

Romans 10:9-13 and Romans 12:1-2 The Message

The earlier revelation was intended simply to get us ready for the Messiah, who then puts everything right for those who trust him to do it. Moses wrote that anyone who insists on using the law code to live right before God soon discovers it's not so easy—every detail of life regulated by fine print! But trusting God to shape the right living in us is a different story—no precarious climb up to heaven to recruit the Messiah, no dangerous descent into hell to rescue the Messiah. So what exactly was Moses saying?

*The word that saves is right here,
as near as the tongue in your mouth,
as close as the heart in your chest.*

It's the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God—"Jesus is my Master"—embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That's it. You're not "doing" anything; you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!"

Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it." It's exactly the same no matter what a person's religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. "Everyone who calls, 'Help, God!' gets help."

Romans 12:1-2

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. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD

We often will form an impression of someone by looking at them. Our first impressions of other people are usually based on their physical appearance.

Listen to Charles Dickens description of the boastful, self-important Mr. Bounderby in *Hard Times* 'He was a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him...' (p. 18).

Charles Dickens made the character's appearance, mannerisms and public persona vivid.

But how would Dickens or we describe someone who is invisible?

Ralph Ellison wrote a book titled "The Invisible Man" whose character is introduced by saying that he is invisible simply because others refuse to see him. It was published in 1952. It addresses many of the social and intellectual issues facing African Americans early in the twentieth century before the civil rights movement.

I think the American treatment of Black Americans back a century ago is how most Americans treat God today.

The term I would use is SEGREGATION.

A 1952 hotel/restaurant window signage was "White Only," and in small letter below it said, "maids in uniform accepted!"

Today Government says we can't pray in the schools, but a moment of silence is accepted.

We have been educated and trained to be politically correct to not offend anyone ----and God offends some folks.

We live, work and play in a secular world where God is seldom welcomed.

Most Christians, at least in the US today have been influenced by our secular culture.

We too often segregate God in and out of places in our life.

In our culture there is little place for Jesus.

Like everyone else, we often go through the day with little occasion to call on God because we are busy with other things.

That is segregating God out of our life.....and that is a big mistake!

A colorblind person can't see red or green. They see shades of gray instead. Many colorblind people are unaware of their condition until they reach their teens or even adulthood. They use the words *red* and *green* without having any experience of the actual colors.

God-blindness works the same way.

We have the word *God* in our vocabulary, but the experience of God is missing.

And like colorblind people, we go about our lives without realizing that something is wrong.

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that unless a person is born again, they cannot ever see the Kingdom of God.

Nic said, How? How can we be born again? Can we enter our mother's womb again and be born?

Jesus, with assurance told Nic that unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Without Jesus we really are blind to God. Jesus came to us as God in the flesh and Jesus gives us our first impression of God as loving us so much he would die for us. If we want to really know God we must know Jesus first.

God want us to receive his gift of salvation. Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock, open the door and I will come in. If you have never invited Jesus into your heart you must if you want to know God. God made it so simple to have Jesus in our lives, we just have to ask Jesus to come into our life and the Holy Spirit enters our soul. There are no perfect words, just tell God you want to be born again. God will understand because knows each of our hearts. After the service today I will stay up front if you would like someone to pray with.

There are some of us who have received Jesus as our own personal Lord and Savior who are living Christian lives without drawing on the full capacity of the Holy Spirit available to us.

Jesus died to save the world from sin, yes!! However, Jesus died to reconcile us to God and to be in relationship with God. God has always wanted a relationship with us. He created us to be in relationship with Him.

God met Adam and Eve every day for an afternoon walk. One day, when God went to meet Adam and Eve, they were hiding in the bushes! Why did they hide in the bushes? They were hiding because they were embarrassed to see God. They had done what God told them not to do.

If we let ourselves, we might all be hiding in the bushes because as much as we love and worship God we somehow do things we should not do. We are embarrassed. We set our relationship with God aside because we want to do what we want to do! We don't want to think about God.

Even King David, a man after God's own heart, said, "Where can I flee from your presence?" (Psalm 139:7).

We can't! There is just no way!

For some of us long time Christians attending church can give us the illusion that we are spiritually growing when in fact we are in spiritual darkness. Isaiah wrote about outward forms of religious practice, "These people ... honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Is 29:13).

I am guilty of just that. One time I remember well was in Mendenhall Mississippi. The group I was with attended a large, mostly black, mega church. The preacher was AMAZING! He talked with a southern drawl and he had a black cadence that was phenomenal. His voice was deep and wonderful to listen to. The music was something that could have been on Broadway. I was awe struck! And do you know what I said when I walked out of that church service. "I'd pay a hundred bucks to see that again!" Ohhh! I did not find God, I found entertainment.

We should attend church to worship God, not be entertained. God wants to abide with us, walk with us. Jesus is Immanuel, which means God with us. Jesus' last words in Matthew are, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (28:20). God's abiding presence was and is a very special blessing. The Old Testament stories show us that God was with Moses, Abraham, Joshua, Samuel, David and Jeremiah.

I think most of us can point to a time when we have experienced God's presence. I hope you have felt the arms of God enfold you if you found yourself sitting in the gravel on the side of the road after a car accident. Or perhaps a friend no longer wanted to be your friend or someone you trusted, betrayed you and Jesus spoke words of friendship to you. I hope you have sought and heard the quiet voice of God whisper to you when you were not sure what to do.

After Moses' encounter with the burning bush, the presence of God became an everyday normal occurrence for Moses. It was such a powerful encounter that Moses was not willing to live without God's input into his life, daily.

That is where I find myself today. I had been a Christian a long time, I would use the words, a strong Christian, serving God for a long time when I profoundly experienced God in such a way that made me not willing to go a day without seeking God's presence to be with me. It was at the U of W Hospital when my husband was very ill. We had passed a crisis and I knew he was going to be ok. You can laugh, and I am sure you will because I still do. As my husband slept in the hospital bed I began to praise God and thank God for seeing us through the crisis. God's presence in that room was so real that as I was talking with God I said loudly, "I know you are here, I feel your presence, why can't I see you?" I sensed God smile at my absolute assuredness of His presence. When I got up from the chair and opened the closet door expecting God there and then on my knees peeked under the hospital bed, just sure I would see God hiding as if a game of hide and seek, I know I felt God giggle with me at my child like faith. Ever sense that day God's presence is normal in my life.

After the golden calf incident with the Israelites Moses lamented the burden of leadership and Moses asked God for guidance. The Lord responded, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." As Moses led the nation, Moses set up a tent called the "tent of meeting" on the outskirts of the Israelite camp. There people could go to the tent to inquire of the Lord.

"In that tent Moses met with God "face to face." (I think that was why I thought I should be able to see God, after all Moses did!). When we take the time on a regular basis to seek after and meet with God, we, like Moses, are setting up a tent of meeting, a place outside the busy routines of our lives where we can be with God.

A.W. Tozer observed that "many contemporary Christians have accepted Jesus and believe they have found God, so they need no longer seek him."

NOTHING could be further from the truth.

To know God we need to seek God.

David, a man after God's own heart said,

"One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple" (Ps 27:4).

"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Ps 42:2).

"My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Ps 84:2).

Nearly 20 years ago Reality TV was newly on the air and the tv show “Survivor” debuted. An SPU student was a contestant. My family watched the show for that reason only, because an SPU student was on the show, and we became addicted. We have not missed one season of “Survivor.” And if you are a fan of the TV show “Survivor” you know the importance of knowing how to start a fire without matches or a lighter. It can be the difference of winning or losing a million dollars!

In truth, if stranded in the wild, the ability to start a fire could make the difference between life and death. There are no less than 10 different ways to start a fire, from using ones eye glasses to reflect the sun to starting a fire with a soda can and chocolate? You use the chocolate to make the bottom of the soda can shiny which also reflects the sun’s ray and can start a fire.

I would like to put forth the premise that like fire making, it is the same sort of thing with living the Christian life. We can win or lose at life’s challenges by how close we walk with God. Wouldn’t it be nice to feel you could connect with God and tap into the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in a similar fashion as making fire, with a match or lighter? Well, we can!

How?

Just like there are many unique ways to start a fire there are ways to connect with God. A lightning strike could start a fire and a lightning strike could spark an awareness of God. More likely it will be if we use God’s Words to start a flame of thought about God in our brains and heart.

Never is church attendance, church membership, bible reading, prayer or serving others a way to work our way to Heaven but when they are performed as spiritual disciplines they do promote spiritual growth in Jesus Christ.

The term “spiritual disciplines” is basically an exercise that draws one closer to God.

I like to think Spiritual Disciplines=Match sticks for Christians.

Spiritual Disciplines also include:

Silence is the discipline of becoming still so we can listen for the Lord.

Solitude is the discipline of setting aside some time and a place where we and the Lord can be alone together.

Bible study is the discipline that helps us understand and grasp the meaning of the biblical text.

Meditation is the discipline that helps us to penetrate and embrace the Scriptures for individual purposes.

Prayer is the discipline of asking God for help for yourself and others. It is talking to God and it is listening for God.

Worship is the discipline of gathering together to show our love for God to God.

Confession comes about naturally (supernaturally) as the Lord meets with us and convicts us.

Spending time with God feeds our souls and that time can be accomplished in many ways. As many ways as there are to start a fire are also to connect with God. I like to journal. Watching the sunrise or sunset in prayer can be a time of real intimacy with God. And you know, God would meet each of us for a daily walk.

When we spend time with God we lift our eyes beyond the here and now to the eternal. And the view can be very beautiful! Through our time spent with God, we can know God’s presence in our daily life from morning to night, at work, at school—everywhere we go and in everything we do.

The Practice of the Presence of God were the teaching of Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century monk. Brother Lawrence taught Christians that God is just as present in the kitchen, laundry room, garage, or back yard and at our desks as in a gorgeous church or cathedral. And Brother Lawrence’s This simple, yet profound teaching has empowered me and can empower you to seek the joy of God’s presence every day and anywhere you find yourself.

The Psalmist wrote:

“My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.
But I have stilled and quieted my soul” (Ps 131).

However,

We are busy people who live in a busy world. If we are going to spend time with God, we need to invite God to go along with us.

Jesus sits in the passenger seat of my car, and yes, we talk while I drive. There is no law against talking to God while driving! We also sing and listen to Scriptures.

In Exodus 14 the Israelites are busy leaving Egypt, Moses spoke to the people: "Don't be afraid. GOD will fight the battle for you." GOD told Moses to speak to the Israelites and order them to get moving. God said, "Hold your staff high and stretch your hand out over the sea: Split the sea! The Israelites will walk through the sea on dry ground." "Meanwhile, God said, I'll use Pharaoh and his entire army, his chariots and horsemen, to put my Glory on display so that the Egyptians will realize that I am GOD."

God is glorified, even when we are busy, especially busy doing the will of God, doing what God wants us to be doing.

Romans 12 says, "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. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Dickens may write a description that leaves a vivid impression. However, the Holy Scriptures describe the invisible God and they leave us with an eternal impression of God There are too many to share today but one of my favorites is found in Nahum Chapter one. Nahum gives us a description that reminds us that God is serious business. That God won't be trifled with. That God is all powerful, but that it is a patient power. That mountains quake, hills dissolve into mud flats and the earth shakes in fear of God. Yet Nahum also tells us that God is good, a hiding place in tough times. And Nahum ends his description of God reminding us that God recognizes and welcomes anyone looking for God's help.

Other places in Scripture give us the impression of God as a shepherd (Psalm 23), that God sees us (Genesis 16:13), that the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:5-7).

We also read that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

That the Heaven's proclaim God's righteousness (Psalm 50).

And best of all the Scriptures tell us that God so loved the world that he sent, Jesus, God's one and only son to save the world and that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life! (John 3:16).

Scripture leaves us with a pretty good impression of God. That God loves us! Amen.