

JESUS IN YOU AND COMMUNICATING
Patterning After the Healthy Christ
Part 4
Dr. George O. Wood

The prophet Jeremiah coming against the conditions of his day says on behalf of the Lord “My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water. And they have dug out their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” That’s Jeremiah 2:13. We’re studying that this past Wednesday night in Bible study. For the first time that scripture became very real to me. I saw the application to this series on patterning after the healthy Christ. Jeremiah is saying God’s people have neglected springs of living water and instead have made cisterns that don’t hold water. A cistern is not a well. It’s a container of some kind that you build and put it up and it catches water – rainfall or water running off a roof. But it doesn’t have any supply of water going into it from the ground, from natural sources.

Jeremiah is complaining of the people of his day. He’s saying, You’ve neglected the living water and instead substituted it for cisterns and your cisterns are all cracked. They don’t hold water. So you wind up with nothing at all.

How true that is in respect to the emotional life, which the Lord is wanting for us. He comes to us in life and says, If any man believes in me when the Spirit comes upon him out of his inner most being shall flow rivers of living water. Then in his own lifestyle he gives us the opportunity to observe him as our model, knowing how we ought to become, what our emotions and temperament ought to be. It’s very sad to walk away from what the Lord is showing us and say, “That’s not for me. I’ll do it my way. My personality is different from the Lord’s.”

If I understand anything about being a Christian it’s simply that the Christian life is allowing Jesus to live in us. Jesus really lives in us if we have become Christians.

Nietze – the German philosopher who coined the phrase “God is dead,” – said, “If Christians wish us to believe in their redeemer why don’t they look a little bit more redeemed?”

That’s kind of the thing that we’re looking at today. Jesus in you and communicating. To communicate is to share something in common. It’s to take something out of your life and share it with someone else.

There are really two levels of communication. The level of communication whereby we relate to those about us in a general kind of way, the many friends and acquaintances that we may know. Then the other level of communication is the deeper level where our family and our deepest friends are.

We communicate with the broader circle of people in our life through friendliness and expressiveness and responsiveness to them. We communicate with that inner circle through affection and tenderness and empathy and warmth. The Lord models all these things as we look at his life.

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Let's take a moment as we've been doing in each of these messages in Patterning After the Healthy Christ, and put a dip stick into our life and see where we're at in regard to this ability to communicate warmth and love and responsiveness to others. There are eight questions.

1. Do I seldom show love and affection to members of my own family? Maybe you could even add do I seldom or never show love and affection to members of my own family? I'm impressed with how Jesus related to his disciples. That one of them could feel so close to him that he could lean on his chest and really receive his embrace. The gospel of John tells us – John in his own words – about the warmth the Lord showed toward him as a person. Sometimes we may feel silly or embarrassed in showing love and affection. But there needs to be a wholesomeness in our ability to demonstrate love and affection that makes it comfortable to express it.

Jesus in his life was very conscious of being touched and of touching. When you see him, he's touching people, isn't he? He's conscious when a woman presses through the throng to touch him. He knows when he's been touched. He knows when somebody's touched him deeply and received life from him. That's kind of a model that relates to that first question. We know I think how the Lord would answer that. He would often show love and affection to members of his own family rather than seldom.

2. A second question is this: do I find it hard to put into words how much I really care for someone?

Some of the hardest words to speak when we're caught up in ourselves are the simple words "I love you." They can be threatening words too, can't they? Luke 15:20 Jesus describing the heavenly Father says that "When the Sons of the father came back while he was a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him and then said, Let's have a party." Look at the expressiveness of God in relationship to us – able to put into actions and into words how much he really cares.

3. Do I find it hard to give compliments or to say nice things to members of my family? Jesus says to a member of his apostolic company, his family, "Blessed are you, Simon Peter." The Lord can give some rebuke now and then. He wasn't afraid to do that. But he also found his ability to praise and to say words of warmth and approval

4. Do I often keep my feelings bottled up inside of me so it's literally as though my hands were tied and a gag were on my mouth so I could not speak? Do I find myself feeling a lot of things but being unable to express them in actions or in words?

Jesus demonstrates his ability to keep feelings flowing by the gospel text, "Having loved his own who were in the world he now showed them the full extent of his love." He proceeded to act out that love by washing their feet.

5. Is it hard for me to express sympathy for someone who is very sad? Sometimes we don't know how to respond to someone who has been through a tragedy of sadness. We feel kind of awkward. Maybe we don't need to say anything. Maybe some of the healthiest things we can do when a person is sad is just be with them and put an arm around them. That's what Jesus did. He showed his healthiness in weeping. The shortest verse in the Bible; "Jesus wept." And he was deeply moved.

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6. Am I quiet and reserved in manner? The Lord identified himself as a friend of sinners.
7. Do I really express gentleness and tenderness with children? As a single adult Jesus gathered children in his arms and put his hands on them and blessed them.
8. It is hard for me to talk about personal problems as well as happy things to close friends? I find it difficult to really show the true me, where my fears and my needs are, to someone else who is very close to me.

Jesus disclosed himself to the disciples by announcements of his death. Repeatedly he talked about what was going to happen to him. In the Garden of Gethsemane he talked about his anxiety.

If you answered no to all eight of these questions it would indicate that you are a spontaneous and affectionate and demonstrate persons by and large. You see yourself as a warm and outgoing person who is a lover of people. Maybe even love yourself and have a sense that God loves you.

If you answered yes to every question it would suggest some measure of inhibition. Some measure of inability on your part to express tender feelings which you may really have. But because you're reserved and restrained, you've become very self conscious. The loving you is being contained within your reserve and your quietness.

You may have answered half and half. I didn't answer no to all of these questions. There's room for improvement in my life. I have a very selfish reason why I began preaching these sermons – I needed it. I figured if I needed it maybe there would be some other people who would join me.

A question has been raised, "Why do we become dammed off in our life so that we become unable to relate to other people in words and actions?" I want to raise that question. Why am I afraid to love? If we answered yes on a great many of these questions what is it that is keeping us back from expressing warmth and tenderness and the love of Christ to other people?

Someone has said that the beginning of life is as a bud or a flower. That bud is closed in the beginning of its existence. Only when the bud of the flower receives the warmth of the sun and the nourishment of the soil does it begin to unfold and expand and show forth all of its beauty. If however as a bud it goes through some kind of injury, such as an unseasonable frost, that flower is injured by the hostile form and it will not open. It will remain a bud.

There are some things that can happen to us in life as individual people that can cut off the warmth from developing in us so that we remain the bud and not the beautiful flower of a human being that models Jesus, that he wants.

We ought to look at some of those things that come upon us that keep us from really expressing love.

One of them would have to be family background.

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Many children who come into this life feel unwanted when they come. Maybe they feel like they were born as an accident. It's been difficult as they recognize in their growing up years that their parents had really not wanted them to begin with. Or maybe an illegitimate child. Or only one parent wanted them. Or maybe a child that was just shuttled off to other people. All of life can be lived out totally with the fact that I came into existence really unwanted. It's very difficult for an unwanted person to then turn around and express love because they're so in need of love, their life is like a sponge reaching out for love. It's very difficult for a person who feels unwanted to turn around and radiate love.

Maybe the child is a less favored child. They always felt left out and the affections always went to another child. Or maybe a battered child. We know from studies that have been done that battered children if they marry have a higher tendency to become themselves battering parents. It's been modeled, picked up. D there's been that frost in their life which has crippled their healthy emotional development as they relate to other people.

An unwholesome parental relationship can take place. Such as a desertion by an adult or by incest in the family.

Someone among us today has felt unwanted or less favored or battered. Or had an unwholesome parental relationship of some kind. Other children perhaps are driven to reach a level of performance and love is withheld unless they perform. That also can produce this crippling in our life.

Certainly family background has to be counted as one of the reasons why we get to where we're at.

Another thing that can really cripple the expression of love is if we are hurt by another person. A psychiatrist was once asked, "How do you teach people to love?" His response: "Can you teach a person to love who has a toothache? When you're sitting there with a toothache think about somebody you need to go love." The pain sort of keeps you from loving anybody at that particularly moment.

Emotional pain is much like toothache pain. Sometimes it hurts deeper and longer and it can't be taken care of like a tooth. So when we have pain we have a difficult time to really reach out and love. The moments when we have been hurt are so important to us that when we tell them we're so inhibited. We know that they're going to sound silly to somebody else.

People get hurt, divorced, broken relationships, rebuffed. Sometimes we're hurt by people who are unthinking that trample on us or criticize us. A person can live with hurt and the mean things that people say about them and walk around wounded all their life. The flower of their life never opens to others.

Sometimes we're the victims of pressure and stress and we don't love because of that. We're so busy with our agenda that things we need to get done that we don't take significant time with people. The Lord has to say, What are you loving? Things and using people? Or are you loving people and using things? There's a subtle distinction. So often we love things and use people instead of love people and use things.

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Sometimes we fail to reach out in love just because we're creatures of habit. This is the way we've always done it and that's the way we're always going to do it. We can allow ourselves to get fixed in personality ruts and never come out of them. It's possible to come out if we begin to assess where we're at and make a determination.

Sometimes we're just selfish by choice. We're going to do it and it's not a matter of our family background or a matter that we've been hurt. But just because we're selfish. This is where sometimes I think psychology errs. They say it belongs from your past somewhere. I don't think it takes in the true nature of sin. Sometimes we just make wrong and selfish and sinful decisions. We refuse to reach out and touch someone else and significantly love because we're too wrought up with doing our own kind of thing.

Our inability to express to one another love also I think ties in with our inability frequently to express love to God. Somehow we have to get past all those things and learn that just as it's right to express ourselves in healthy ways to other human beings, it's right also to express ourselves in prayer to the Lord. Personal or sometimes in corporate worship. Through the expressions of our hands, the expressions of our voice.

We have to look at why we've got where we're at.

There's some ways I think to become a more expressive and responsive person. I'd sum those ways up in three prayers. Not trying to present that this is a panacea for everything but I believe it's a helpful direction for where we can begin to go to begin to be more expressive and responsive.

One prayer certainly is this. I think it would have to be at the top of the list. "Lord, you have made me worthy." If we don't feel worthy we really can't give love. I would underline that again and again. A feeling of worth. We know that fundamentally that comes from God. God because of Christ makes us feel worthy. We're important to him that Jesus came into the world. That should rearrange our whole perspective of who we are, the act that Jesus accepts us and has made us worthy. Jesus has been with us from the moment of our conception.

I think each one of us has to look at our life and recognize that we're that precious to God that Jesus has been with us every moment of the way. We are worthy because of his grace and because of his love. When we begin to know that sense of worth then we can in turn pass it on and begin to relate to others when we find his acceptance.

Another thing I really believe we can say is Lord, deepen the level of my verbal communication. We need to communicate the real us and disclose the real us to others that are about us.

In the book Why Am I afraid to tell you who I am lists five levels of conversation.

Cliché conversation which is "Hi how are you? I'm fine thank you."

Level four the next outer level of love is reporting the facts about others. Like we come home at the end of the day, "Hi, how did things go today? What did you do today?" *I spent most of the day in the office.* Reporting facts.

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Level three – my ideas and judgment. That’s the next innermost level. What I think about things.

The next innermost level – my feelings. How I really am feeling about what is going on around me.

Peak communication where all the defenses are down and I truly disclose who I am to another human being.

It’s striking to see how the Lord develops this with the Samaritan woman. John 4:7. The Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (Level 1 – that’s cliché level.) Then the woman responds to him on level two, on the level of reporting facts. She notices “You’re a Jew and I’m a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?” The Lord then responds to her on level three – his thoughts. “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Jesus is deepening the level of communication with this woman. Then the woman responds on level four which is her level of feelings. “Give me this water, that I may never thirst again.” She’s really crying out of the emptiness of her life and disclosing herself to Jesus in a more significant way. Then Jesus comes to her on level five – the self disclosure, the authentic level. The gut level of her personality. He notices what it is that is really troubling her and keeping her in life from being what God called her to be. So he identifies it. He says, “Go call your husband and come back.” She says, “I have no husband.” He says, “You’re right you have no husband. You’ve had five and the man you’re living with now is not your husband.” Jesus touched on that peek level of communication. Then what does she want to do? Jump back up to level three. “Let’s not talk about that. I want to get back to talking theology. Our father said we should worship on Mt. Gerazim but you say Jerusalem. Where do we worship.” Jesus won’t let her do that. He comes right back down to her and finally winds up disclosing who he is. Just as he had told the woman who she was finally he says to her in verse 26, that he is the Messiah. “I who speak to you am he.” When they’re all done with that communication she goes off to the village and tells everyone, “I met a man who told me all I ever did.” She’s finally been freed because somebody met her at the peek level of her life and said, “I accept you just as you are and you can change and you can be a whole new creation.” She goes off and tells everybody. The whole village receives Jesus Christ and there’s great joy in the city. Somebody plumbed the depths and had a peek level experience in communication.

How really human tragic it is within family if we don’t get beyond five four and three levels. Never get to two and peek level of communication. Between parents and children, brothers and sisters, sisters and sisters, moms and dads and vice versa.

We can so very easily get stuck on one or the other.

To look at the level of our communication with other people, if we never get down to telling what we’re feeling or our love, our fear then we don’t really feel at home disclosing ourselves in a peek experience with someone else. We’re really living life shortchanged. The Lord wants to live in us to the fullest extent. He says, “I come to not only give you eternal life. But I come to give you abundant life.”

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A final prayer we can ask of the Lord is “Lord express your warmth through my actions.” At times we’re taught, Be strong. Hold things in. Don’t let your emotions show. Keep a stiff upper lip. When you look at the Lord you find He demonstrated warmth through his actions. Sometimes he even demonstrated anger in his actions, a righteous kind of anger. The Lord had this kind of wholesome personality that allowed people to touch him. He didn’t keep himself distinct or removed from people or reserved. There was that gregariousness, that warmth in his personality that reached out and people felt comfortable coming to him.

There’s one passage in the gospel that shows the comfortableness of Jesus in a person coming to him. But it makes me uncomfortable twenty centuries later reading it. It’s in John 7. Jesus is invited to a Pharisee’s house to eat dinner. He went there and reclined at his table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house she brought an alabaster jar of perfume and she stood behind him at his feet weeping. She began to wet his feet with his tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, poured perfume on them. Simon complains and Jesus says, You didn’t wash my feet when I came in but verse 44 “She wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss but this woman from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet.”

I’d be very uncomfortable with that I confess. There’s this tremendous warmth in his personality that lets this woman come to him in that significant way that corresponded to the level of her need to feel received and accepted by the man who had forgiven her. The Lord said you can express who you are and your emotion and your love to me and I will not deny you. I will not say, You can’t do that; that’s not proper here.

I think among Christians the Lord models this fact that among believers there can be extravagant displays of love. To the world would be extravagant. But the Christian is the person who has been freed because of the personality of Jesus Christ to be approached, to be touched. To touch others – to touch a child or a giving friend. To give a kiss and to care.

There are five times in the New Testament where the apostle Paul tells believers “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” That’s not our cultural form now. Perhaps a hearty handshake would do. But it is certain an expression of nearness in the fact that believers don’t relate to one another on just the head level but they’re brought close to one another in Christ.

The model for our love for one another is the love of Christ. Greater love has no man than Christ who has turned around and taught us “Love one another as I have loved you.” He loved us, not by remaining in the isolated palace of heaven. But he loved us by coming into our world. He loved us by speaking to us. He loved us by disclosing himself to us. That was his great mission – to tell us who he was and is. He loved us by acting, by demonstrating, by looks and by touch and by caring.

The apostle John it is said in his old age in the evening of his life would set for hours with his younger disciples gathered at his feet. One day it is related by tradition, one of his disciples complained “You always talk about God’s love for us and about our love for one another. Why don’t you tell us something besides love?” The disciple who once as a young had laid his head on Jesus’ shoulder upon his heart, is said to have replied, “Because there is nothing else. Just love. Love.”

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May Jesus be in us communicating love.

Thank you Lord for coming from your world into ours. Communicating your love and your life to us. We take this moment of introspection to even confess the areas of our life which have been unlike you because of sin. I pray, Lord, for persons who have for years who have been living damaged with the hurts of childhood would be freed in you to be who you've called them to be, rather than what someone else has made them. Lord in your name we would not accept what someone else has done to us. But we would only accept what you have done for us. That we would be free in you to reach out. That we would have the courage if we could not reach out immediately to begin the process of reconditioning so that somehow we could come to that full measure of manhood that is reflected in our Lord. Teach us as men that our true measure of manhood is not measured by some sort of macho imagery. But that our true man is you – strong and yet weak, brave and yet possessing an ability to cry, tough and yet tender. Lord, there are significant people you have put in our life – spouse, child, parent, brother or sister, friend. You want us to touch them in new and living ways to communicate to them on a deeper level than ever before. Enable us by your Spirit to be your people, to have that joy of deepening our relationship with one another. I know as we deepen our relationship with you that you're calling us to greater love for one another. Thank you for your liberating life which always gives us joy. I pray, Lord, for anyone here today that may be has never opened their own life to your love. Has never sensed that dramatic moment of all time and eternity where the scripture tells us that you so loved us that you gave your only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should have eternal life and not perish. That's the ground upon which we stand. The fact that you really do love us. We praise you for that. We pray that there will be persons whose hearts will open to you now as I pray and say, Lord, I want to receive that love. Come into my heart and into my life. Thank you, Lord, for restoring our soul. Thank you, Lord, for caring. May we as we leave this place today live as real lovers of you and other people because we have been loved by you. In Jesus' name. Amen.