

Be Seen: You Can Trust Others

By Bobby Schuller

Beginning a new series today, a very short one, only four weeks, and we're talking about the deepest human need. The deepest human need is bonding. That is to connect with others. The more deeply you connect with others, the more full and rich your life is. And the less you connect with others, the more empty, bored, scary your life becomes. And today we want to just talk about something that's often forgotten in the church and that is that one of the best ways you can experience God is through people. One of the best ways others can experience God is through you. You might be the only Jesus somebody meets today.

When I was 15, I was going through a little bit of a rough time in my life. It's just when you're kind of getting into the swing of things in high school, really kind of moving from that awkward junior high phase to kind of finding your place in the totem pole of high school-ness. And I was a having a rough time. My parents were divorced and I just had other challenges, and I remember that a lot of my friends were sort of starting to go down the road of perdition, drugs and things like that. And I started to.. I didn't do drugs, but I started to kind of dip my toe in the water and my parents didn't want me hanging out with those kids anymore. So I found myself not having a lot of friends and feeling really

angry and embittered. I felt angry towards God. My mom was going through this strange.. like not strange but really important personal religious transformation, which at the time I actually didn't like. My dad was a pastor, as you know, and it was just in a weird place in my life.

And I remember, I got out of the shower one morning and I looked in the mirror and when I looked in my own eyes, I saw nothing. I saw a sort of emptiness. And I saw what I felt, and I hadn't really noticed it till then, but I just felt this sense of emptiness.

And it was not long after that, I was actually with my mom's side of the family at the Anaheim Hilton for a convention, and it was there in the lobby I met a preacher. And this old preacher, we talked about piano, this and that, and I might have told you this story before, but I'll never forget how it felt looking in this man of God's eyes. I saw something there powerful, to the point that it actually like affected me physically. It created not a nervousness but just a weird sense of power. Like there was something really supernaturally powerful about this man. We talked for about an hour, but I would never forget seeing something awesome in his eyes.

That day I went to this convention, where he preached, and I became a believer; I entrusted my life to Christ. Not long after that, we moved to Oklahoma. It was like three weeks later, and I got plugged in with this church, and I went to this big youth event, and God was doing

things in my life where He was forming in me a new life different than the one I had. And it was about a year after that experience of becoming a Christian and being baptized I got out of the shower one morning, I wasn't looking for it, and I looked in the mirror and I saw the same thing in my own eyes that I saw in that old preacher's eyes. I looked in my face and I saw that someone had taken residence in my life, and His name was Jesus Christ. And I knew in that time that the Spirit of God had filled my body just as it did him, not because of my perfection or because I was a better person or something, I knew it was just because of faith, because I believed.

And today we're going to talk about that. You have that. If you trust in Jesus Christ, He's in you. And one of the things we forget, what's the most central teachings to the Christian faith is that we Christians believe the greatest way to experience God is through other Christians. That God dwells in the skin of the one who believes in Him. He's in you, and He's in me, and though we experience God in our quiet times and in our times of silence and solitude and those are important, man do we also experience God through hearing a prayer, or an encouraging word, or empathy from another believer. And that's what we're going to talk about today.

Our deepest need is to bond deeply with other people. But the greatest barrier to that is a sometimes unknown or unrecognized deep

feeling that as a whole, I am not worthy of belonging. I'm not worthy of love. There are some things about ourselves that we really like, but there's these other things that most of us will keep hidden that we think are shameful, embarrassing and not worth love, but they're a part of us.

And this probably more than anything is THE thing that keeps us from bonding deeply with others; that keeps us from having a deep sense of joy. I just want to let you know you can let go of that and you can be you just as you are. That's called being vulnerable where you allow yourself to be open to shame, ridicule and attack. You risk that but you do it because you believe that the payoff could be a deep connection bonding with another person.

Quite simply, when you bond with another believer, you bond with the Lord. When you experience love from another believer, you experience it from the Lord. And is our world in need of bonding and deep relationships and friendships? Absolutely. Our world has grown more restless today than it ever has. People are showing only their best and hiding their worst more than they ever have. Everyone's wearing a mask. And especially in a place like Orange County California where there's a lot of money and fame and pride, it's hard not to compare yourself to people that are more beautiful than you, or successful than you. It's hard not to reinforce the voice of the enemy that says you're not worthy of love and belonging. You got to prove yourself, you got to do

more, you got to look better, you got to act better. God says my beloved child, come as you are.

Our world is restless and it's not connecting deep. Cell phones aren't helping. I remember Simon Sinek was talking about how it used to be when you'd go into a meeting, people would sit around. They'd be at a table before the meeting began and people would be like hey, how's your dad? Hey, how's your mom? How's your degree going? Whatever. Now what happens when you go into a meeting, right? You got eight people in a room, the meeting hasn't started so everybody's just.. I'm connecting.. deeply with others through the Internet. Can't you see how joyful I am? This is meaningful and I'm a happy person. L-O-L. So what's happening is people are connecting through the Internet and through other ways, but they're not really connecting. And this is a real problem because especially the younger generations haven't learned what it means to put the phone away, to not just like have it.. to not just like, huh? Look at that. These young kids! I'm telling you these young kids today and their cell phones. You need to put it away.

So what happens is as we go through life and we only show our best and not our worst, as you would on Facebook or just going to the mall or whatever it is you do, that there is this hunger that begins to develop in you and that hunger can be partially satiated through entertainment, or through buying some new clothes, or having a great

meal, or having a glass of wine, or doing good things, but we find that oh that distracts me from this sense that there's something missing in my life, and so this is the beginning of addiction and compulsive behavior; that when we miss out on a deep friendship, whether it's with our spouse or our kids or our parents or our colleagues, and we begin to turn to other things, entertaining things, because there's this void; we often call it boredom, but its emptiness. And God has a better way! And that something better is called Christian joy. Joy! When you wake up in the morning with a smile, with a sense of purpose and fresh vision and life! And entertaining things are entertaining, and they're fun and they're great, but the greatest thing in my life is this overflow of joy that comes from what? It comes from God, but how does it get there? It comes through people. Through bonding. Through deep, emotional, good friendships and that only happens when we're brave enough to be our true selves, warts and all.

That's why we do this creed every single week. Why we identify as a beloved of God and not what we do and what we wear or how we look or how old we are or our accomplishments, but we simply every single week align our minds with the idea that I'm loved by God just as I am and not as I should be. Because only when we believe that do we get the courage to reach out to others vulnerably and be like hey, these are some of my things I struggle with, these are some of my doubts and

fears, this is who I am, but I'm just reaching out to you because I need a friend. And then that person's like oh! I'm addicted to that, too! Right? Or oh, I'm afraid of that, too! I'm glad somebody's not perfect around here. And that's a really good thing.

So I want you to know today that God wants you to experience Him, not just in those mountaintop moments alone, but He also wants you to experience Him through people. You're worthy of love and belonging, and when you start being vulnerable with the people who love you, you're going to see that a lot of people love you just as you are, and you don't have to prove anything. Isn't that good news?

The scripture reading for today is John 17. And in this passage Jesus is teaching us that we know God's love through unity; through connecting deeply with other people. It's a powerful passage. It's at the end of what's called a departure sermon. And in this sermon, this is the last thing Jesus tells His disciples before He goes to the cross and it's in verse 20. Jesus says: "My prayer is not for them alone," He's talking about the 12 disciples, "but I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." Did you catch that? He wants people to be one in the same way the Father and the Son are one. That's a strong one-ness, right? "May they be in us that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me," so God's

given you the glory of Jesus, “that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity.”

Okay this is an important word. In Greek its Ginosko. “Then the world will know.” Everybody say know. This word here, in the west, when we say know, it’s just in our head, right? To know something. To know someone is to know facts about them. But the Greek idea to know someone is to be close friend with them. To know is an intimate word. In the bible, when it says a man made love to his wife, the actual word says “and the man knew her,” or “the man knew his wife.”

So the idea of knowledge is intimacy. Its depth. Its deep. And this says “then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them,” and I’m going to say it this way, “as much as you love me.” “Even as you have loved me” is what the NIV says. But the same thing that when they are together and bonded deeply with one another, then the world will know that you love them as much as you love me. How many of you know God loves you up here in your head? Maybe you can raise your hand, I don’t know. But if you’re like me, I could know it here but I don’t always feel it. Huh? I don’t always feel it. I don’t KNOW it! You know when I know something. Like I know my kids love me. I know my wife loves me. But do I always know God loves me? Sometimes, to be honest with you, I don’t.

Well how do you get that sensation, that feeling that God really loves me? Jesus tells us right here. You get it through the church. You get it through people. You get it through bonding deeply. The times in which you're going to feel most love by God is when you feel most loved by other people. That's the truth. The Christian idea of incarnation is that God is doing His work of love and charity and compassion through people.

Could be that somebody is here today and saying God, take this depression from me. And God is saying to you, I can, reach out to people. Some of you are saying God, take this addiction from me. I've been carrying this for years. And He's saying I can, reach out to other believers. Lord! Lord, won't you take away this poverty, or take away my lack of purpose, or take away my sense of meaninglessness in life, and God is saying to you bond deeply with other believers. If you want to KNOW God loves you, I mean KNOW it you're going to know it through other people. That's Christianity. Christianity. And you will.

And if today is any.. it's a prophecy over your life that in the past you may have struggled to bond deeply with others, but God is going to teach you through the word and through this church that by being vulnerable and being who you are, warts and all, even the stuff you hate about yourself and all your bad memories and all your regrets and all this stuff you're ashamed about, that as you become vulnerable with

other people, you're going to experience God's love and grace and mercy and power. Isn't that good news?

And maybe you feel busy but unproductive. You got a lot of friends but you feel lonely. You got people in your life but you feel isolated, that's because you're lacking bonding and God's bringing that to an end today because you're going to learn to stop bullying yourself and believing that you're not worthy of love and belonging, and you're just going to start reaching out to people. It seems weak. It's not. It's so strong to be vulnerable and honest about who you are with others. So we know God's love, not only when we feel it on the mountaintop, but when we feel it through another person. When someone throws their arms around your neck when you're going through a trial. Another believer does that and they just hold you and give you a big hug, it's the Lord doing that, too. And you feel it. And you know it. And when you've got it, you can endure just about anything.

The world needs bonding, the world needs real friendships, the world needs to go deep with others and that's why the church is the answer. And when I say the church, I don't mean an institution, I don't mean a bunch of creeds and robes and buildings, but when I say church, I mean the family of God on earth. That we as the church, not just Shepherd's Grove, but all believers united in compassion and love for one another; the family of Abraham blessed and called doing God's

good work in the world, that's the answer to a world that is restless and competitive and angry and dog eat dog. A church full of mercy and compassion and love and grace and guidance, and that's the answer. Not a proud church but a humble church that's vulnerable. Can I get an amen?

That's the answer. We call it incarnational theology. It's an orthodox of view. This is not heresy. It's actually core to Christian belief, and that is that Christ sits on the throne of the heart of every baptized believer. That Jesus is actually in this building in 900 bodies, or whatever is here. That He dwells in the physical body of every single believer.

In Greek, there are two words for body. The first word is Soma. Everyone say Soma like that. Just Soma. Very good word for body. Soma is like, you know, Arnold Schwarzenegger, right? It's like a very.. body, you know. It's like what, Hannah, for a girl? Jillian Michaels. Jillian Michaels. The body, the Olympian, the athlete, the cleanly shaved, well bathed body of someone. And usually in Paganism when gods are described and heroes are described, this word is used Soma.

There's another word in Greek for body, it's called Sarx. Everybody say Sarx. Sarx is; it's like B.O. and body hair and ear wax and all the things.. dandruff and all the.. I got to use the bathroom. It's very

negative. It's often translated as flesh, like this idea has not a positive connotation at all.

And in Jesus' day, there was this group called the Gnostics, and there was this Greek philosophy that it was kind of a mystic philosophy that everything that is spiritual is good, and everything that is physical is bad. That's not a Christian or Jewish idea, by the way. And the apostle John, who writes the gospel of John, starts his monologue like this. And he's speaking to these Gnostics who think the body is bad. He says "in the beginning was the word." The Greek word is logos, it's where we get ology from. It means science, knowledge, all ideas. This is really heavy Greek philosophical word. "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God," and guess what, the word became Sarx! The word took on skin and flesh and eats and goes to the bathroom and has B.O. and it hasn't showered long enough and hair and the word became a dude and dwelt among us.

And if you're reading it, you're not hearing it that way. If you're reading it in Greek, especially in the first century, that's kind of how it sounds weird and kind of funny. John is going over the top to say that the word of God, all these vast, great spiritual ideas became a dude. Became a man. And He dwelt among us and through His skin He blessed the world. Through His skin, He healed the sick. And through His skin, He embraced the reject. And through His skin, He went to

those who were cast away by the religious. And through His skin, He saved the world on the cross. And that this man brought all of heaven through His Sarx. That even though He was tempted and suffered and struggled and sweat and bled and did all the things that it means to be human, He was able to bring into this world something so good.

C.S. Lewis said that the son of God became a man that men could become the beloved sons of God. And that the women could be beloved daughters of God. And ain't it the truth? And this is so important because the core to Christian belief is not imperfection but embrace. That even though all of us have all of our Sarx, our temptations, our lack of hygiene sometimes, our aging, our sickness, our addictions, our illness, that even through that, the light of Christ can shine. And that even through that, through my Christian neighbor, even though he's got some real, real issues, you know what I mean? He's got some real baggage, this guy right here. You can still experience Jesus Christ through your imperfect neighbor. And sometimes we find that the imperfect Christians, they're the ones we experience God through the most because they're the most honest about their baggage.

I don't know about you, but I want a God with some skin on Him. That was something; that old story that there was a child who was weeping because of a storm and the dad came in and he hugged him and he said 'don't worry, son. God will protect you.' And the son threw

his arms around his father's neck and held him close and still weeping said, 'no, I want a God with skin on Him.' You ever feel that way? You see that son was experiencing God through the present skin-ness of his father. That by his father being there and hugging him, that's how he experienced God's comfort, not some ethereal idea. And though we do experience God in that way, alone on the mountaintop, in that pursuit it's easy to forget that you also can experience God the most through your spouse. Through your children. Through your annoying neighbor that always puts her purse in your spot here at church. Huh? Through your colleagues at work. Through the people you're doing life with. That in every single believer is an opportunity to look into the eyes of Jesus Christ. And to hear the words you're loved, you're forgiven, you're called, you're blessed. You want to know God, know your neighbor.

Paul calls us the body of Christ, and that wasn't a metaphor, it was real. He literally meant we are the body of Christ. Look at your hands. Whose hands are those? Those are your hands, but those are also the hands of Christ because Christ is in you. And that's why those hands are meant to bless, to hold, to embrace, to forgive, to be open, to be generous, to be life-giving. It is through our imperfect Sarx, through all of the things that we don't like about ourselves and all of our lack of perfection that Jesus can still shine through and do ministry. You think my prayer is more powerful than yours because I'm a pastor or

something? It's not. If Christ is in you, He prays through me and He prays through you. Isn't that awesome?

So you want to experience God, you're saying Lord, take this addiction from me. He's saying connect deeply with others. Lord, take this depression from me. Connect deeply with others. Lord, take this loneliness, take this lack of vision. He's saying to you connect deeply with others and you will. Isn't that good news?

I'll just finish with this last thought. Connecting deeply with people means that you are seen deeply, and it is just that simple. That when you are seen deeply, you can be loved deeply. But if there is a deep part of you that is unseen, there is also a deep part of you that is unloved. And it is so important that like an internal wound that you allow that wound to be seen, not by the whole world, but by people you trust who will empathize and love you. To be loved deeply means to be seen deeply and the cross and grace allows for that to happen.

To connect deeply with others and I'm especially talking to young people here, but connecting deeply with others does not mean just having fun with them. And this is something that a lot of people in my generation miss out. They think I'm going to go do fun stuff with people like me, and when the fun is happening it really is fun, but when they get home, they come home feeling lonely. And so the drive is to do more fun things. And what they think is that having fun is meeting a felt need

of connecting deeply with others, but it's not. You're just having fun and it becomes a distraction, and you leave going.. you don't realize it, you didn't get what you needed from your friends, and that was deep vulnerable bonding.

So it's not just fun, although having fun is great and can get you there, but its deep bonding. And it's not just talking about the weather. Can I get an amen from all the introverts in the house. Introverts hate talking about the weather, and there's a reason for that because if you're wanting to connect deeply with your spouse or a friend and you're just like talking about Angels, you're just talking about whatever, you're not bonding with that person. You've got to bridge from the Angels game to something deeper and the only way you do that is by being vulnerable. By being brave. By talking about the stuff you're going through and how it feels and by men, can I say this, getting in touch with your emotions and what's happening to you emotionally. And if you feel numb in life, it's in part because you're not in touch with unconscious stuff that's going on in your life. So it is so important.

You're here today and maybe you came to church or you're watching on TV and you're looking from a touch from God, and your quiet times have been dry, and your prayer life has felt empty, and you don't like reading your bible anymore, I'm telling you, the Lord is telling you to connect deeply with other believers. Not just have fun with them,

not just volunteer with them, not just talk to them, but to go to a place where you have some people in your life that you're bonded with, and sometimes that's hard work. It means going deeply, being vulnerable, being seen deeply, confessing your struggles and your doubts, and you're just going to find that the more you do that, you're going to see how lovable you are, how valuable you are, how needed you are, and all this stuff: all this potential and life and purpose that's been laying dormant in your soul, maybe for years, is going to start to spring to life, and that's very good news. Amen? Thank you.

God, thank you for all that you're doing in our church. We trust you. And Lord, I just want to pray a special blessing for everyone that's here that feels isolated, lonely, maybe busy or unproductive. Maybe we feel like we have a lot of people in our lives but we still feel alone, I pray, God, that you'd bring that to an end today and help us, Lord, to bond deeply with others, in Jesus' name, amen.