

Living and Loving Together: What's Going on Deep Down?

So, we have the Super Bowl today

There will no doubt be plenty of stories about how the players made it this far, the personal tales of where the players came from and the things they did to succeed.

It's one of the perennially interesting stories: What makes a successful athlete.

First off, I wouldn't know. I am not even an unsuccessful athlete because, well, I've never been particularly athletic.

But when I read about top athletes, one quality stands out: from an early age, they had a very clear understanding of what they needed to work on. Great players were able to see where their weaknesses were, and they worked on those as they developed their strengths. There is usually a willingness to work with coaches to get better.

I think of my 14-year-old son. He does something after soccer games that I never did: He asks me what he could have done better after each game.

He has this genuine willingness to be more self-aware about his game. And I am sure that helps him improve, and overall enjoy soccer.

And I wanted to talk today about how we can know ourselves better as part of our sermon series that we've called, Living and Loving together.

I want to chat today about how knowing our own feelings better can help us all live together.

Here's what we've learned so far in the series.

We have seen how people each have their own separate realities.

And as we make efforts to get on with each other, we move closer, and become more connected.

And this is crucial: as people connect, and are motivated by love as they do so, they are touched by heaven and the power of heaven.

Connection itself has the power to bring the *joy of heaven* into our relationships, make our lives better, transform our hearts and minds. Connections is not just a conduit to deliver other kinds of more practical help, like solutions to their problems, advise, corrections or resources,

But they have power in and of themselves.

Now, much relies on what we as individuals bring to any relationship.

And that in turn rests on what is going on deep inside us. And often it's not clear what we feel, and we may feel many things at once, often contradictory things, and it's often the case that our strongest feelings are not conducive to connection.

Now, my goal today is not to preach a sermon that says: shape up so you can be a better friend, colleague, spouse or family member.

No, my aim today is to look at how we can be aware of what's we're really feeling. Often we do stuff, things that might not be great for our marriages, families, workplaces, and we don't even know why we're acting in the way we do.

I am not promising perfect self-awareness. That's impossible, of course. What I am hoping to show is that God knows each one of us and one of the things He does is help us know ourselves, and a lot of good things tend to happen when we become more self-aware.

And as God reveals what He sees going on in our lives, we become more likely to trust him and that trust can help us relax and have smoother, more understanding relationships.

We can bring the joy of heaven into what's going on in here.

And that fits nicely with what God is doing as He connects us with others.

And when we have that going on, we sort of get God as our personal trainer. I think that was one of Charles's way of talking about God. God as personal trainer. He is alongside us, enjoying the workout of life with us, giving us tips along the way.

Let's look at something that happens in the bible that shows God doing what I've been talking about. It's the episode called, Peter's Denial of Jesus.

Our first passage happens just after the Last Supper, which is when the disciples have their final meal with Jesus before he is arrested and then crucified. So, the disciples and Jesus finish their meal and head off to the Mount of Olives. This is what we see:

31 On the way, Jesus told them, "Tonight all of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say,

'God will strike the Shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

32 But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.”

33 Peter declared, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.”

34 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

35 “No!” Peter insisted. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And all the other disciples vowed the same.

Peter’s pretty emphatic about this commitment to Jesus there. Now, it’s the middle of the night and Jesus goes to pray on his own. He tells the disciples to keep watch, but they keep falling asleep. And Jesus at this time is in agony, because he knows his death is not far away, and he expresses his anguish to his Father several times and Jesus then recognizes that he is not going to avoid the cross, so he moves toward that fate. He is arrested, then he is tried by the religious leaders, and as he’s enduring that ordeal Peter is outside, and that’s where we pick things up.

69 Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came over and said to him, “You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean.”

70 But Peter denied it in front of everyone. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

71 Later, out by the gate, another servant girl noticed him and said to those standing around, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.[\[k\]](#)”

72 Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath. “I don’t even know the man,” he said.

73 A little later some of the other bystanders came over to Peter and said, “You must be one of them; we can tell by your Galilean accent.”

74 Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know the man!” And immediately the rooster crowed.

75 Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And he went away, weeping bitterly.

Oh dear, it’s clear that Jesus was right. Peter did deny him. But what an interesting turn of events for us. Let’s break things down a bit. First, look at how certain Peter and the disciples are that they know themselves.

No!” Peter insisted. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And all the other disciples vowed the same.

They together make that vow in response to Jesus, when he tells the, this:

Jesus told them, “Tonight all of you will desert me.

He could not have made it clearer. And Peter did deny him.

And when Peter remembers Jesus’s prediction, this is his reaction.

He went away, weeping bitterly.

Something has happened there. Something big.

He feels bad that he denied Jesus – three times. But imagine the even deeper things that happened as a result of this:

Perhaps the biggest: Peter would have realized that Jesus knew him better than he knew himself.

Let's talk about that.

Right then, Peter does not feel good. He weeps. It doesn't feel like the joy of heaven when he understands that Jesus was right. But at that moment, many doors open for Peter, if he chooses to walk through them.

He sees that Jesus knows him better than he knows himself. He understands that God is close by, and cares about his actions. And, if we read on in the bible, we also discover that Peter did not get into any trouble with Jesus for his denial, as far as we know. Jesus spends 40 days with the disciples after he is resurrected and then of course he speaks to the disciples through the Holy Spirit after he has ascended.

Peter went on to play a very important role in bringing God's love to all people.

Peter, if we look forward into the book of Acts, had a special sensitivity to what God was really up to.

In the book of Acts we see Peter have this amazing interaction with God that prompts him to go to a meeting at a house of a Roman centurion, and this meeting is pivotal in bringing the Gospel going the Gentiles.

Maybe it was in the courtyard, soon after the rooster crowed, that Peter learned forever that religious bluster is hollow – and that Jesus knows us deeply and has our best interests at heart.

Sometimes breakthrough moments like that occur – and they are great. They set us up for better things. And they do that because we know ourselves better.

And so I just want to make this point:

Faith in Jesus offers us the safest and most effective space to sort out our feelings.

Let me tell you one of the things I've realized.

Been a Christian for nearly 25 years.

My faith has been full of religious bluster that Peter shows here.

And I've also had down moments like Peter when I realized that I'd got many things wrong.

And now after two and a half decades, I am getting a better idea of what is really precious and unique about faith, at least for me.

And one of those things is that faith in Jesus really does give me a safe and effective place to sort out my feelings.

We may have frustrations and fears, and they can exact a sort of negative power over our lives and our relationships. But if we talk about those fears and frustrations with God, they will lose that negative power. Our life circumstances might change, but we stop feeling so trapped by them, or stymied by them.

I am not sure why talking about fears and frustrations weakens them. I think maybe it's because we were never built to bottle them up on our own. We don't have the strength to deal with things on our own. No one has that ability.

Jesus reveals that in the Garden of Gethsemane. He goes to his father, and as he sweats blood, he talks about the terror he's feeling, and somehow, after that, he is as ready as he can be for the cross.

There's another point I want to make about this passage, and it's this:

Faith can also help us become more engaged

Once we know our feelings better, it's much easier to understand and accept what other people want.

It works like this.

Let's say I am going through a phase when I don't like my job and I feel generally down and so when I come home I don't engage with my family as much as I should and I sit on the couch scrolling through Twitter or Insta getting more miserable as I do that. So, I go and sit on my own and talk to God about what's going on. We have a good prayer time together and I am able to express my frustrations and my deepest fears. Much of what God will do in that back and forth is show me paths I can take to feel better. And as he does that, He will no doubt talk to me about how I can benefit from being more engaged with my family and my friends and the things I can do to achieve that. And it will feel all the more doable because speaking to God about my fears and frustrations will free me up to be more engaged.

Sometimes we don't have enough left over for others because we're wasting so much energy suppressing our anger, our frustrations and fears.

Practical tips

Not wanting to do something is often a great opportunity to look deeper

- Peter did not want to stand up for Jesus. That pointed to something.
- Not wanting to do something is *sometimes* an identifier of something that might be holding us back.
- Not talking about burdensome chores but about something that should be fulfilling.
- And be willing talk to God about what you don't like about faith
- If we read something in the bible that disturbs us, bring it up with Jesus or with fellow believers.
- These can be great opportunities for God to show us care, and to reveal that, despite what we might think, His love is at work.

Tap into the River's resources when looking deeper

- Get prayer from prayer team. Specially trained. Connected to God.
- Sara Furste offers spiritual direction.
- Join a group – small group for instance.