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Exodus 34:29-35 (Good News Translation)

John 15:4 (Good News Translation)

Love 301: "Having a Relationship with God"

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Nothing changes the love. God's love will always be there for us whether we are intentionally connecting with God or not. Yet, when it comes to fruit bearing, that's a whole other matter. Scripture is clear, not connected, no fruit. In other words, stagnant at best, withering or just plain dead at worst.

In the Christian faith there is a emphasis on having a relationship with God. And throughout scripture we see multiple examples of men, women, and even children being in relationship with God; a relationship with God in many ways in not all that different than having a relationship with others. Sometimes we know and relate to people as a stranger, an acquaintance, a friend, a best friend, or a partner. How is it with you and God?

First, I'd like to talk about what are the essential elements of a good relationship and what you need to do to have one. Second, I would like to look at what you can expect: benefits, implications and outcomes of a good relationship.

Now, onto what are key elements of a good relationship, including a relationship with God.

- We will need to make an **effort**. Relationships suffer when we don't give them our time and effort. This holds true with God. God doesn't need it, though I believe God likes it (time/attention, effort, a vigorous, determined attempt ad effort to strengthen a bond). Let's be honest with ourselves, we give a whole lot of time and effort to

many things. That is the truth of our lives, yet it begs to be asked what might we need to spend less time and effort doing, so we can become acquainted with God or deepen our existing relationship with God. In other words, what must go or decrease!

If we want a quality relationship with God we must give God quality **time** and a quality of effort.

- Another key in a good relationship is **consistency**. It is hard to get better at something if we do it intermittently. That's just a fact; and that is also true in our relationship with God. I remember reuniting with my friend Denise after many years of not seeing or even talking to one another. It seemed at first like we just picked up where we left off. Yet, we had changed over the years (that is a problem with a childhood faith and then no activity till you're 50 when it comes to God). We need to get not reacquainted, rather we need to be reoriented. So, Denise and I talk twice a week now by phone (see lives in Atlanta, Georgia) and we are reorienting to who one another is now and we are not just reminiscing, just talking about the past. Rather, we are doing the present and looking toward the future together. So, it must be with God.: we want a relationship with God that is both where we are and where we want to be.
- For a quality relationship we must also have **trust**. We have all heard it said, that without trust in a relationship you have nothing; everything builds from there. I am not sure you don't have nothing, but it has been my experience it is hard to maintain, much deeper a relationship without trust. Trust is also important for other reasons: trust allows us to navigate the uncertain and complex world we live in today. In other words, trust in God helps you be able to handle the complexity and uncertainties of our world and deal with worries.

Trusting God helps our mental and physical health and well-being. And I would be amiss this morning, if I did not talk about how love builds when we trust someone, when we trust God, we grow in our love of God. The more we engage with God, the more we realize God can be trusted. Why? God is faithful and consistent, and thus we realize with time and experience, God can be trusted more and more, even completely.

Let me talk about an aspect of trust that has come up recently in the lives of some of us in this very room. And that is, you find yourself in a terrible way, experiencing a real crisis in your life. And then you have prayed, and prayed and prayed some more, and God seems to not answer your prayer. Let me just say, that is when we may want to tap into the people in the room who have had something difficult for years and years, despite the fact that they have prayed. Tap those folks, because they often know how you can still trust God amidst that! I personally know this to be true.

How do they do it? How do I do it? They have trust because they have found God to be present through it all. Is it more important to get an occasional answer here and there when we are in crisis or is it more important for us to know that God can be trusted to be with us, companion us, partner with us amidst our crisis and for as long as the crisis, situation, illness, or event is... which may be for years and years or for the rest of our lifetime. What serves us better is not a Santa Claus God, or an, under-girder, supporter, forever partner, and the best friend we could possibly imagine.

So far, we have these things that can help us become acquainted with or deepen our relationship with God: effort/time, consistency, and trust.

And now our last important element for our relationship with God: honesty.

- Billy Joel in his song about honesty wrote:

“Honesty is such a lonely word
everyone is so untrue
Honesty is hardly ever heard
and mostly what I need from you”.

God could have written that and does sing the song to us.

The atmosphere that is conducive to truth telling and not lying or withholding information is listening and acceptance. With God, those are givens. God does listen and God fully accepts you and me, warts and mistakes included. No relationship goes to any depth without honesty. Game playing and withholding affects us deeply and is never a winning or overcoming strategy. We can't move from where we if we don't acknowledge our feelings.

Way too many of us have been told God is a mean judge who will not only punish you, but banish you. Lies, lies, all lies! Nothing separates you and me from the love of God. God want to hear about everything, because without that the relationship won't deepen and thus we will never experience total, and unconditional love, which God wants to pour out to each and every one of us, and yes, God does mean you too! Why do you think Moses face glowed when he talked with God? Must have been the unconditional love and regard God showed him. Let's remember Moses, this guy with some bad behavior, who had a temper tantrum and

a serious outburst that left the tablet of the Ten Commandments smashed in pieces on the ground when he stomped and threw a hissy fit. God gave him another copy, without even chastising him and then gave him a second chance. God does the same for us and we too can have a our faces glow because of the time we spend with God, experiencing nothing but God's goodness, love and faithfulness.

Let me conclude, at least for today, with how Howard Thurman puts having a relationship with God. He says, "The human spirit has two fundamental demands that must be met relative to God.

- First, **God must be vast, limitless, transcendent, all-comprehensive, so that there is no thing that is outside the wide reaches of God's apprehension.**
- The second demand is that **God be personal and intimate. We must have a sense of being cared for, of not being alone and stranded in the universe.** All of us want the assurance of not being deserted *by* life nor deserted *in* life. Faith teaches us that God is—that God is the fact of life from which all other things take their meaning and reality."

Faith tells us God is. Time, effort, consistency and honesty tells us who God is .

Let us pray.

God, may we see you more clearly, as you really are, may we love you more dearly through the giving of our time, effort, consistency, and honesty.

and thank you for the glow, for it is a way for us to know that intentionally being with you and recognizing you being with

us, is but just one way for us to know that being in relationship with you makes all the difference in the world. Amen.