

Romans 8:35-39

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

'For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I Belong to God

Welcome to Week 2 of our worship series on Dimensions of Prayer, a series designed to bring you closer to God by enhancing your prayer life...and last week I spoke of the many things that get in the way of prayer – the distractions that we face.

And I left you with two questions:

1. Why do you need God?
2. Why do you need to change?

Did anyone reflect on those questions? Would you like to share your insights?

If we believe that God is the Creator of everything we realize that God is essential for our very survival. He didn't just give us life and send us off; he **MAINTAINS** our life minute by minute.

Why do we need to change? That has to do with God's plan for us and for all creation. I need to change because the world needs to change, and I am interconnected with everyone in this world whether I want to be or not. What I do affects others, and what

others do affect me, and God's plan is that we affect each other in good ways.

But because of our sin we don't always affect each other in good ways – we hurt, we ignore, we despise, we even hate – and because we can't fix this by our own strength, we require God's strength to bring about this change in us and this change in the world. Thus the need for prayer, and a lot of it.

So how do we approach God? That's the focus of today's sermon. And let start by saying that that is a trick question - How do we approach God? Why is that a trick question? Because we don't have to approach God; GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US! Some people think of God as absent until we "summons" him in prayer, but God is always watching us and listening to us whether we know it or not. When you pray, you are not calling God like you would call your best friend on the phone; rather you are waking up and noticing that he is there next to and that he has been there all along. Our inflated ego, our exaggerated sense of self-importance, leads us to believe that we are making an effort to reach out to God, but we don't have to reach at all; we just have to take note of his presence.

So approaching God is not difficult. What IS difficult is approaching God with the right attitude. And to do that we have to believe that WE BELONG TO GOD. Why is that difficult? We like to believe that we are independent. We like to believe that we are in charge of our lives and our destiny. But the only reason we're able believe that is because God has given us a great deal of freedom to do what we want and go where we want. We make choices because God allows us to make choices about where we'll live and where we work and who we'll marry, and what kind of car we drive. God gives us a lot of freedom, including the freedom to buy things like houses and cars and boats and jewelry...

But make no mistake; we don't actually OWN our houses or our cars or our boats or our jewelry. Banks don't own them. The government doesn't own them. GOD OWNS THEM. The universe and all that is in it belongs to him. And one of the greatest obstacles that we face in building a relationship with God is the delusion that THINGS BELONG TO US. In his book *Dimensions of Prayer*, Douglas Steere

writes, **"The mindset that claims to own the universe or a portion thereof can never really pray. We are God's guests in the universe."**

So it's very important that we get that through our heads: We belong to God. What we have belongs to God. The universe belongs to God. And when we allow that to sink in, prayer becomes natural for us; we can approach God as his children – that's what Jesus told his disciples when they were shooing away the children; "Unless you come to me as a child you will not see the kingdom of God. Coming as a child means that you come without property rights, because your Dad is the one who owns the universe. – incidentally that's how Jesus taught his disciples to pray saying, "Our Father..." And Jesus uses a word for 'father' that really means "daddy." Speak to God as a child speaking to "Mommy" or "Daddy" asking for whatever you need, trusting that if you need it you'll get it and if you don't you probably don't really need it.

And when it finally sinks in that you belong to God, it should be clear to you how prayer changes you. Because if you start your prayer with the knowledge that you belong to God you realize that there are things that you don't want to give up, and those things have become your source of security – your house, your car, your phone, even your family and friends. But instead of gaining a sense of security from those things – all of which are temporary – you need to find your security in God. All those "things" should lead you to recognize just how generous God is to "loan" you all that you thought was yours – your husband or wife, your children, your friends, your house and car, cell phone and computer. But those things can never bring you eternal joy and eternal peace, because none of them are eternal. It can take us a long time to give up and give in to God, but the sooner that happens, the sooner we can get on with a life lived in to God. The French priest Henri de Tourville writes, "Do not keep accounts with our Lord...Go bankrupt!" The problem with believing that we own anything is that we think we can offer up something to God in exchange for our eternal life. Do you want eternal life? Then simply acknowledge that you belong to God and you will HAVE eternal life.

And knowing that you belong to God should also help you see the horrible tragedy that we suffer from seeking our security and joy from things OTHER than God. As I mentioned before we are all interconnected – my well-being depends upon your well-being and the well-being of everyone else on this planet. The tragedy of believing that things other than God will fill our deepest needs is what leads us to try to “own” things, to say that such and such is mine, and then we become possessive because we think that we can’t live without those things, and so we struggle to possess what doesn’t belong to us in the first place believing that there is not enough for everyone, and so people fight and kill and turn blind eyes to others’ needs. God wants to free us from that kind of life, that bondage to selfishness, fear, and sin. God certainly has a sense of humor – I’ve heard him laugh at some of the foolish things I’ve said and done. But God does not laugh when we sin, because our sins – sins of commission and sins of omission – cause others to suffer, and that in turn causes God to suffer. Blaise Pascal, the 18th century French theologian writes, **“Christ will be in agony even until the end of the world.”** Such is the love of God that he will suffer severely and constantly for us and not be satisfied until all creation embraces the love in which God holds us.

And so it is absolutely imperative that you acknowledge God’s ownership of your life. Don’t be like that child in the toy store who gets so attached to that coolest-of-all toys, who throws a tantrum and gets dragged out of the store screaming, “I want it!” It’s not yours to begin with.

And for your homework, I want to leave you with two questions:

- 1. What are the things that I am most attached to?**
- 2. What would help me let go of them?**

Don’t get me wrong: God is not trying to deprive you of things that bring you great joy, but the sooner we embrace the truth that we belong to God, the sooner we may experience true joy, and the sooner we may live life as God intends us to live it.