

You Get a Fresh Start.

By Bobby Schuller

Today we're continuing a very long series that will go all the way through Easter. And it's called The Narrow Road. Jesus promises in the Sermon on the Mount that the road to life is a very narrow, difficult road, and the road to death is a very broad and easy road. What he means by that is if we want to inherit eternal life, and by the way that promise is not just to the afterlife, it's right now. If we want to inherit eternal living, as Dallas Willard called it, we have to trust in the teaching and wisdom of Jesus Christ and in his person. So if we are willing to do some of the most difficult things in life, we can inherit this great thing.

And today's sermon, I think of all the sermons I'm going to give, is going to be the most important of like 18 I'm giving in this series. And in fact many of the other sermons I'm going to be given are just reinforcing what I'm going to talk about today – and that is simply this: your greatest human need is to bond with others. Very often I'll say the greatest human need is dignity and that's what I mean when I say that. If we don't walk in dignity, we very often find ourselves wrapped up in a lie, withdrawing, and in everything you do that's unhealthy, almost everything is coming from your unmet ability to bond deeply with others. This is not only Christianity, this is psychology. This has actually been proved that your greatest need is to find some sense of deep connectivity. And that's not just in your romantic relationships, but in your

friendships, bonding with your kids, your parents, even some of your colleagues at work, to have relationships in life in which you feel deeply connected. In other words your greatest need is to connect deeply with others.

And many of us, we live every day exhausted and we think it's because of our job, and sometimes it is just because of our health issue or we're getting older or things just aren't the way they used to be or whatever. And what we don't recognize is that much of our total lack of energy is coming from a place where we're not bonding deeply with other people. Reverse that – the most joyful, courageous Jesus-like people are the ones who are able to connect deeply with God, and in particular, connect deeply with other people and have embraced their imperfections. You know they don't love it, but they're okay with where they are and they're trusting those things to God and just being honest and real and connecting deeply. Those are the people that have the most energy and the most joy, and you're that type of person. God is teaching you to let go of having to prove yourself. To find your identity in grace, not in works. And you're learning to reach out, and you're learning to show your true self to your friends and your family, and you're trusting that you really are wanted by them. You are. You are. People want the real you. God wants the real you, I want the real you, and so do people.

Very often, many of us, we have lots of friends. Maybe you're in a big family. And yet in the midst of that it's easy to feel out of energy or

even lonely. How can I have lots of friends and a big family and still feel lonely. I've felt that much of my life until I learned how to connect deeply with others, and we're going to talk about that today. Janis Joplin was once asked what's it like being a rock star, and she said it's like making love to ten thousand people and going to bed alone. It's an interesting thought. I think some of us can resonate with that. We look at what the world has to offer. If we do well enough, we can be famous and masses of people can love us, and we can have lots of money and amazing trophies and climb mountains and learn all sorts of amazing skills and do great things, but in the end, if we don't have love, the scripture says, it's all worthless. It's all worthless.

The thing you need most in your life is to not only love others, but to be loved and to really feel it; to bond deeply with others. And the only way that happens is when you are truly yourself, and the people you're with are truly themselves. And when that happens God brings together people in really terrific, amazing ways. God wants to offer you more emotional energy today. God wants to give you the fullness and life of his Holy Spirit today that you live every day in the mist of all your storms and everything with joy because you're connected deeply with your friends and your family.

The biggest thing that gets in the way of us actually connecting with others is shame. Shame gets in the way. Not guilt, shame. Guilt is a good thing. Guilt is outside your body, outside your identity. Guilt says

I'm a good person, I did a bad thing. Right? That's not like me to shout at somebody. It's not like me to get drunk. It's not like me to.. whatever - the thing that you feel guilty about. And so you simply say I'm going to fix this and I'm going to do it better. Shame says of course I did that. Of course I made a mistake. I always do that. I'm never going to be better. I need to hide these things about myself because if people truly saw me, they'd reject me. So guilt says I made a mistake, shame says I am a mistake. Guilt says my actions are unworthy, shame says I am unworthy and there's a big, big difference.

Jesus Christ died on the cross, not only to remove your sin; he died to remove your shame so that you could inherit the beloved-ness of being a son or daughter of God. So that you could live every day with confidence that in spite of your mistakes, God really does love you, he blesses you, he favors you, he calls you his own. That if you walk by faith, you walk by faith, in the end, your works will be good because they'll flow naturally out of the good things God is doing in your life and so you don't have to be ashamed. Feel guilty sometimes, but never shame. Let that go. You are worthy of love and belonging. You are wanted by other people as you are. Believe it and your life will change.

Shame takes on lots of masks and faces, but it's always the same thing. It's always saying I'm not enough. Shame looks like busyness, constantly always doing something to prove myself. Shame looks like compiling trophies. Shame looks like always serving people even though

nobody serves me and nobody notices. Shame can actually take the form of strictness – that’s very common. Strict, rigid legalistic people are usually some of the people who struggle with shame the most. They feel the most unworthy of belonging. Shame most commonly results in withdraw, passivity, depression. Shame says something like I can’t tell that person, they wounded me because then they’ll leave me. Or I can’t tell that person I’m angry because I’ll hurt their feelings and that’ll cause division between us. Shame says I can’t talk about how I feel; I can’t say what I think. Shame says I can’t share an opinion so I don’t want to push people away. Shame says I can’t say no so I’m going to just avoid it altogether or say yes to everything. And all of these things are so bad for you. They’re running you ragged. We need to let go of our fear of abandonment and embrace, by faith, the idea that God wants us, and that there are people in our lives who want us. And the people who don’t want us, well fine, no problem. Really. We need to get there. We need to get there.

The problem is, when we live by shame, always ashamed of this or that, we don’t look a certain way, we haven’t accomplished enough, we don’t do enough or whatever, we don’t have enough, we don’t have a good enough reputation, the problem is that when we live from that place, that draws us into depression, into addiction, into sin which then reinforces our shame and makes us more isolated than we ever were, so we got to break that. And the way you break that is a good old bible, old fashioned

grace. It's all about the cross. Just trust in that. It's all about that and you can be who you are. All the skeletons in your closet, everything, you can be just exactly who you are. When you are vulnerable, you think you're going to push people away. When you're honest about your addictions, when you're honest about your feelings, when you're honest about your thoughts and your opinions, you're not going to push most people away. You're going to push some people away, but they're probably unhealthy anyway.

What's mostly going to happen is you're going to draw people to you. Why? Because everyone feels safer around sinners! Everyone feels safer around people who are human. It's so much easier to talk to a drunk than it is a pastor. It is! When you are vulnerable about your flaws and your mistakes; see here's the thing: everybody's a sinner. Some people are just more honest. And the people that are honest about their sins, and not just your sins but honest about your fears, your doubts. You're honest about your weaknesses. Honest about your regrets. That doesn't push people away. It's telegraphing that I trust you. That's why I'm telling you this. And what usually happens is not only will people comfort you, they will begin to open up their own hearts to you. I've never told anybody this before - and right there some of the most important things happen in your life.

Have you ever sat by a fire and talked with an old friend? And it can feel like four hours fly by. And you leave that conversation, even

though it's three in the morning or something, you should be exhausted, you're going to bed somehow energized, alive. That word is called flow. It actually has a word for it. When you get into a groove with a good friend, or your spouse, or one of your kids that energizes you. The opposite can happen, too. Have you ever had a long.. its maybe a fifteen minute conversation about the weather with somebody you care about, but it can feel like it goes forever and you leave exhausted.

All of these things again are touching on our deepest need – to bond with other people. When we meet with the people we love and we don't bond with them in some meaningful way, and we continue to not bond with people in certain ways, that relationship leaves us disappointed, and therefore leaves us exhausted. We need to connect deeply with people. We need to be our true selves, we need to be seen deeply, and we need to see others deeply and until that happens, we will not have the emotional energy to do what God has called us to do. We need to stop trying to be perfect. Christians are not perfect, right? They're not perfect. That's why we need Jesus. So today I want to convince you do less, be more and connect deeply with others.

The scripture reading from today was John 15, one of the most famous passages in the bible, one of my favorite sermons for Jesus. Have you ever been on a spiritual retreat? Very likely this one's going to come up. In John 15, Jesus says.. I'll give you the abridged version. I could spend hours on this, literally on every line, but it's essentially like this:

Jesus says I am the vine, and you are branches attached to me, the vine. As long as you're attached to me, everything's going to be okay. If you break from me and try and do things on your own, you will wither and die and you'll be cut from the vine. My Father is the gardener and he takes care of this vine, and he makes sure that every branch is cared for and that it bears fruit. You will bear fruit if you abide in me; if you stay connected to me. And as you are connected to me, you will receive everything you need to reach out and bear fruit. If you do what I command, you are abiding in me and this is my command – love one another. If you love one another, you will be abiding in me. It's something like that. This passage is amazing. It is the perfect description of the inner life of Christ.

We first begin, not by loving people, we begin by abiding in the vine. This word abiding, by the way, means to find your home in. It'd be like if you went up to the mountains and you were sledding. And you're out with your brothers and sisters or your friends or something, and you get in a snowball fight, it starts to snow and you think we got to get back to the cabin. And you're getting back and the snow's starting to pick up. And maybe you're feeling a little bit scared. And finally you see the smoke on the horizon. There's the cabin, you're trudging through the snow, it's snowing. You come into the house and there's hot chocolate. Grandma Persley has made hot chocolate. And you come in, and you come in and it's warm and it's safe, and you take that outer layer off. And

then the best part, the best part is taking off the socks because the socks don't come off, they peel off. They're wet. So they peel off. And you hang dripping icy cold socks on the fire and you put your kind of damp wrinkly feet up by the fire and just start warming them up. And you look outside and you see the storm raging and the wind blowing and the snow falling, but you are safe, you're comfortable, you're with the people you love. It may be snowing outside, but it's nice and warm in here. And there's something that the snow itself goes from being dangerous to something that's beautiful and even fun.

Okay. That is a perfect description. We don't have this word in English, but that's a perfect description of this Greek word Menno. Our best translation is to abide. Abide. But it's so much richer than that. And Jesus says do that in me. Abide in my love. Let my love be your cabin in the snow. John 15 doesn't say that but I did. Abide in me, find a home in me, be safe in me, and when you feel safe in my love, then instead of turning inward and crystallizing and holding onto everything, you're going to learn like branches on a vine to open up, to bloom, and to reach out. And you reaching out is you loving others as I have loved you. That's what it's all about: being rooted in the vine, being safe in Jesus Christ, and finding the freedom to be messed up, broken, flawed individuals looking for love. That's what we are.

And if you think you have to be perfect before you feel safe enough to reach out to people, you will die alone. Nobody is perfect. Nobody is

even close. In fact the people that are closest to being perfect are those who have learned to be at peace with their imperfections. They're the ones who feel safe in God's kingdom, and can just take their mask off and say friends, family, this is me. I love you. I'm scared. I'm hurting. I'm a sinner. I'm broken. I'm angry. It's good to be real. It's bad to be fake. You can love others because you're safe. You can remain in his love. You don't have to prove anything to anybody. You do enough. You are enough. You don't have to prove anything to God. You don't have to prove anything to me. Just abide in him and love others and everything else will fall in its right place. That's the truth.

Our world is so busy. Everybody's so busy and exhausted. Everybody's constantly going, doing a million things. Not you. You're learning to rest and let go. Maybe you're listening and you're like I'm not busy, I struggle to get out of the house. And sometimes there's a busyness of action, but there's also, and I really want to talk to a lot of you today. Listen: there's a busyness of mind. Just resentment, bitterness, self pity, regret, always wondering about my health, always wondering about money, always worrying about my job, there's a busyness of mind. Let that go, too. Just relax, just chill out, and just be you and allow God to do the work. Amen?

And that's what you're doing. That's what you're doing. You're learning. You're learning to let go. You don't have to tell it like it is; you don't have to fix everything. Things can be imperfect. Everything doesn't

have to be perfect and right. You can let that go and just love people. And you are. I'm so proud of you.

So be there for people. Your relationships, your friends and family are the most important thing in your life! So be there for people. The only way to be there for people is to give them time. Love is spelled T-I-M-E. The people who love you need your time. They need it. The people who love you need you around. And you need to set time for them and not give all of your time to errands. Don't give all your time to people you're not super close to. Don't give all your time to your job or your business even. You have to, have to lean into your friends and family. They're the most important thing. And the only way we're going to do that is if we stop being so lazy with the way we plan our lives. Let me get to that in a minute.

C.S. Lewis said only lazy people are busy. I always loved that quote. Only lazy people are busy. There's a big difference between busy and being productive. Stop being so busy all the time. Un-clutter your life. Leave large gaps in your life for nothing, including no TV, no anything. Just have big gaps in your life where you can be available to the people you love. You think in your busyness you're being productive, you're probably not 80% of the time. You may be familiar with this name, Vilfredo Pareto, anyone familiar with that? Pareto's principle? Pareto's principle is more commonly known the 80/20 principle. He was a 19th century Italian economist who was measuring productivity and he

actually came across this strange thing. When he was gardening, he found that 80% of the peas in his garden were coming from 20% of the pea pods. And he found a ratio that he found very, very common in economics and in life in general. That 20% of the input is responsible for 80% of the outcome. That's true in this church. Probably 20% of this church is responsible for 80% of the volunteering. Right? Twenty percent of an organization is usually responsible for 80% of the success, and so on and so forth. And sometimes this ratio is even more extreme. It can be 90/10 percent, it can be 99/1 percent. In your life, 20% of the work that you're doing is responsible for 80% of your success. That means that there's probably 80% of your time that's probably not that productive. Most of the stuff we're doing isn't really producing or accomplishing much at all. And it's lazy to not take the time to analyze how we're wasting our time in busyness rather than spending our time doing things we love, or in particular, bonding with others. 80/20 principle.

Tim Ferris, who is not a Christian, he's a business person but he said he realized that being busy is a form of laziness, lazy thinking, and indiscriminate action. He actually found in his vitamin business, before he wrote this famous book, that 80% of his clientele was only responsible for 20% of his business. So he like fired 80% of his customers. He's like I'm just going to lean into the 20% that are producing income. He said within six weeks his business income quadrupled because he was leaning into those who were producing. I'm going off the reservation. The

point is this: you think you're being productive by working all hours of the night, you're not. And it's so good to let go of those things and lean into bonding deeply with others.

And you're like well I want to bond deeply, but what if people don't want to bond deeply with me? You just got to make a choice. Hannah was telling me that this was a need that she felt. And her brother Nate was like 'one of the best relationships I ever had was when I got a prayer partner.' So Hannah did that. She was telling me she got a prayer partner, and now like she and her prayer partner are very, very tight. And it's all about that once a week they just get together and they talk about, you know, when you pray, you're talking about your needs. They just get together and they pray. And she says it's been one of the most life giving awesome relationships. So you have to have this in your life if you want to have energy.

So there are four things you need in order to bond. Number one, the most important, you need to be vulnerable. I've said like a million times today, let me say it again – being vulnerable means that you allow people to see deeper into your life. I remember in our small group, we were very surfacey, talking about the bible, talking about this, what was going on, and one day the question came up what is something that offends you most. And I was astonished that everyone in our small group had very different answers to the question – what offends you most. And by answering that, we were able to talk about the heart of some of our

deepest wounded-ness, and it causes us to bond in incredible ways. By the way, small groups are starting next week. You should sign up for it if you want to bond deeply with others. So number one: be vulnerable. Allow people to see deeply.

Number two: don't resent the responsibility of relationships. Every relationship means there's more responsibility. Your life is like pigs at a trough. Every time a pig squeezes in, another pig gets bumped out. It just happens and you can't resent it. You have to be okay with the fact that time is the currency of love. If you love your job more than you love your friends and family, your time is going to go to your job. So you cannot resent the fact that like when I became a boyfriend, I had more responsibilities, when I became a husband, etc., this happens. So time is the currency of love.

Number three: be the first. Be the first to set up a date night, be the first to call your friend to get together to go bowling or whatever it is you do, be the first to say you're sorry. Keep being the first. I know a lot of you are saying I'm always the first! Be the first to talk to your spouse about how you're always the first. Okay? Be vulnerable. Speak from your heart and your life will change forever.

And fourth and finally: believe you are wanted. Believe you are wanted just as you are. Believe that if you get angry you're still wanted. Believe that if you share an opinion, you're still wanted. Believe that if you're not as attractive as you used to be, you're still wanted. Believe

that even if you fail at your job or failed in your endeavors, you're still wanted. Believe that regardless of what you've done or what you have or what people say about you, you're still wanted. You are wanted. You are more than wanted, you're needed. People in your life, they need you. Believe it. Believe it with all your heart. You are worthy of love and belonging, not because of your accomplishments or because of your good behavior, you're worthy just as you are. Believe it with all your heart and you will never be the same. Amen?

I can't go without giving you an opportunity to connect with God. It's so hard to connect with people if you don't connect with God. And today I want to convince you that it's a great day to become a Christian. I believe that becoming a Christian begins with an act of courage and it carries on with an act of courage, and that's why I think a tradition of standing up in front of a bunch of people is so important to becoming a believer.

So if you want to become a Christian today, if you've fallen away in your faith and you want to come back to God, if you want to go to heaven, if you want to receive Christ, I want to invite you to do that today. The bible says that if you have the faith of a mustard seed, that's all the Lord needs. And maybe you say only one percent of my life believes, 99% of my mind doesn't believe in God, but one percent does, that's all God needs to do a miracle in your life.

So if there's anybody here today, and you want to become a believer, with every head up, and everybody looking around, look at your neighbor and say is this you? I want to invite you to stand up and to give me thirty seconds of your time to stand up and just come down here and let me pray for you. Just come on down. The bible says today is the day of salvation. Just come. Receive from God. He loves you.

Friends would you pray with me? And let's have the whole church; we're going to pray together. Let's all hold our hands out like this as a sign of receiving grace, and new life and a new name. So would everyone, let's pray this together. Repeat after me: Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Make me a new creation. I am forgiven. I am loved. I am blessed. I have your faith and I trust in you, in Jesus' name, amen. Your life will never be the same. And before you go, guys, go to this prayer room and we'll give you a book on how to live as Christ, and we just want to connect with you guys. Give us a year of your life. Just attend church for a year of your life and you'll never be the same again. We love you so much. Just go this way. We appreciate you. Thank you so much.