

Be There: Being Present and Responsible

By Bobby Schuller

We're in a short series today in the third part. If you're just joining, you don't have to have heard the other parts, but we're talking about the deepest need of every human being. And the most important need that we have is to bond deeply with God and to bond deeply with people, and then as Christians to remember that bonding deeply with people is one of the most important ways we bond with God.

And so we talk a lot about what it means to have a good relationship with God, but these few weeks we're going to talk about our relationships with one another and how those relationships build us spiritually and work within us everything we need to live a life of victory.

If you're bonded deeply with people, every victory has flavor and joy. If you cross that finish line alone and you don't have any friends or family, it'll end up being empty. Everything in life only matters when we do it with friends, or we do it with family. The things we do alone, if we do it alone too long, they end up just being that – alone. And nobody wants that! What we all need more than anything is not to just have friends, and not to just have family, but to bond deeply with them. That is that they see the deepest parts of your life, and you see the deepest parts of theirs and love one another anyway.

And rest assured, when you get to the end of this journey, that is, this life on earth, the only thing you're going to be thinking about is your relationship with God and your relationship with your family and your friends. All those trophies, all those cars and properties or money or work or whatever it is that you've done in your life, none of it will matter if you don't feel right with God, and if you don't feel right with your friends and your family.

And so that's why today we want to especially focus on what it means to bond deeply, not only as a husband or a wife, or as parents, but even as friends. In fact I think talking about it in terms of being a friend is probably one the best things we can do. I don't know about you, but I'm putting my phone in airplane mode. All right, there we go. Someone's texting me. Let's put our phones in silent, okay? Don't text me right now, I'm busy. Okay. I thought about giving you Chad Blake's phone number and saying it was mine. But then I changed my mind. I changed my mind. I don't know it by heart, so I can't do that.

So when we die and go to be with the Lord, or when we're getting ready to die, that's what we're going to be thinking about, isn't it. We're going to be thinking about our family, our friends, and how we are with God.

So, one of the best ways you can grow in your relationship with God is to bond deeply with others. And the best way you can break the

bondage of sin in your life is not by trying harder. The way you break the bondage of sin in your life, that is after you've been forgiven by the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the practical way you break bondage of sin and addiction in your life is by bonding deeply with other believers. That's it! Bonding deeply is the cure! For sin and addiction, bonding deeply with God and with others. That's the cure. That's how it happens. If anyone has been an alcoholic or addicted to substance, and you've gotten better, it's because you got a friend in your life, you got a part of some kind of a program that taught you how to go deeper with God and with people.

And so it is so important that we stop beating ourselves up about our sin or our addiction or our problems, maybe you're a workaholic, maybe you can't stop spending money, maybe you're struggling with depression, I'm telling you the cure is bonding deeply with people. Make it the most important thing in your life and you'll become an energetic, positive, joy-filled, vision-filled believer, and this is what God wants for you: that you would bond deeply with others.

So often in life we're searching for the answers in all the wrong places: in our work or in our hobbies or in our entertainment, all of those things are important and you should engage in them. The most important thing is sometimes right in front of you: your best friend, your

siblings, your parents, your kids and your spouse. This is what matters. And this is one of the greatest ways God is going to grow you.

For many of us, if you're anything like me, I've had to learn to come emotionally alive. And for me, when my kids got annoying, or my relationships got difficult, it's easy to give into the temptation to pull away. Maybe you're going through depression or an addiction, or you just have something that's nagging on you and you think I'm high maintenance. We're just going to review something from last week, okay, real quick? Everyone is high maintenance! Your parents are high maintenance, your kids are high maintenance, your spouse is high maintenance, anybody got a high maintenance dog in the house? Look, everyone, everyone that matters in your life is high maintenance and they are worth it. They're worth every bit. Every second, every hour, and every dollar, they're worth it, and so are you.

And so if we want to grow we have to learn; everyone just say this, repeat this after me: I cannot maintain myself. (AUDIENCE REPEATS: I cannot maintain myself) You can't. You can't do life alone. You need people. That's why Jesus calls the church the body of Christ. Paul meant that literally. You literally put skin on Christ; that when I receive a hug from you, an empathetic conversation from you, when I do something great with you, I'm not only doing it with you, I'm doing it with Jesus if you're filled with His spirit.

And so there's this great thing, it's called incarnational theology that one of the best ways we experience the Lord is not only on the mountaintop or in great worship services, but when we're doing life with other believers. So often in life, we pull away from others, from our best friends, or our family when life gets hard, because we don't want to be high maintenance, or we don't want to be a burden. But that's the time when you need to lean into your relationships the most. It's a bit like.. I think they're called Chinese finger traps. You remember those? Or Chinese handcuffs. I think they're made of bamboo or something like that. I used to always get it at Chuck E. Cheese. You do the roller thing enough times and get enough tickets, it's like 15 tickets and you get one of these, and then you put it on your sister.

If you know these things, the Chinese finger traps, you put your fingers in and then you try and pull your fingers out and it gets tighter, right? And the harder you pull and try and get your fingers out, the tighter the Chinese handcuffs get. And the only way to get out of the handcuffs is an irony. Is to go in the opposite direction of where you want to go, of what feels natural. To push into the cuffs. To go deeper into the cuffs. That's the only way you get freedom.

And so for many of us, you're struggling with depression, or addiction, or maybe it's not anything so heavy, maybe you just lost your job or you're just going through a tough time or a bad break up or a

divorce and you think I don't want to share this stuff with my friends. I'm already a burden to them. I don't want to be even more high maintenance. Let me just give you a bit of advice – I had to learn this myself. Lean into it with your friends. Lean into it all the way. Weep with them. Get slobbery and hang out there for awhile and weep, and mourn, and grieve. Lean into your suffering with your friends and believe it or not, you'll actually leave feeling closer to them, and they'll feel closer to you, and when they go through a hard time, they'll be able to go deep with you, too.

The way you get freedom from the trappings of life is to go deep with God and to go deep with people. So go deeper. Be more vulnerable. Be seen deeply. Only then will you be loved deeply and when that happens, you get free from the trap. Can I get an amen?

Can we just establish, before I keep going, that you are wanted. And see that's the biggest lie is that nobody wants that messy part of my life. I guarantee most of your friends and family do. Some don't. That's true. And it is so hurtful when you are vulnerable and someone rejects you or mocks you. In the midst of that, you think I'll never be vulnerable again. Keep going. Switch to other people. Find new friends. You have to have this in your life, though, and I do too. It's okay that you're high maintenance. So is a Rolls Royce. It doesn't mean you're bad. In fact the most valuable things on earth are high maintenance. Can I get an

amen? I want a Rolls Royce. And I want you. Don't buy me a Rolls Royce, though, I'll get in trouble.

So you are wanted and you are valuable even though you have needs and you can't maintain those needs on your own. You need friends, you need your spouse, you need your kids, and you can bond deeply, by the way, with anyone. You can bond deeply with children. I did that with Haven. We went to the fair last week and we bonded deeply. So you are wanted and you are needed, and learn to be vulnerable with the people you want.

But today I want to talk about not only doing that.. and I'm only halfway through my sermon, don't worry. Everybody gets all frustrated when I say 'today' cause it's like oh is he starting right now? Don't worry.

I want to ask the question – what happens when good things get in the way of the most important things? What happens when good things become a way that we avoid the most important things in our lives? What happens when work, or ministry, or a hobby, or things like that take away from time with your spouse or children and your friends? Well when that happens, bad things happen.

I'm going to read from Luke, and this is the evangelist Luke, his telling of the story of Jesus visiting the house of Mary and Martha. But before he tells that story, he tells another story that is actually, most

people don't know, is linked, and that is the very famous story of the Good Samaritan.

Now the Good Samaritan.. we always think of Samaritan as a good thing. In Jesus' day a Samaritan was a hated person. They were seen as a sort of half Jewish, half Assyrian, they had their own.. they were like Jewish. They thought they were Jewish but they had their own mountain and they had their own Torah, but it was different. So they were like hated by the Jews more than almost anybody, even more than the Romans. They hated these Samaritans.

And so in this story, Jesus then is talking to a Jewish rabbi, and this rabbi says to Him, 'Jesus, how can I inherit eternal life?' And Jesus says to the rabbi, 'well you know the bible. How would you answer that?' And this smart rabbi leans back for a minute and he thinks about it and he says 'love the Lord with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.' And Jesus says 'you've answered correctly. Do this and you'll inherit eternal life.'

And then there's this awkward moment. And it says that the rabbi, hoping to justify himself, says then to Jesus a second question – 'who is my neighbor?' And of course Jesus tells a story. He said 'once there was a really good Jewish man and he was on his way to Jericho, and he was robbed and beaten up and left on the road. And coming down the road,' it says priest but we're going to say pastor, okay? Coming down the road

is a pastor, and this pastor was on his way to Jericho to do ministry and he was very busy so he stepped over this man on his way to preach at a local church. They were expecting him at 8:00 sharp.

Then soon an evangelist, it says a Levite but we're going to say evangelist, was on his way to a revival. He had received a prophecy that the Lord was going to move in incredible power and that was supposed to begin at 8:30 and he'd already gotten a text that they'd started the music, they were wondering where he was. And so he's on his way to the Jericho revival and sees this beaten man and like I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I love you. All right? And got to the meeting.

And then I don't know, a scientologist was walking down the road and he saw this man and he said to himself, he needs help, so he picked up the man and he put him on his donkey, and he took him to a hospital in a hotel, made sure his wounds were mended, cared for him, fed him, left some extra money to make sure he could get to a full recovery and wished him well.

And Jesus asked of these three: the pastor, the evangelist and the scientologist.. let me start over. He asked of this man, 'of these three, the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan,' again the Samaritan is so hated, 'who loved their neighbor?' And the rabbi couldn't even say Samaritan, I mean he just hates him so much, but he said something like 'the one who helped the man on the road.' The one who was present. The one

who recognized that the most important thing in your life is the thing that's in front of you. That God calls us to the 15-feet of space around us, that calls you the person you're sleeping with in bed, the person that you wake up and have breakfast with, your children, your spouse, your colleagues at work, your close friends. And very often we think we're supposed to be somewhere else in Jericho and sometimes we are, but the most important thing is what's right in front of us: our family, our friends. God's the most important thing, but God tells us make the most important thing in your life these people, right? God calls us to bond deeply with one another, to love each other; to be present.

And too often in ministry, and I'm just going to diverge here for a second, but how many PK's; I'm one, how many PK's end up being Christian, let alone being pastors? Not many. That was actually one of my biggest fear when I did my essay for ordination. One of the questions they asked is what's your greatest fear going into Christian vocational ministry? And without even thinking about it, it's that my kids wouldn't be Christians; that they wouldn't know Jesus. Cause I'd get too busy ministering to other people that I didn't minister to my own children. My dad was so good to us and I can say that we all.. all four of us, his kids, love the Lord because he put us first. And I know sometimes you put your kids first and they don't become Christian, so I'm not saying that, but I just know that very often in ministry, or in doing good, we forget

our spouses, and we forget our kids, and we forget our dear friends as we set our eyes on some distant hill. And though it's so good to dream, it's so good to do good works and dream big and do good things and travel and pursue your calling, never do it at the cost of your most important relationships. Can we get an amen on that one?

And so the story of the Good Samaritan, about being present with people who are need right around you then goes right into.. Luke then carries that story right into a famous story of Mary and Martha. So it's just after that. So Jesus then is on His way and we're just going to say this for a minute – they were going to Martha's house. Everybody say Martha's house. We need to show Martha a little sympathy here, right? This is her place, and hospitality in Jesus' day was a big deal. And it still is a big deal in the Middle East. But in His day, hospitality was the most important thing. You care for your guest, you protect your guest, you honor and make sure that they get the best stuff, and you pull out all the stops, and you care for them.

It's still that way today. I digress, but I was with a European friend of mine in Israel, and he was trying to explain to me hospitality in Islam and in the Palestinian world. And we're walking through the old city of Jerusalem in the Palestinian quarter, in the Muslim quarter, rather, and he picks a random door and he knocks on the door and this guy answers and this guy says something to him in Arabic, just like hi, we'd

like a cup of tea, and this stranger invites us in with a big smile on his face. You'd think we were at a five star restaurant. Sits us down at his table and lays down a little mat, and brings us some tea, and offers us to stay the night. And this was during the Intifada in 2005 when tensions with oh gosh, the Iraq war and nobody was going to Israel because of all the suicide bombs. I mean it was crazy. And here is like a pastor, and two white guys, one from Europe, one from America, and this Muslim Palestinian invites us because – why? In the Middle East, culturally it's the most important thing, and it was that way in Jesus' day.

So you got to empathize with Martha. She has a religious duty to care for the stranger, the alien, the hurt, but this is a special guest. It's Jesus! He's like a big deal! He's famous. And by the way, when Jesus comes and visits you, He brings 12 teenagers with Him. So here's Jesus, visiting, and sitting down at the table with this woman and she's getting to work, right? And she's busy and this is the story. If you have your bibles, I'm reading from Luke chapter 10 verse 38. And it says, "As Jesus and His disciples were on the way, He came to the village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." By the way, this word all the preparations, it's a bad translation. The word in Greek

is “diakonos”. I know Luke puts this in here for a reason. The word “diakonos” means ministry. It means literally like Christian ministry. The Greek literally says ‘Martha was distracted by all of her ministry.’ So ministry is keeping her from connecting deeply with Jesus and connecting deeply with her sister.

One of the highest callings is to be in ministry. One of the best things you can do, and we’re all called to do some kind of ministry. But what happens when our ministry, when a good thing, an awesome thing becomes the most important thing, and we miss out on Jesus Himself.

So Martha was distracted by all the ministry that had to be made. She came to Him and she asked Him, by the way, she’s wearing like what are those things.. she’s wearing an apron and it’s covered in spaghetti sauce. She’s got like yellow rubber gloves on. Her hair, it’s a mess.. it’s terrible. And she says “Lord! Don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” So again, Martha’s doing all this stuff and Mary’s just listening to the Lord, right? “But the Lord says ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things but few things are needed or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.’”

This word worried is the word “marimnao” in Greek. Everybody say “marimnao”. It means worried or anxiety, but it literally means to be pulled apart into pieces. If you were to pull apart a bread to serve it to

people, you'd be "marimnao". It's like being drawn and courted, stretched so tight in so many directions you break. And he says Martha, Martha, you are "marimnao". "You are being pulled in a million directions, but only one thing matters." You think it was good that Martha was being hospitable? Absolutely. That she was serving? Absolutely. But how often in our hospitality, in our work, in our service, in our hobbies do we forget that all of it, all of it is for one thing alone: to bond deeply with the Lord and with others.

And so often in our busyness, in our worry, in our chronic worry. Worried about work, worried about errands, worried about bills, worried about everything that needs to get done, worried about ministry, we forget that in the end none of it matters except one thing – our relationship with God and our relationship with people. Worry kills bonding. And Jesus is just saying Martha, come sit with us. Be present with us. Stop judging your sister. Talk to her, talk to me. Let's enjoy this time together.

If you feel bad for Martha, I do too because I am Martha a lot. And I think that very often it's easy to resent the Mary's in our life. And sometimes there are people who come into our lives and they just want to talk to us, or do something fun with us, or sit and be with us, but we've got a million things to do. And it's easy to sometimes resent the people who want us or want to be with us. But what we forget is they

are just longing to get from us what we need to get from them: deeply held, pure, good, compassionate love.

One of the things that I had to learn moving from being a boy to a man was that part of maturing was understanding that time is the currency of love. You want more free time? You get less love. You want more love? Say goodbye to your free time. That's just how it is. And very often we can resent the love that's in our life because it can be these beautiful little hands that hold us back from building a career, or pursuing a dream, or crossing a finish line when we want to. We forget that the more free time you have in your life, the less love you have in your life.

I realized this when I started dating a serious girlfriend named Hannah Presley. Yes, she's related to Elvis. It's a long story. I'd never had super serious girlfriends. Most of the girls that I dated I didn't get very serious with. Hannah was actually the first serious girlfriend I really had. And she was my dream girl. I pursued her for a long time, and we started dating at the beginning of a college year, and by the end of college, we'd been dating about nine months and it was getting serious, and I'm in Oklahoma and Oklahoma in the summer is hell. It really is. If you're from Oklahoma, I'm sorry. I hope you agree with me. There's some really nice things but like one time when I was filling up gas at the gas

station, the whole thing was covered in grasshoppers. It's like 117 and like a hundred..

So anyway, my point is I was not planning on staying in Oklahoma. And I got to this point where I like had this dream of an epic summer in like a surfing thing, and all this stuff I was going to do, and I was going to leave my girlfriend in Oklahoma and then just come back and we'd get right back into it. But as I began to talk to her about this, I realized there was a fork in the road. I could go to California, letting my girlfriend live in the same town as her old boyfriend for three months or I could, right? Or I could stay in hell, Oklahoma, I love Oklahoma. It's just not.. with an angel. And I did! And that was kind of the beginning. We had an awesome summer because there are actually a lot of great things to do in Oklahoma in the summer, but my point is that in life, you get a girlfriend, you have less free time. You get married you have less free time. You have kids you have zero. No. It's like negative. Like no free time or regular time or sleep time. There's just nothing. If you got a dog or a cat, say goodbye to even more free time, right? So having love in your life means there's less free time. And the point is this: don't resent it. Don't resent people because they want to be with you. Don't resent people because they want to talk to you or have a longer dinner with you or want more than a cell phone or call or a text. They want to sit with

you and do fun things with you. Don't resent them for that. People love you and want you.

And by the way, one of the best things you can do with your work and with your hobbies and where all the fun things that you want to do is invite those people to do it with you. Yes, I know your kids aren't good at golf, but invite them to go golfing with you, right? Yes, maybe your spouse is not good at cooking, or at working on cars, but you'll be surprised. Invite them to do some of the fun things.

I was talking with Joel and Victoria Osteen about their kids, and Victoria, we asked her how did you.. because her kids, their two kids are so close to them. How did you raise such great kids, because they really are so close. And she said we just invited them to do ministry with us, even when they were little kids. Just had them read the scripture and had them do things that were important for them, and included them in everything. We never worked alone. We always worked as a family. And I think very often our pride gets in the way. We want this to be just about me. My work is about my accomplishment. You got to let that go, man. You've got to let that go. And sometimes you got to invite your friends and your family to come along with you. There's an African proverb that says if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with friends.

So never forget that work is good, dreams are good, but sometimes they can either get in the way of the most important thing, which is bonding deeply with others, and other times, they can actually be the very thing that can get us to the place of bonding deeply with others. You are wanted. Yes, you're high maintenance, and so am I, and that's okay, too. You are loved, but you got to have people in your life if you want to grow in your relationship with God. You can't do it alone. Amen?

Father, we thank you. We ask, Lord, that you'd help us to bond deeply with our friends, with our family. Lord, I know that there are some people under the sound of my voice who have gone through a brutal divorce, or maybe have lost a spouse to death, or maybe there are people here who have never been married and they want to be married. Or people here who have lost a good friend and need another best friend. Lord, we need relationships in our life, and so this blessing I pray this morning is that for that person who is desperate for more, that every person under the sound of my voice would go deeper in the relationships they have, and would even grow in the number of relationships they have; that they would be healthy relationships, that they'd be good, and they'd cause us to grow deeper in our relationship with you, and to have bigger dreams, and a bigger vision for our life. Lord, we love you, it's in Jesus' name, amen.