

Title

WITH is better than For

This morning we are looking at the last of the four postures toward God that people settle for. Instead of living a life WITH God.

We have looked at life that is:

Under God

Over God

From God...

And this morning we will think about with a Life FOR God.

This last one is particularly challenging for earnest Christians, especially pastors. And I would be lying if I said I haven't preach more than my fair share of "You need to live for God" sermons! Within our tribe, Life For God is the probably THE most popular heresy.

Yes, I said it. The belief that...

...God created you for the sole purpose of accomplishing God's purposes in the world;

...That God's will is that you accomplish great things for Jesus; and that

...God is more pleased with us and will love us more if we live our lives totally FOR God...

Is a half-truth. And like all half-truths, it is both incredibly appealing and incredibly destructive.

You might remember that Skye Jethani introduced us to Life For God by sharing the story of Rebecca, a senior at a Christian university who wanted to be a cardiologist but was anxious because she believed God expected more of her than that – namely to become a missionary instead. Rebecca, like many of us who have grown up in church, grew up believing that some life paths are better, more holy, and therefore more pleasing to God than others. Like most young women and men, she desperately wants to please God. She wants her life to matter. The underlying fear and guilt that drives this desire can be incredibly destructive.

But this heresy doesn't just affect young people who are just starting out in life. We can carry this burden through the whole of our lives. I have had the privilege of visiting with amazing saints who lived long lives of faithfulness. And because I am a pastor, I am the one they will ask: "Why am I still here? I can't do anything for the Lord! The Lord must have me around for some reason, but I don't know why. I can't do anything for the Lord, but people are doing a lot for me."

A Life For God takes our fear of insignificance and throws gasoline on it.

A Life WITH God enables to remember that it's about collaborating with God in the mission, not doing it on God's behalf. Our doing becomes a natural expression of our being.

When we think of people who have accomplished unprecedented things for God, the apostle Paul tops the list. Surely the man who described himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ would be the greatest proponent of a Life lived For God, right? But that's not the case! Paul never made an idol out of ministry. Paul always understood that the mission of God was a means to a greater end, and that end was a WITH-God life. Doing for God is not the point. Knowing God, and being known by God, the goal. Notice what Paul says here in two of letters he wrote from prison – written from a place in which he would have been sorely tempted to ask, “Why am I still here if I can't DO anything FOR God?”

Texts

Phil 3:8-9 NRSV

⁸ ... **I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.** For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

Eph 3:14-19 NRSV

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have **the power to comprehend**, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and **to know the love of Christ** that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Can we, the church, accept that God wants us to know more that God wants us to do? Can we imagine living in the utter freedom that comes from knowing that God doesn't need us, but God really wants us?

I still remember when this idea came into my life, and shook me to the core. The belief that I only exist get God's work done was deeply ingrained in me. My desire to do something significant for God once drove me, and if I am honest it still does. But there was a moment when – as a young man desperate to prove myself – God broke through and lovingly confronted my heresy with radical grace. <Describe my experience at HUP and the scandalous nature of grace.>

There are so many young men and women who are doing all they can FOR God, and struggling under the impossible weight of that instead of being able to accept God's grace and live instead under Christ's yoke. So my call to you seasoned saints is this:

Reach out to a young person in your life.

Listen to their dreams and fears about doing something significant in life.

In your own words and from your own heart,

encourage them with God's complete acceptance of who they are, right now.
Look them in the eye and tell them, "You are enough."

And if you can't do that yet, then let me pray that you can receive that grace for yourself first.

Let us pray.