

Training Days

I don't pretend to know in any exhaustive, iron clad manner, the Nature of God. I do not have a definitive, undisputable description of God, nor do I want to limit my sense of God by whatever inadequate definition I might be able to offer. I don't know how to describe God. What I do claim as truth about God comes from theological training, study, experience, Scripture, prayer and discernment. I am only too aware that all of that is utterly inadequate. I think God is a Mystery of Love beyond my imagination. I am not certain how much more specific or declarative I can be.

There are a number of things I **don't** believe about God. One of them is that God sits on a throne somewhere and has a ledger in which he writes what bad and good things he is going to make happen to me today. I also don't believe that God withdraws or holds back His love or even momentarily stops loving me, no matter what I say or do.

I have been preaching about Spiritual Pathways and Spiritual Journey lately. I really don't think God is very concerned about theoretical things such as my Spiritual Pathway or my Spiritual Journey.

What I believe God cares about, is the condition of my heart.

What I believe God cares about is the actions I take and how I live my life.

What I believe God cares about is how I try to live like Jesus.

Knowing what my Spiritual Pathway is, and cultivating a deeper spiritual life is a blessing for me, not for God. These tools help me to put myself in a more accessible space and a good frame of mind and heart so that I might be more in touch with God, more open to God's Spirit, clearer about how God is calling me to love, serve, and enjoy Him. God does not care if my spiritual path is Creation or Activism.

God does not care where I am on my spiritual journey. God cares that I strive to live in love and service. God cares that you and I strive to find ways to reflect His love, into the lives of others. Jesus tells the leaders

of the church, the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Matthew 22, that God's greatest commandment is for us to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and the second, that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves.

In the church we can get so caught up with the work of committees, fund raising, programming....and the reason for doing everything we do in our busy busy lives, gets so lost! Simply put – love God. Love one another. Are you connecting the dots between this invitation and all the things you do in the name of the church and in the name of Jesus?

Racing to rehearsals and meetings and study groups and worship.....why? I believe it is so we can get better at knowing God, enjoying God, loving God and hence, better at sharing that love with one another.

If I were to ask for a show of hands of those **who do not want** to know and love God more, and feel closer to God, how many hands do you think would go up? If I were to ask **who does not** want to get better at

being a better friend and neighbour and human being, how many hands do you think would go up?

I am going to ask for a show of hands on this - How many of you can swim? Play golf? Drive a car? Bake a cake?

Thank you. Again, a show of hands - How many of you were great at any of these things **the very first time you tried** - the very first time you tried to swim, or play a round of golf or drive a car or bake a cake, were you good at these things the very first time you tried?

Many of you will be familiar with the Mark Twain quote, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in 7 years."

We know more in grade 8 than we do in grade 2.

So why do we think that it is any different when it comes to knowing and loving and serving God, or loving our neighbour?

If we grow intellectually, if we have the capacity and the potential to grow in terms of our physical or our skill abilities, we should also appreciate that we grow spiritually. We are not just born fully developed, fully equipped in any dimension of our lives – emotional, intellectual, physical, or spiritual. We need to learn, practice, and mature. Some people call it training.

Those of you who play a sport or have nurtured a hobby – you know about training. You practice. You repeat. You learn technique. You practice some more. You share wisdom and experience and perspectives with others. Sometimes you succeed. Sometimes you fail. But you grow. You get better at it!

1 Timothy 4 calls us to train ourselves in godliness....for to this end we toil and struggle. Training. Spiritual training.

So learning what our preferred Spiritual Pathway is, becomes a tool for us to connect with God.....to learn more about God and how we can effectively serve God. If we learn what our Spiritual Pathway is, we can

be more intentional and deliberate about placing ourselves on that Pathways and presumably more in touch with God. When we grow spiritually, we learn more about God's love for us and how we can know and enjoy and love and serve Him. Our awareness of God's presence with us grows! Learning what our preferred Love Language is, helps us to know how we feel love, how others feel loved, and how we can speak that love language to one another. Learning about Spiritual Gifts...what our gifts are and how we can employ them, helps us to serve and enjoy God more effectively. All of these are simply tools, which may help to open us up to God. All of these things are part of our spiritual training and the tools we can use to become more aware of God's ongoing presence with us. Training is an indispensable ingredient in growing in our awareness of God's presence.

We don't train so that we can demonstrate how spiritual we are, or how religious we are, or how much Scripture we can quote. Training in the spiritual sense is so that we can grow in our love of God, our

knowledge of God, and our longing and ability to serve God. We train in the things of God so that we can be more like Jesus. We train so that we can be more effective when it comes to loving one another. We train so that we can be a Christ-like presence to one another. We train so that we might enjoy being with God in the everyday moments of life.

Can you quote 1 Corinthians 13....love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant. Love never ends.

Who cares if you can quote it? God cares that you live it!

Growing up at our cottage I was always in, on or around the water.

Often deep water! At various stages of my childhood, I was aware of what a good swimmer I was. I almost drowned on 3 separate occasions. I still get anxious when I think about it.

I had thought that I had mastered the art of swimming. I had so much more to learn. To this day I continue to train.

God bless you on your journey

Amen