

You Will Find What Your Heart is Looking For

By Bobby Schuller

During Advent, we've been talking about Advent, on the church calendar it's a word that means the arrival. It's the root word of the word adventure. It means something great is about to happen. And as we've been counting down in Advent, we've talked about the four promises of Advent.

For me, as a pastor, I've seen kind of four major issues that I've decided to tackle during this month of December. The first is loss; many of you are facing that: the loss of a loved one or of your health or of your business or whatever. The second was shame, guilt, feeling guilty all the time. We talked about that two weeks ago. Last week we talked about this thing of finding calling and purpose. A lot of people feel like well I'm too old. I'm just kind of waiting around to die. Or a lot of young people are always asking the question – what am I supposed to do next? We talked about that.

Today we're going to talk about meaning and specifically this void or this emptiness that all of us feel. If you wake up some mornings with a pit in your stomach and you don't know why, we're going to talk about that today. Part of the human condition is that all of us are born restless. All of us are born restless. You've never seen a baby born that just comes out and just hello doctor. Mother, father, great to see you. Babies come out screaming and clawing and shouting. Babies are the rawest version

of you and me. We all come out screaming and that's what life is. There is some part of life that every bit of us is hungry, screaming, yelling, hollering, and a big part of becoming an adult is sort of hiding that. Right? A big part of becoming an adult is sort of building some boundaries around that thing that still exists in our hearts.

There's a great poet who once said every day man lives with quiet desperation and he goes to the grave with a song still in his heart. This is the existentialist dilemma; the idea that all of us have this hunger inside of us, this yearning, this wanting. And for the secular world, there's no way to really deal with this except to have fun or to stay busy. But I want you to know that hunger is from God and is cured by God. And that a lot of us, we believe this hunger, this thirst, this restlessness is a bad thing. Well guess what – maybe it's not so bad. Maybe there's some part of this burning within you that is from God and for God.

If you feel a hunger in your guts, in your bones, I want to tell you something – that hunger is for God. It's like you're one side of a magnet and he's the other and you don't know what is pulling you but there's this thing, this thing you need, this thing you want that's drawing you to him; this passion, this fire that is your soul. The Greeks really wrestled with it and they gave it a word. They gave it the word Eros. Eros is the Greek word that actually means erotic. Many of us, we always associate it with sex. But Eros, for the Greeks, was much more than that. It was a passion or a fire for something great. And for the Greeks, they believed

that all of us, especially the Greek Christians, that this was a fire to want to be reunited with God.

Today's promise is this: whatever your heart is looking for, it's looking for God. My promise is this: what your heart is looking for, you're going to find it. You're going to find it. Don't give up your search for God's power, God's life, and God's fullness. Christ is coming.

Today, Hannah read from one of my favorite stories. It's from Luke chapter 2, and it's the best Advent story. It's the story about Simeon. Simeon was an old man when this story happens, but in this story, Jesus has been born. And according to Orthodox Jewish custom, Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day, and I know this sounds weird, but after a Jewish woman gives birth, she has to go through a period of, I think they call it a cleansing or waiting. Its 40 days. And for 40 days, she's basically under house arrest. She can't leave. She has to stay there. And the levitical law says it's for the cleansing, it's a cleansing of the woman and etc. I actually think this is God's way of protecting women from infection because many women back then worked with animals and other things. They didn't have germ theory. And by protecting the woman and keeping her in the house, it protected her from many of the germs that are in the world; that they allowed the woman to heal.

But Jesus then comes for this ritualistic thing where after that 40 days, they come and they bring their baby to the temple. And so Mary and Joseph are bringing now a 40 day old baby Jesus to the temple for

this consecrating event. And in this event, normally the mother would make a sacrifice of a lamb. A lamb is very expensive back in those days. And so Mary and Joseph actually made the sacrifice of the doves, the two doves. And this was called the poor man's sacrifice. And it actually reinforces that Jesus was actually born into a very poor family that didn't have much. They didn't have enough to do like the really nice offering. They had to do the poor man's offering. There's something really sweet about Jesus being born in a manger and being born sort of into our poverty. And it's a symbol that he's a king but he's so human that he faces all the challenges that poor people face, and if you're poor, Christ knows what that's like.

And there's a man named Simeon who had been promised that in his life someday he would see the coming of this Messiah. Now the Messiah had been prophesied for 500 years. That someday there would be this man that would come and he would change and save everything and Simeon was promised by the Holy Spirit that someday he would see the coming of the Lord's Messiah. And I like to think that Simeon was told when he was a young man. Now scripture doesn't say that, but I like to think when he was young, early, he was told this by the spirit and he'd been waiting his whole life for the coming of Christ.

And the scriptures say that the Holy Spirit led him into the temple to see the child. And there he saw Jesus. And he went up to the baby and he held it in his arms and he said "at last, Lord, as you have

promised, send your servant now to go in peace. For my eyes have seen the coming of your salvation – a light to the Gentiles.”

Simeon is a symbol, is the symbol of Advent. When Simeon holds the baby Jesus, there is something in him that says everything I’ve been waiting for in my life has happened. Simeon doesn’t die right there then on the spot, but as an old man, he basically says to God I’ve seen it. I’ve seen the coming of the Messiah. And he essentially says I can die now. I can die. The major part of walking as a Christian, as a believer is being able to say whether you’re young or old, whether you’re sick or healthy, I can die now. This is such an important part of what it means to walk in Christ. That no matter what, in your life, you are prepared. That you are at peace with God. And that happens when this void inside your heart is filled with Christ. All of us desire him, all of us want to reach out for him, and all of us want to, whether young or old, have this kind of Simeon experience. Not that I want to die, but that if I died today I experienced everything that it was meant to live. That I one hundred percent know full life, completely, right now because I touched Jesus Christ.

And I want to tell you today that Christ is calling to you. That just as the Holy Spirit guided Simeon to go into that temple, the spirit is guiding you to come to Christ. And that whoever you are, Christ wants to hold you as Simeon held that baby that you might say Lord you can send me in peace. I can be fulfilled and complete and made whole in Christ Jesus. And the thing is, when you get to a point where you’re ready to

die, there's never been a point in your life where you felt more alive. And that's what I want for you. That you're ready today, no matter what happens, that you are filled with eternal life.

There is in every human heart a vacuum; a hole. This is Blasé Pasqual that said this. We might today say there is a sucking sound coming from your heart that for all of us we are born, literally with a vacuum right here. And that thing, that the only thing that fits in that hole that really satiates that thirst is the knowledge of God's love. Having an intimate personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the only thing that puts that void at rest. All of us human beings, regardless of our religion, our background, all of us feel this in us. Some of us have become numb to it, others of us have felt it with God, but most of us feel it and we try and fill it with other things. And you can take really good things and fill that hole and those things become corrupt. Whether those things are substance or food or friends or relationships or television. You can take literally anything, even religion and try and fill that hole, and it won't work. Only God, a personal relationship with God, can fill that void. Only true intimacy with the Lord can satiate that thirst.

This is why St. Augustine wrote in his famous words in the confessions, "our hearts are restless till they rest in him." There is an answer to all of us who are hungering and thirsting. The answer is Jesus Christ. Only he can fill the deepest void.

And so I want to promise you something. It's a promise that Jesus made himself: "Ask and you'll receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened." If you seek after the Lord, you'll find him. You'll find him and you'll find more than you ever thought you would find. You'll find eternal life and living water, something you never expected.

Well many of us, we say I want to know God, I want to feel God, but Bobby, how do I do that? Well, I know you hate this answer and I say it all the time, but I don't really know. I believe that there are two ways in which God sort of manifests his life, especially to Christians. And its two things that seem opposite but they actually harmonize: Solitude and Community. Solitude and Community. What would happen, you know, many of us, whatever your thing is, all of us have these props that we utilize to fill that void. For some of us, it can be having fun, its video games, its drinking, it's going out with friends, it's whatever. We have these things. People do these things to fill this void, to stay busy, to constantly go, go, go, do, do, do. Maybe it's your work. Maybe it's your errands. What would happen if you were stripped of all of those things? What would happen if you didn't have your cell phone, and if you didn't have any errands, and if you didn't have anyone knocking at the door, and if you didn't have a job? What would happen to your life if God for only a moment stripped you of all of those things, who would you be?

For many of us, this feels and sounds like a nightmare. I can't imagine what it would be like to be without my piano. Or whatever it is.

The thing that you do all the time. And the truth is, if you were stripped of the things that you love to do every day to keep you busy, you would actually find maybe, especially if you go to church here, that you're loved by God. And you'd find that you don't need those things. And you would mostly find that even when you thought you were alone, you weren't. You'll actually find that God was with you the whole time. This is why solitude is so important as a discipline for Christians.

There's a famous story that guys like me preaching on solitude love to talk about with Elijah. Elijah was in the mountains and he was searching for God and it said this great wind came and it split the mountain and rocks fell. But God was not in the wind. And then it says a fire came but God was not in the fire. And an earthquake came but God was not in the earthquake. And then a gentle whisper came and it said 'Elijah, why are you here?' See this is so important because those symbols: the earthquake, the fire, the lightning, that's how we think God is going to speak to us, but God speaks to us in the silence. He speaks to us in the rest. He speaks to us in solitude. It is so important that we have built into our lives rhythms to just stop doing stuff. To just pause a moment and rest and not send cards and check emails and call people. To just relax and rest. And not even feel like you have to pray or read your bible. To just stop and create space for God to speak to you.

There was a great study that Paul Jensen put in his book "Subversive Spirituality" where he talks about this study where this man

actually who is fascinated by what happens to people when they're like on a submarine, or when they're in the hospital, or in prison, and he wanted to see what would happen if I actually forced people to do this. And so in a study for smokers, which is one of the hardest addictions to beat, I know many of you know that, that to quit smoking is so hard. And so he did this study where for twenty four hours, he would put people in basically a black box. Very comfortable, they had a bed, they had food and they had a toilet, but there was no light, and there was no sound for 24-hours. And he actually found that of the group that actually did that study, the success rate of defeating their addiction to nicotine way outweighed the people that didn't do that. That there was something about being in a box where there's no lights, no sound, no one calling, I can't do anything except just be comfortable, that that actually forced that person to look inward. Anyone who has any kind of addiction or any kind of substance thing that is the last thing they want to do is to look inward. All of us are that way. But solitude forced those people to take a moment and look at their life. And they couldn't engage in any distractions at all.

Solitude is a detox! And you need it! Solitude's a detox and it's the thing that removes all the things that are between you and God. When the time comes that you die, those things are not going with you. You want to have a relationship with God in which you understand what it

means to be with God even when you can't see anything and hear anything or reach anyone, and that's what solitude does.

Most of all, solitude truly prepares us for community. And I'll finish with this last idea. Christmas is about incarnation. Incarnation is a word we use a lot. Incarnation literally means to put meat on something. If you speak Spanish, carne, carne asada? Carne means meat! Incarnation means to literally put skin and bones on something. There was an old story of a girl who was crying and the dad came in and she said 'I'm scared of the lightning outside, and I'm just terrified.' And he's like 'okay well we'll pray' and they prayed and they prayed that God would come and comfort her, and he said 'do you feel better?' And she said 'no! I need a God with some skin on him.'

There is something to that, by the way, that for Christians, we worship a God with skin. We worship a God who became a human being. And most of all, and this is so important. This is what's so often lost in Christian theology. We worship a God that is among us in you and me. That although we recognize that Jesus Christ is the son of God and he was in fleshed and he was with us, well in that physical way, it feels like he's not here anymore, but Christianity has always taught that he is. That he's in you and he's in me. That because the Holy Spirit lives within us, that literally when another Christian hugs you, even though that person is hugging you, Jesus is hugging you, too. And the most profound experiences you can have of God's goodness and the devil's evil is always

going to be through the body of another person. It's always going to be when someone lovingly puts a hand on your shoulder, or in an evil way, hits you or harms you in some way. That the best goodness and the worst evil always comes through the body of another.

And this is what I want to point out to you, friends. Is that you can't just experience God in the beautiful solitude, wonderful ways, all the worship music, the things that you do in silent, you also have to experience God through people! That God wants to engage with you most of all through others, through community and that's why the church matters today, more than ever. Science has now become, in our modern society, the front, like the main way in which people view the world is through science. I think it's really a shame because even though science is such a wonderful and important discipline, it's not the only discipline. And I've watched as things like philosophy and history, and especially religion have now kind of been overshadowed, in many ways, by science, and science has attempted to create meaning for everyone while things like religion have diminished in secular society. But science can't do it.

And one real way that this shows itself is through technology. How we try and create community through technology. We have more ways to connect with each other than we've ever had. If we're friends, I can call you, I can email you, I can Facetime you, I can text you, I can Facebook you, I can Tweet you, I can YouTube you. And the list goes on and on and on. There are more and more ways in which we can connect, and yet

community has never been more fake and fragmented in our nation's history.

We are training ourselves that the best way to have community is the safest way, and that is, hiding behind a screen. The best way to have community is to pick the perfect picture, and the perfect personal description, and show only the best memories to the people I'm connected with. Never posting a picture of me weeping, never posting a picture of me sick, never posting a picture of me feeling alone because you need God with skin on him. You need to feel community. You need to actually shake hands and hug your friends and actually talk to people face to face, and have an actual shoulder to cry on when you weep. We need community! I feel like people are going crazy. Technology is meant to be like vitamins, not food. It's meant to help us, it's not meant to be a replacement. And that's what it's become. All those things are great, but they're a supplement, they're not the real deal.

All of us need community. And one of the best ways that we experience God's love and power is through people. And I want you to know that when another human being that is filled with the Holy Spirit says I love you, God is saying I love you, too. He's using that person to say it to you. And my bet is the time you've experience God the most, the time you've experienced the devil the most is through people. That's what Christianity is. It's the belief that through Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit abides in every single person who has faith. And that even though those

people can even harm you sometimes that God is still in there somehow and all of us need community.

If you hear anything I say today, it's this: when you think of your spirituality as training, nothing trains you more than the friends you have. Community is the most important mode of training that you have. As a pastor, I have seen and talked to parents that have children that do some pretty rotten things. I've talked to the parents of murderers, I've talked to the parents of rapists. Some of the worst, the most harmful, violent people in society and the parents always say, always say the same thing – he was just with the wrong friends. They never say he is evil, he's a bad person. They always say the same thing. He just got in the wrong circle with the wrong sorts of friends. Because parents recognize that when their child goes from being good to evil, by being someone who does good it almost always begins when they get in the wrong circle of friends.

And we know that as parents, but why is it that we don't want for ourselves what we want for our children? We want for ourselves to be rich, but for our children we want them to be happy. We want for ourselves to be fun, but for our children we want them to be moral. We want for ourselves to hang out with whomever we want to hang out, we want our children to hang out with the right kinds of people. It's because we love our children more than we love ourselves. If you learn to love yourself, take the advice you give to your kids and think about the kinds of friends that you have and surround yourself, although you know it's

important to reach people and help people that are hurting, you should have friends in your life that are godly people that inspire you to be a better person.

You should weave into your life people that are positive, that love you, that are encouraging you, that are forgiving you, and that especially draw out of you your emotions and can weep with you and comfort you when you're going through hard times. That's what the church is supposed to be. Any church that is not that, is not truly a church. It's a club. And we need to form in every church, whether a pastors or in our small groups, a community of people who encourage one another and who realign our hearts with the kingdom reality that every human being deserves dignity because every human being is loved by God. And we need to be realigned in our competitive, painful world that always diminishes us and says we're not pretty enough, or handsome enough, or successful enough, or young enough, or whatever it is, that we come in line with God's love that those voices are fake and phony and don't matter. That there's one voice that matters that says you're not what you do, you're not what you have, you're not what people say about you. You're my son, you're my daughter and I love you and that will never go away. Amen?

So my promise to you is this – that sucking sound that's in your heart, and you always turn to other things, turn to God. Christ is calling. He will fill it and that is the promise of Advent and Christmas. Amen?

Let's pray: Father, we thank you that you are a good God. The hound of heaven that never stops seeking after us. Lord, we seek after you and we pray, Father that you would fill this void, this restlessness that is in our heart. We pray that it would always drive us into your arms and not drive us into temptation. Lord, renew us, save us, change us and mold us into the likeness of your son Jesus. It's in his name we pray, amen.