. We don’t have to wait for Him to work us into His schedule. He’s already present, waiting for us to recognize He is there.

Henry Blackaby points out that “God always takes the initiative to involve people in His work.” – Experiencing God Workbook, p. 79. The key to having a dynamic walk with God is to identify where God is already working and join Him. No other invitation required.

Tomorrow, we’ll continue digging into our UP relationship.

Day 3

Upward and Onward

One of the more familiar aspects of a walk with God is the idea of taking quiet time with Him. Your quiet time isn't synonymous with your walk, but walking with God is nearly impossible without it. Think of your quiet time as putting on your spiritual walking shoes. You can walk without a quiet time, but your soul may get pretty sore before the day is done.

If you're like me, you've started a regular quiet time more times than you can count. You've made your new resolution, gathered the right materials, identified where your "prayer closet" was going to be, and made everything ready. You started well and then things fell apart. It could be that we just lack willpower and focus, but what if it isn't just you?

I've talked to thousands of Christians over the years, and when the subject of maintaining personal time with God, I've found one in hundreds that has this down. Most Christians actively struggle with their UP relationship. And those who do have a consistent habit tell me that it's something you must remain consistent with or you lose it.

Do you have a regular quiet time with God? If so, how do you maintain that in your schedule? If not, what things derail you?

Yesterday we started looking at some tips for how to strengthen our UP relationship. We looked at being a copycat and recognizing the invitation God has already extended us. Today we'll talk about three tips that directly impact the way I think about my quiet time with God.

1. Rest with Jesus

I'm not as much of a list maker as some people I know, but I appreciate the value of a good "to-do" list. Every time I have decided

to get serious about having quiet time with God, I put it on my list. I schedule it in my calendar. I write myself reminders. And I still struggle to maintain it.

To be fair, this problem is largely one of allowing the urgent things in my life to shout down the important things on my list. I think it was Stephen Covey that talked about the four types of tasks that show up on our “to-do” lists. He said our task list is usually made of things that are:

- urgent and important
- urgent but not important
- Important but not urgent
- And unimportant and not urgent

We can all continue to struggle with how to prioritize the important things in our lives. But after years of struggling with this situation, I think a change in perspective might be helpful.

Instead of making my quiet time with Jesus a task to be accomplished, how about making it something I do as part of my rest from the tasks of the day. Last week we looked at different ways to incorporate rest into our days, weeks, months, and seasons. What if time with Jesus was “down time” instead of a thing I have to do?

I know when I start missing quiet time I feel guilty for not taking time to do it. But I never feel guilty about missing a TV show or not reading my favorite book. I look forward to doing those things, but I don’t feel guilty if I don’t get to them as I’d planned.

Please don’t think I’m equating the significance of the two activities. I’m just noting that our mindset for one time of rest is very different than our thinking about the other. Perhaps it’s time to start thinking of my time with Jesus as down time with a good friend instead of a task to be checked off.

With that in mind, check out this next tip.

Instead of making my quiet time with Jesus a task to be accomplished, how about making it something I do as part of my rest from the tasks of the day.

2. Let God out of Your Prayer Closet

My quiet time with God will look very different depending on where I'm at in the natural rhythm of life that the semi-circle describes. If you're a mother with small children, tell me when you have five minutes to yourself without being so exhausted you just want to sleep. Maybe you are slowly losing your spouse to Alzheimer's. Maybe you're a swing shift worker with a crazy schedule.

Quiet time with God is first about being with God and not so much about exactly where and how you do it. Depending on your season of life or the circumstances you may be journeying through, your quiet time may look very different than the "ideal" that the books describe. If we truly are in a relationship with God, wouldn't that include our "regular" life as well as the times we tend to think of as spiritual moments?

What if we let God out of the prayer closet and find quiet time with Him in the natural flow of the day? If you are a nursing mother, one of the moments you can guarantee the baby won't be fussing is when you are nursing them. What an incredible moment to spend time with the Creator of this little life in your arms. If you're a walker, talk with God while you walk. Do you paddle board or kayak? Invite Jesus on as a passenger. Are you a fisherman? Jesus spent some time on fishing boats when He was here. I'll bet he would spend time on yours.

When I lived in Southern California, a major time challenge for people was the hours spent in commuting to and from work. Some of my church members would spend between 2 and 3 hours of their day on the freeway. Several of them discovered that time in the car could be quality time with Jesus. Flipping the radio to Christian music, listening to the Bible as they drove, even talking with Him as He sat in the passenger's seat. Plenty of quiet time with God and it really cut down on the road rage!

Mike Breen tells about a man who decided to invite Jesus to coffee every morning. He would pull up an extra chair to the table. He would buy a coffee and a cream cake for himself, and a cream cake for Jesus. His only complaint was that sometimes Jesus didn't want his cream cake, so he would have to eat both.

If we truly are in a relationship with God, wouldn't that include our "regular" life as well as the times we tend to think of as spiritual moments?

There is great value in having a quiet space for private time with Jesus, but don't get so locked into what that looks like that you can't invite Jesus out into the real world with you.

How can you connect with Jesus throughout the day?

3. Give a Gift to the Gift-Giver

What do you get for the person who has everything? That's the gift-giver's conundrum. We give gifts to people in our lives because we want to show them we appreciate them. The act of offering something from our hearts to another strengthens the relationship. But what could you possibly give to God that He doesn't already have? In a word; you.

What if walking with God was really the choice to offer who I am and what I do to Him as a gift. Eugene Peterson sees this as the real meaning of what Paul wrote in Romans 12:1. This is the way he paraphrases that passage in The Message.

*"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you:
Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping,
eating, going to work and walking around life – and
place it before God as an offering."*

Instead of limiting our time with God to religious moments, offer the everyday moments you have to him as a gift. That will certainly expand the time you have with God, won't it?

Because you were made in the image of a creative God, there is some spark of creativity in you. It may be the easy to recognize creative expressions like painting or music, or your creativity may be a little more unique. Maybe you are a true artist of organization or a wizard with a monkey wrench. What if you exercise your creativity in honor of God as a gift to Him.

It may not change what you do so much as why you do it. God has given you life and He's given you the control over what you will do with it. Choosing to give back that life to Him is an act that draws you together and strengthens the relationship between the two of you.

As you continue to develop your UP relationship with God, you'll discover that it is this relationship that makes it possible to abide in Christ. Remember that it is out of abiding in Christ that our fruitfulness develops. Without abiding, our fruitfulness is limited. Life is a journey they say; a journey filled with epic twists and turns. It's a journey you don't want to attempt alone. As you walk, walk humbly with God and your journey will be rich.

Ponder This

How is walking humbly with God different than simply walking with God?

When you spend quality time with God, how is your daily life different than when you don't?

Day 4

Get into It

Let me tell you about one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. It wasn't the most embarrassing moment, but it is certainly in my top five. It happened at a party, as many embarrassing moments tend to, but it's not what you're thinking. I didn't get drunk and make a fool of myself (I don't drink. I'm capable of making a fool of myself without the help of alcohol). I didn't say anything inappropriate or call someone by the wrong name.

I opened an envelope. Yes, there is more to the story. A lot more. You see, the party was supposed to be for someone else. I think it was a birthday party or something like that. What I didn't know is that the party was secretly for me. A bunch of my friends and church members had induced me to come under false pretense and so I was completely unaware of what was about to happen.

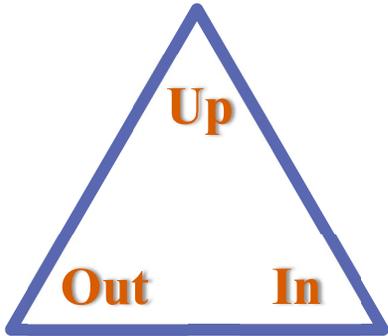
We were gathered in the living room and I was expecting the usual chatter to ensue when the Head Elder of my church took the floor. Being a somewhat trusting sort, I was completely oblivious to his designs until he handed me an envelope and explained that the contents were from the church for my family. I opened the envelope and found a significant wad of cash and a note explaining that this was a gift so that I could buy a new truck to replace the one that had broken down some months before.

Did I mention I was embarrassed? I didn't know what to say. I stammered and stuttered while the color rose in my cheeks. And lest you think I'm being ridiculous, you need to know the amount was five figures. I'm still embarrassed enough about it that I won't tell you exactly how much. It did buy a very nice used truck.

You see, I'm not very good at receiving gifts; particularly significant ones. It's embarrassing. Not only am I left speechless (which is rare for a pastor), I'm left feeling like I don't deserve that kind of gracious love and I have no idea how I'll ever return that kind of consideration. It's embarrassing.

Empty Hands

It is also the foundation of our IN relationship



Micah 6:8 defines the three essential relationships our lives function within. Yesterday we explored the meaning of walking humbly with God. This is our UP relationship. Working our way backward we come to the phrase, "love mercy."

What is the first image that comes to your mind when you think of mercy?

Walking humbly defines the essence of a daily experience with God. Loving Mercy defines the essence of my relationship with those close to me. What you will learn today about your relationships with family, friends and church will turn your world upside down.

Until recently I'd always read that two-word phrase with an outward picture in my head. Loving mercy must surely mean that I develop a heart for offering mercy to others. That is one of the essential qualities of God. It is closely connected to forgiveness and grace, which are vital to helping me deal with the inevitable wounds that come from living in relationship with broken people. It is right that I should learn to love offering mercy to others.

But God had something much more challenging in mind. We can see it more clearly in a story that catches the disciples in a less than stellar moment.

Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. Luke 22:24-26

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Read Luke 22:24-26:

What were the disciples arguing about? What do you think they were picturing when they imagined being the "greatest in the kingdom?"

Jesus explained that the kingdom of heaven was rather upside down from what the disciples were picturing. In God's kingdom, the superstars weren't at the head of the table, or even at the foot, they were standing behind the guests and serving them. Being a servant was the model Jesus held up as the pinnacle of importance.

I've been a student of leadership theory for most of my adult life. I'm intrigued by the different ways some people get other people to accept an idea or accomplish a task. One of the popular theories in Christian circles especially is the idea of servant leadership, as taught by Jesus in passages like Luke 22.

Every article and book I've ever read about servant leadership explains that the essence of servant leadership is humbly offering yourself to others. Leadership by example, by getting your hands dirty and serving with those you lead. Give of yourself so that others will trust you and do likewise.

It's a wonderful idea and can be an effective leadership model. There's just one problem. It wasn't what Jesus was saying in that passage. He wasn't even talking about leadership. He was talking about how our IN relationships are supposed to work.

In Jesus' day, there were people who gave of their time and money on behalf of others. They were called benefactors, because they had something of their own to give. Servants, on the other hand, had nothing of their own to offer. They had no discretionary time to give, they had no money or possessions of their own to speak of. If you were a servant, there was one thing you could do. You could receive.

Living in Love

In God's kingdom reality, the currency of relationships is graciously receiving and lovingly giving. It's a symbiotic relationship built on the core idea that every gift needs a recipient in order to experience the joy of giving. There is a divine interdependence that starts with a willingness to graciously accept. When I accept I bring joy to the giver and I receive what I need. Then I turn around and give to someone else who is ready to receive what is offered.

It's so much easier to be on the giving side of that equation, isn't it? It feels empowering to give something to others. I feel good about myself and my charity. But receiving things is embarrassing. I feel indebted and guilty. Being in need brings feelings of being powerless and out of control. So why would Jesus tell us we're supposed to be like needy, powerless people with nothing of our own to offer? That doesn't sound like a very good way to build a community.

Remember that Jesus was teaching His followers about the Kingdom of God. Our fears and embarrassment about receiving gifts reflect a very different kind of kingdom and its own set of assumptions. In God's kingdom of love, there is no power structure. There is no scarcity and there is no superiority. None of the fears we have about receiving connect in God's kingdom.

Ever tried to really get your mind around the Trinity? It's a mindbender to conceive of three and yet one, perfectly unified and yet completely distinct. I don't completely understand it, but I have grasped the significance of the fact that Trinity means relationship. God exists in community with Himself. Why? Well, you can never experience the joy of giving something to another if there is no one to receive it. And you can never experience the gratitude of receiving if there is no giver. Giving and receiving is foundational to a loving relationship. Love doesn't work without them. So, God exists in an eternal community that has a constant giving-receiving circle.

Giving and receiving is foundational to a loving relationship.

It should be no surprise then that when Jesus showed up on this earth He continued that kind of life while He was here.

The gospels tell us that Jesus had distinct circles of relationship. Listed below are three different relational circles Jesus “did life” with. Identify something Jesus received from each relationship.

The 3 (Mark 14:33) _____

The 12 (Mark 6:7) _____

The 72 (Luke 10:1-23) _____

Fostering my IN relationships enables me to begin experiencing the kingdom habit of receiving and then giving again.

These were Jesus’ IN relationships. He depended on them and received from them. In turn, He also gave to them and the circle continued. If it was important for Jesus to be engaged in these types of relationships, it’s important for his followers as well, isn’t it? Fostering my IN relationships enables me to begin experiencing the kingdom habit of receiving and then giving again.

Doing Life Together

This is what the Bible called having “fellowship” with one another. Most of the time it plays out in very small ways that add up to big impacts. Let me give you a sample of the way it might work. You go to sit down in your regular spot in church one Saturday morning only to discover another family is sitting there; a couple you have never met before. You sit down in the pew behind them, and instead of getting upset and boring holes in the back of their heads with your stares, you tap them on the shoulder and introduce yourself.

Now let’s pause our story for a moment and ask the question. Did this experience start with giving or receiving for you? This can be tricky, because movement is happening in both directions. There is gracious giving involved because you didn’t tell the new couple to move out of

your seat. But that only happened because you received an unexpected gift. Without knowing it, the new couple gave you the experience of changing things up a bit and you received it by sitting in the pew behind them. So, receiving is your starting point on this adventure. Now, back to the story

Very quickly you discover they moved to town a few weeks ago from an area you just happened to grow up in. You begin swapping stories about people you know in common and hit it off well. You invite them to come over for lunch after church and the conversation continues.

At lunch, your guests compliment you on the main dish and ask for the recipe and you graciously write it down for them. Your kids hit it off well and before they leave, they invite your children over for a playdate the following week. You accept the invitation. When you drop the kids off for their afternoon of fun, your new friend shows you around their house and shows off some of the redecorating they are doing. You remember you have the perfect floral arrangement and picture to go with their new décor. You offer to bring them and help with some painting and they accept.

Look back at the story above. If this were you, circle every point in the story where you received something and underline every place where you gave something.

This is doing life together. It's not particularly complicated, but it does require a willingness to go beyond pleasantries. And as you give and receive with each other, there's a bond of friendship that is naturally developing. If you keep nurturing it, it will keep growing as your friendship deepens.

It should be said that Jesus doesn't expect that you'll develop that kind of relationship with every Christian you meet. Not even Jesus did that. His relationship with Peter, James and John was more intimate than his relationship with the other nine disciples. And his relationship with them was much closer than it was with the seventy.

*By this all men will know
that you are my disciples,
if you love one another.”
John 13:35*

But building close IN relationships with some other Christians is an essential part of kingdom life. It is the way Jesus said you could tell that someone was His follower.

Read John 13:35:

If it were illegal to follow Jesus and I was accused of that crime, would my accusers be able to prove it by the standard Jesus gives in this passage?

Manufacturers put warning labels on just about everything these days. I think life should have one as well. "Don't try this alone." In spite of the challenges and risks inherent in doing life together, those who risk it discover it is the only way to really experience kingdom living.

Ponder This

Why is it important to have relationships with other Christians in our lives?

Four horizontal lines for writing.

What happens to your personal spiritual life when you are not able to be with other believers?

Four horizontal lines for writing.

Day 5

Out with It

If you've never had the chance to visit Banff National Park in the Canadian Rockies, it is something to add to your bucket list. Soaring mountains and startlingly blue lakes appear around every corner. But some of the most incredible mountains I've ever seen are right next door in the Kananaskis National Park. Massive granite mountains rise out of the valleys like God just dropped them there.

Some years ago, my father, my grandfather and I had the privilege of taking a week-long backcountry horse packing trip through that majestic scenery. Along with the scenic views, we were looking forward to visiting a particular ranger cabin along the way. It was a scene you'd find on a post card. A cute little cabin at the edge of a wide valley, flanked by massive stone peaks. And in front of that little cabin, someone had built a stone water fountain that was gravity fed. A pipe ran up the hill to a spring bubbling straight out of the rocks. Mountain fresh spring water flowed down the pipe and bubbled out of the fountain. It was about the best water you'll ever taste and we were looking forward to a drink.

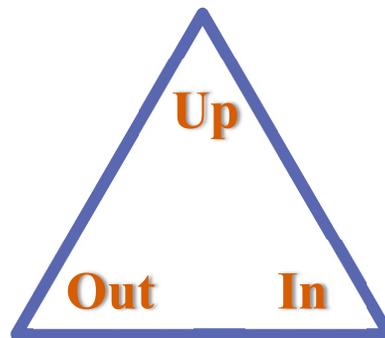
Imagine our disappointment when we rode up and discovered that there was no water in the fountain! We wondered if the spring had stopped flowing because of drought. But it hadn't been particularly dry that season. We wondered if the pipe were damaged and the rangers hadn't repaired it? So, we set off to do our own investigation.

We began following the pipe up the hill, checking for damage along the way. The pipe was intact all the way up to the small pool at the source. And it was there that we discovered the problem. A very unfortunate frog had ventured into the pool and, not realizing his danger, had been sucked onto the pipe by the force of the water. Not only did it kill poor mister frog, but it stopped up the flow of water downstream.

After a simple "frogectomy" the water was flowing again. We decided to let it flow for a while before we took a drink however.

Leaking

The question on the table, as it were, is understanding what God really wants from me. Micah's answer shows that everything God expects of me is summarized in three relationships; Do Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with God.



We've been working backward from the UP relationship with God to the IN relationship I have with my family and now we're to the OUT relationship I have with my community. Doing justly is another way of saying, "Do the right thing." As Jesus put it, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Matthew 7:12)

If we take all three of the key relationships God says we need to have in our lives to be doing what God wants, this particular relationship is the outlet that releases pressure and makes space in our lives for the other

two relationships to function. Imagine your life is like a water balloon. Your UP relationship with God is a never-ending source of spiritual water flowing into the balloon. And with that water coming in, your water balloon life will begin expanding.

You can see where this is going can't you? Eventually you either must stop the inflow or find an outflow unless you want your life to explode (and we don't want that!) You might be tempted to think that our IN relationships are a natural outflow, but they aren't. Remember that our IN relationships are based on receiving first. We receive from God or from others and then we give back to God or to others. This is what we call a closed system. The blessings flow around within the body of Christ being given and received. When this is working the way God intended, nothing is lost. So, there's no outflow here and your balloon is swelling.

But if you carefully poke a small hole or two in the balloon, as the water of God's blessings flow into you and they are shared around the body of Christ, some of those blessings flow out to others that aren't a part of the cycle. This is our OUT relationships. Dwight L Moody, the great evangelist was asked one time if he'd been filled with the Holy Spirit. "Yes," he replied, "but I leak." Unless I have places in my life where God is leaking out to the rest of the world, there's a frog in the works and the flow isn't working right. Then, even the good things that God has provided for me can become stagnant and toxic. There's no space for new blessings from the Lord pouring in.

Eventually you either must stop the inflow or find an outflow unless you want your life to explode.

If It's So Easy, why is It so Hard?

This sounds suspiciously like evangelism, doesn't it? And that is correct. That's a scary word. Outreach is something most of us try to avoid if at all possible. Suddenly a daily walk with God and a posture of receiving don't sound as difficult. Evangelism is hard; or is that idea the product of some serious misunderstandings we've developed about our OUT relationships.

What does "evangelism" mean to you?

I don't know what you wrote down in response to that question, but if your answer assumes that someone else, someone who is gifted that way and trained in those skills, will do it, then you are in the majority. Over the years we've come to associate evangelism with imparting information (truth) and selling people on ideas (converts). Evangelists are the sales force for the church. They receive special training and know all the greatest techniques for convincing people to buy what they are selling.

We then let the specialists manage our OUT relationships by proxy. An idea that might work if we could live vicariously through others, but that doesn't work too well. To have a healthy relational balance in our lives, each one of us needs a personal UP connection, a personal IN connection, and a personal OUT connection. Without a personal outlet, I don't have a useful purpose for all I've received. That's a passion killer if there ever was one.

*Without a personal outlet,
I don't have a useful
purpose for all I've
received.*

What if our ideas about evangelism and outreach are mostly wrong? I can vividly remember the first time I had the opportunity to witness to someone. I was about 17 and on a ferry between the mainland and Vancouver Island. I was standing in the bow (because that's where you feel the wind the best) and enjoying the scenery. A 20 something young man struck up a conversation with me and it somehow turned to the church I attended. That quickly turned to why I kept the Sabbath. I was excited and nervous. My palms were sweating and my heart was racing. I was half hoping my testimony would convict him on the spot and half fearful he would laugh in my face. He did neither. When I was finished with my very theological explanation, he said, "Oh. Cool." And that was the end of it.

Years later I can look back at that moment and observe a couple of things (Kairos moment anyone!). I really didn't understand the question he was asking. Because I thought witnessing and evangelism were primarily about proving why I was right, I failed to notice he was asking why the Sabbath was important to me. And because I thought the point of evangelism was to "win a soul" I was a little disappointed when he didn't drop to the deck and pray the sinner's prayer.

Let me quickly say that I very much believe in public evangelism and winning souls for Christ. I do believe there are people God gifts with the ability to be great evangelists. But that's different than our OUT relationship. In fact, without the OUT functioning in each of our lives

personally, corporate evangelism is harder than dancing the Polka in a gunny sack (no, I've never tried it, but I'll bet it's hard.)

Getting Out There

What is an authentic OUT relationship if it doesn't end up looking like the usual evangelistic methods we use in our churches? It can be just about anywhere and involve just about anything or anybody, but it will always have these three qualities:

1. It is all about relationship

When Micah talked about doing justly, he had a specific sense of what that meant. The idea of justice for the Jewish mind was anchored in the application of the law of God. Doing justly happens when we bring our reactions to things that happen to us into alignment with what God says is right.

God's intention is that my relationships with those who aren't a part of my "in" crowd would be characterized by "doing the right thing" and being, "a man of your word."

Justice becomes relational when those around me come to know me as someone who will "do the right thing" and "be a man of my word." People are hungry for authentic relationships with people they can count on. Before they ask you what you believe and where you go to church, they will be sizing you up on how trustworthy and decent you are.

List any of your neighbors that you would say is someone who does the right thing. How do you feel about them? If your neighbors were making a similar list, would you be on it?

Once a relationship is established, sharing the message of the gospel can come easily.

This is where all evangelism starts. It is all about the relationships we build with those who aren't a part of the tribe. It is about being the kind of person who others can count on. It's about being a friend for friendship's sake and not because you want to get them to come to church. It's about being open enough with your life that the Holy Spirit starts leaking out in your conversations with them.

There is more to evangelism than that, but evangelism can never be less than that. If your outreach efforts seem difficult and stressful, it is likely you're trying to share something personal with someone you haven't built a relationship with. Once a relationship is established, sharing the message of the gospel can come easily.

2. **My OUT relationships are out there**

Here's a newsflash. Jesus didn't come to build churches.

Read Mark 1:35-38:

What did Jesus say he had come to do?

If Jesus had come to build churches, he would have gathered up the interests He had gained and begun organizing. But Jesus moved on. He was on a mission to build relationships with the people outside church walls.

It's not that Jesus didn't believe in churches or that he didn't want His followers to have them. In Luke 4:16 it tells us Jesus had a regular habit of being in synagogue, which was the Jewish version of a church. Jesus was pointing out that when we make our church the end goal and the point of our life with God, we've missed the point.

Church is a function of my IN relationships. It is the place where I practice my gifts and find support and accountability for growing in my spiritual life. It is the bridge between my Up and my OUT. When we let "frogs" plug up the outlets in our lives and stay comfortably surrounded by my IN relationships they become

incestuous. I start looking critically at others who aren't in the same place I am with God.

My brother-in-law lives in Alaska and, during fishing season, he is often out on the Bering Sea running a commercial fishing boat. With a few adaptations for scale and technology, the concept of fishing they use isn't that far off from the fishing Peter and Andrew, James and John would have done. Instead of lures and poles, they use nets. Huge nets a mile long that they spool out and back in on giant spindles in the back of the boat. But no matter how big, or small, the net, seine fishing has one fundamental rule for success. You must go where the fish are.

Fishing for men has the same rule. You must go where the people are. If you are a fairly new Christian, that might actually be pretty easy. You still have quite a few relationships with people who haven't chosen to follow Christ. But the longer you have been a Christian, the more intentional you will have to be in making space for relationships with people who don't belong to your church.

How many friends do you have that aren't Christian? What are some ways you could begin building a relationship with a "pre-Christian?"

3. The Holy Spirit is already working

Do you remember how Jesus maintained his UP relationship with the Father? One of His secrets was to look for what the Father was doing and do that. It works for my OUT relationships as well. God is always working on the hearts of people who don't know Him, trying to draw them to Himself.

Read John 16:8-11:

How does this fact impact your efforts to share Jesus with your “pre-Christian” friend?

One of my favorite evangelism tools is something anybody can do. I like to ask questions. Since that afternoon on the ferry, I slowly started to realize that the more people tell me about their spiritual journey, the more I can understand where the Holy Spirit is working with them. By asking curious questions I can learn if they want to talk about something, how much they know about it, and if they are open to receiving anything from me. At the same time, they don't feel lectured to or belittled by my “superior” knowledge to the Bible.

It turns out asking questions was a favorite trick of Jesus as well. Even when He ended up in an adversarial situation, rather than argue, He would often ask a question that turned the arrows around and got the other party thinking instead of attacking.

Time for a spiritual Frogectomy

I'll confess to you that I'm not a natural evangelist. I have friends who seem to get into spiritual conversations wherever they go. I have to work at finding ways to build OUT relationships in my life. As an introvert, I don't naturally make new friends easily. But my OUT relationships are an essential part of my kingdom life. So I have to work at building those relationships a bit more.

What I can't do is let the natural outlets in my life get plugged up with the frogs of busyness, fear, or just plain laziness. God expects me to have OUT relationships in my life and, if I'm looking for them, He will begin connecting me with people who need to have someone in their life that leaks the Holy Spirit.

Ponder This

In what ways does God prepare people to come to him? What is our role in the process?

Name some places where you regularly come in contact with people who are not Christians. How could you develop deeper relationships with these people?
