

Podcast 290 Bottom Line and Full Circle

Learning how to be a better husband and father led me to knowing and loving my heavenly Father better.

Steve: Last night was a fun night for me. I was asked to go meet with some ministry leaders at a church who are wanting to incorporate family worship in the life of their fellowship. They want to encourage parents to read the Word of God with their kids. It was very different for me because I was brainstorming with them about who to change the culture of their church.

Generally I work with parents. I sure with them what we did in our home and encourage them to read the book I wrote entitled Family Worship, which talks about what we did in our family as well as what a bunch of other families have done. However we were considering how to impact a church which was a different dynamic.

Steve: Okay, so let's jump in. Father, thank You for the way that You've led our family, and thank You for the concept of family. As we discuss it today, I pray that You'll help me to be in the Spirit. Help us all to have ears that are open to what the Spirit is saying, and I pray that You'll bless that church last night that I was visiting with their ministry leaders, that You'll give them creative and effective ways in the Spirit so that they'll impact those families for God. In Jesus' name, amen.

Steve: For the first few decades of our family life, I felt called and commissioned to teach and train my sons. The concept of family worship came from the verse, "You shall teach your children diligently," in Deuteronomy 6:7. The second half of the verse reads, "And you shall talk of His commands when you walk by the way and lie down and rise up." I took that to mean being with your family and incorporating your faith into every area of your life.

By the way, the ministry leaders did their own in-house poll and found out that the majority of their families were simply being Sunday Christians as opposed to seven-day-a-week Christians and modeling their faith in front of their family. I don't know how they figured that out and what question they asked, but it was something that came up in our conversation.

Deuteronomy 6:7 was paramount in the way I trained my kids. I sought to teach them intentionally, and then live what I teach when I'm with them. That's the summation. Ten years ago, I was speaking on this passage when a mom asked me, "Why do you always talk about verse 7 without first mentioning verses 5-6?"

I didn't know, and looked them up. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart." These passages inspired and convicted me to pray, "Father, help me to love You with everything in me, and help me to love Your Word."

I was focused on building my family on biblical principles. I wanted to encourage and influence my children to love God and love His Word, and that was great—legitimate—and biblical. God used this desire to have a godly family to draw me to Himself. In Deuteronomy 6:5–6, the Scriptures teach that before I can influence my children to love God and His Word, I need to love God and His Word. In hindsight I realize that my desire to bless my family drew me closer to God.

One of our sons, when he was young and living in a parsonage, would plant himself right at the foot of the stairs, kind of in the geographical center of the home, and he would holler, “Mama! Are you?” My diligent wife was busy. She was not only a pastor’s wife, but she was homeschooling her kids, and her plate was full. She didn’t sit around reading love stories and eating bonbons. Sandi would come to him and say, “Here I am. What’s going on? How can I help you?” “I just want to be near you, Mama.” Isn’t that special? This little puppy didn’t have any specific needs. He just wanted to know where his Mama was because he wanted to be near her. Okay, so hold that thought.

I’ve been reading in 1 Corinthians in my New Testament Bible reading, and as I’m reading through chapter 10, I noticed in the 16th verse, it says, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” And I was struck by that word “participation,” and I thought, “I wonder what that means in the Greek?” So I went to Biblehub.com – and I’m sure there’s other places, but I’m really beginning to like this resource – and I looked up the word for “participation” and learned that the Greek word is *koinonia*, which most of us are familiar with.

When I think of *koinonia*, I think of fellowship. It turns out that in the feminine form, *koinonia* – ending in an “a,” which signifies it is the feminine tense – it can also mean, fellowship, or sharing, or communion. This is probably where we get the word for communion when we talk about the Lord’s Supper, because that’s what this chapter is talking about. I had always assumed that when I read the word *koinonia*, it’s like we’re gathered around the Lord’s Table and we have fellowship with each other, we have communion with each other, we share, and we commune.

However the more I looked into that word, I think it also means, that we are sharing and connecting with God at the Lord’s Supper. We’re participating – that’s what the verse says. We’re participating in the blood of Christ. We’re participating in the body of Christ, which is a mystery, and which is why it caught my attention. So, I looked at each instance the word *koinonia*, appears nineteen times in the New Testament. And as I read the verses, one passage in particular jumped out at me, the last verse in 2 Corinthians (13:14) “May the love of God, the grace of Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

I love those three phrases. Jesus, His grace, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In this passage, koinonia is used when talking about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Now, let me read the Amplified Version, which is much more verbose. Instead of just saying “fellowship, it reads the grace (favor and spiritual blessing) of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the presence and fellowship (the communion and sharing together, and participation) in the Holy Spirit be with you all.” This is what koinonia is conveying to us. This word means more than just fellowship. It’s sharing, it’s participation in, it’s communion with the Holy Spirit.

I have been ruminating on that, and this precious word, that God just doesn’t give us His bread and body to just sit there on the table and drink and remember and then move on, but He wants us – He’s inviting us to a participation in His presence, as well as a fellowship with believers. This word is vertical as well as horizontal.

Later that day I was taking my regular walk with God, and I was ruminating on these discoveries, and I was telling God that I enjoyed being near Him and fellowshiping with Him. I like sharing with Him, and communing with Him. In a nutshell I was telling God, “I enjoy You.” And I was also thinking of my son, who just wanted to be near his mom, I was thinking of koinonia, of participating with God.

It is funny how the brain works, Because I even thought of the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “What is the chief end of man?” “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” As I was telling God this, the Spirit responded and He gently posed this query: “What do you enjoy about Me?” It was a quiet question, but it was penetrating. I stopped, and I reflected, and I thought, “This is how my son must feel when he comes back from an adventure.”

My oldest boy had the opportunity to serve at a summer missions trip while he was in college. His group went to Papua New Guinea. When he returned home I asked him, “What did you like about the trip?” “Everything.” Sigh, so I rephrased the query and said, “Now, come on, give me specifics.” “It was all good.” We had to really pull teeth to get him to say, “Well, I enjoyed meeting so and so, and I enjoyed this and that,” but anyway, that’s the idea. Now, when I ask people questions, I say, “Tell me the best three things from your trip.” I try to be very specific and concrete. And that’s kind of the spirit that I felt God was saying, was, “What do you enjoy about Me?”

I stopped, and I thought, and I said, “I like being near You. I enjoy Your presence and Your fellowship.” As I responded, the Spirit immediately impressed two truths on my heart, based on two passages from Scripture. I don’t know how to convey what is on my heart, but I know these passages. I’ve talked about them, I’ve studied them, I’m familiar with them, but yet somehow, right then, in my backyard it was as if the Spirit spoke all in caps, with a period between each word. Have you ever seen that on Facebook?

Scott: Yeah.

Steve: I pause when I see those periods, and here they are: “I.AM.WITH.YOU.ALWAYS.” I know that concept. I know that truth. But in my backyard, it went deeper, because I almost heard Him saying it. “I. AM. WITH. YOU. ALWAYS.” These words went right down into my being in a whole new way, and I thought about that – wow! “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Right that second, He is with me. Right here. He’s eternally present, every minute, every day, always.

The second thing that was impressed upon me that morning was, “NOTHING. CAN. SEPARATE. ME. FROM. HIS. LOVE.” These 7 words are taken from Romans 8. Paul takes several verses to say what I just said in seven words, but it’s as if Paul is struggling with words to try to convey how awesome this truth is. Neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come nor things in heaven, nor things on earth, nothing can separate us from His love. As I put those two together, “Wow! He’s with me, and He loves me!”

I’m going to add a third truth, and even though it wasn’t spoken that morning, it’s tied into it, “GOD. NEVER. CHANGES.” Never! He’s God. He’s eternal. I like the phrase from the song, “Christ, the Solid Rock.” “When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay. On Christ the solid rock I stand.” That’s my bottom line, my solid rock on which I stand. He’s with me, He loves me, and He’s never going to change.

We’ve just completed about six podcasts talking about Jesus’ bottom line – “You are My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased.” I believe that when God spoke those words to His Son at His baptism, they went right down deep into the core of His being. I bet you He rehearsed those many times when He was being tempted by the devil for 40 days in the wilderness, as He was hanging on the cross feeling all alone, and when He was being persecuted and beat up by Pilate’s soldiers. That’s when you go to your bottom line.

I hope that we will all think through our bottom line, something that we can cling to when all around our soul gives way, when everything else is haywire, when so much is changing in the world in which we live, and we just keep coming back to our bottom line. Our truths.

The full circle is that I started by talking about how I really wanted to be a good dad, a good husband, I wanted to raise my family well based on Scripture, and was intentional about family. This quest led me to being intentional about my relationship with God. I’m more and more convinced that my relationship with my Dad is what influences my relationship with my family.

When I’m good vertically, it’s going to overflow into my family. My koinonia, my communion, sharing, participation, fellowship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is primary in having good koinonia with my wife, sons, fellow podcaster, and anybody else that God brings across my path. When I’m in a good place vertically,

then I'm just going to be a much nicer guy to be with. I'm going to communicate better, I'm going to be able to understand people better, listen better, love better, pray better – everything flows from the koinonia with heaven.

This journey of making family first priority produced an unexpected yet blessed fruit. I got to be part of God's family in a whole new way. That's the full circle. Interestingly, in the process of drawing near to my Heavenly Father, I now know Him better, and I love Him more – which is the first commandment.

Paul says, "I count everything else but loss for the sake of knowing God." Jeremiah says, "Let not the wise man boast in this... but let him that boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me." God created us to have the fellowship with Him, but not only just enjoy the fellowship, but enjoy the person that we're fellowshiping with, and enjoy Him and know Him, that's what we were designed to do.

Scott: I'm going to have to ruminate a little on my bottom line, I think.

Steve: We all need to work on our baseline. And that's what we've been trying to talk about in our podcasts. We need to grasp the fact that we're beloved, that we belong, and that we're pleasing, and I think we've done a pretty good job of covering that. This was just new that God brought to me, and I was not expecting it. I was just simply telling Him, "I like being near You." But sometimes, that's what a good question does, it forces you to reflect and examine.

The whole experience was really interesting. I've never had the Spirit of God do that before to me: "What do you enjoy about Me?" I felt what my son feels like when I try to encourage him to be specific. Don't just tell Me that you like Me. What do you like about Me?"

Let's pray. Father, thank You for that gently probing question that was done with love and forced me to go a little deeper, which is what good questions do. And thank You for the truths that You wrote in my heart in a new way, and I pray that You'll help us all to have a good, solid, eternal, biblical understanding of You and a really helpful and functional bottom line that translates into our relationship with You and overflows into our relationship with those we love and care for. Bless us this day in all that we put our hand to, and continue to make us know that You love us, You like us, and we bring great joy to You. In Jesus' name, amen.