

Text: II Corinthians 5:18-21

Title: “3-D Life” Pt.1

INTRODUCTION

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be the most inviting place anywhere. Any church that is truly alive with the Spirit of God will be filled with people who are consistently thinking about others that they can invite to join them.

But why is that important? The answer that you might expect would run along these lines: Church is a happening place. I’m excited about my church. I want the people that I like and the people that I love to enjoy what I enjoy. So I invite them.

ILLUSTRATION – It’s like being excited about a restaurant and inviting your friends to go back with you. You loved it, you enjoyed it, and you want others to have the same experience.

ILLUSTRATION – Or it’s like my neighbor who recently invited me to try a new natural drink that he says is the most amazing thing. Supposedly there’s this place in Upper Mongolia, or somewhere, where an asteroid hit the earth a long time ago and since then the vegetation has grown three times as fast as it should have grown. And they’ve used some fruit from this place to make this drink. Now, I’m a little suspicious. Did it occur to them that it was radioactivity that made the vegetation grow back that fast? Supposedly they checked it out, but I’m a little skeptical. But I’ve got a bottle in my refrigerator at home, and I’m trying it because my good friend, whom I trust, invited me to try it, and he told me how great it makes him feel. And he invited me to try it.

And when it comes to church, if you like what’s going on, if it’s really meeting your needs, and you have a great time when you’re here, then it’s fine to want to invite your friends and family to come and enjoy it with you. We’re glad you feel that way. There’s nothing like a satisfied customer.

And the same thing is true when it comes to inviting our friends to Christ. We know what He’s done in our lives; we know what a difference He has made, and we want our loved ones and friends to enjoy and experience what Jesus has done for us. Great!

But is that the main reason we invite people to church? Is that the main reason we invite people into a personal relationship with Christ? Let me give you a higher motivation. The main reason we invite people to church, or to a Sunday School class, or a party, or to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, is this ...

ON SCREEN - “God is a reaching God ... and He reaches through His people.”

Turn with me to II Corinthians 5:18-21 and we’re going to explore that reality for a moment. As you’re turning, let me remind you that you have a great opportunity to put this into practice tonight as we have the first of our monthly outreach nights tonight in the South Complex at 6:00. Now let’s look at this grand motivation. Read vv.18-21.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ (*God is a reaching God. The amazing thing is that the reason God has to reach to us is that we have run away from Him. We have broken His laws and sinned against His love. And through Christ and His death on the Cross, God has invited us back to Himself ... reconciled us to himself.*) **and gave us the ministry of reconciliation** (*God reaches through His people.*): **19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them** (*God is a reaching God.*). **And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation** (*God reaches through His people.*). **20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God** (*God is a reaching God and He reaches through His people.*). **21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

So you see the highest motivation for inviting other people to a small group, to a fellowship, to worship service, to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is this ... it reflects the character of our God who is a reaching God.

In fact, this is true of all the dimensions that we are going to talk about in this series on the 3-dimensional life of the church.

INVITE, DISCOVER, CONNECT ... is a response to who God is.

- We invite others to join us, because God is a reaching God.
- We get into the Bible and discover life-changing truths, because God is a revealing God.
- We build relationships and truly connect with others, because God is a relational God.

Now let's get back to that statement: ***"God is a reaching God ... and He reaches through His people."***

1. GOD IS A REACHING GOD.

2 Corinthians 5:18a - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ ...

"All this..." – Paul refers here to the great miracle described in II Corinthians 5:17.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

But what God has done *in* us (making us a new creation) is preceded by what God has done *for* us through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:19a - God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

The word "reconcile" that is used here repeatedly in the verses we're studying is a great word. It essentially means "to change." The relationship has changed! No longer enemies ... no longer alienated ... no longer estranged ... now friends.

Now get this: God, being a reaching God, *took the initiative*. Normally when people are estranged it's a third party that steps in to bring the two together. Not so with God. We sinned against God and were separated and estranged from Him because of our sin, and He came looking for us.

Example: Remember what happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve had sinned?

Genesis 3:8-9 - Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

God took the initiative to reach to His fallen creation.

Example: Remember the parable Jesus told about a shepherd who had 100 sheep. He lost one sheep. What did he do? He left the 99 and went looking for the lost sheep until he found it. And when he found it he called on everyone to rejoice with him that he had found the one lost sheep.

Next Jesus tells the story of a woman who had 10 silver coins. She lost one. What did she do? She lit a lamp and swept the house until she found that one coin. And when she found it she called on everyone to rejoice with her.

And the next story Jesus tells is about a father who had two sons. One of them rebelled and left the family, ruining his life. But he came to his senses and returned and repented. And when he returned home, he found his father looking for him ... waiting with outstretched arms. And the father said, "Let's have a party."

And the point that Jesus is making in those three parables is that God is a reaching God ... and His heart is filled with love for the lost.

Luke 19:10 - For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

God is a reaching God ... and He reaches through His people.

2. GOD REACHES THROUGH HIS PEOPLE.

The text tells us ...

- We have the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18b – (God) gave us the ministry of reconciliation...

- We have the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:19b – And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

"committed to us..." – lit. "placed in us"

2 Corinthians 5:20 – We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

So God's initiative becomes our imperative.

EXPLANATION – In biblical times there were regions in the Roman Empire that were known as imperial provinces. These provinces came under the authority of the Roman rule only by force.

They would rebel if they could. Ambassadors were sent to these regions to make known the will of the emperor. He was the emperor's stand-in ... the emperor's representative.

That's what God has called us to be and to do. We're saying to those in this rebellious world, "The King of Kings wants to have a relationship with you. Come to Him."

God is making his appeal through us! Just think about that.

ILLUSTRATION – Now with events in the Middle East swirling as they are, we've seen a lot about the United Nations, and the role of Condoleezza Rice, our Secretary of State. Her responsibility is to represent the President of the US in foreign matters. She takes the wishes and the opinions of the President and reflects them in the courts of others nations. But suppose President Bush told Condoleezza Rice, "Go the President of Russia that I want to talk to him about a treaty where we can work together to bring peace to the Middle East." Well, Secretary Rice jumps on a plane and flies to Hawaii and vacations awhile. Then she goes over and visits a friend in Switzerland, but she never gets word to the Russian president that the President of the US wants peace. She wouldn't be Secretary of State very long, would she?

Dear brother and sister in Christ, it says right here in the Bible that you and I are Christ's ambassadors. We have a mission. Our mission is to represent the will and the word of the King of the Universe. Why in the world God chose to use us as His ambassadors is a mystery, but the fact is that's exactly what He chose to do.

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ILLUSTRATION – Oliver Stone's new movie, "World Trade Center" revolves around the true story of two New York City Port Authority policemen who were trapped in the rubble when the World Trade Center buildings collapsed. Sargeant John McLoughlin and Bill Jimeno both were among the hundreds of first responders who went in to help evacuate the twin towers. After the buildings collapsed McLoughlin and Jimeno were the 18th and the 19th survivors to be pulled alive from the rubble. But there was a powerful moment when two US Marines were climbing over the rubble with flashlights calling out for any survivors who may be buried under the rubble. When they miraculously discovered McLoughlin and Jimeno, it seemed it would be impossible to get down to them. Jimeno cried out through the rubble to the Marine, "Don't leave us alone." And the rescuer responded, "Sir, we are Marines. You are our mission."

2 Corinthians 5:20 – We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Now don't get the wrong idea. God isn't so eager to make up with you that He just forgets the fact that you are a sinner. That's not what is happening here. Reconciliation cannot mean that God just ignores our sin. Action was required ... and what an amazing thing God did.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We're talking here about the atonement. The invitation to come to God is meaningless if the way hasn't been made for sinful men to come to a holy God. A price had to be paid to remove the sin that stands between us and God.

Behind the gruesome scenes of the Cross where Jesus suffered, bled and died, an amazing transaction was being made. In the great mystery of the atonement, God made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us, so that a miracle might occur ... we might become the righteousness of God.

ILLUSTRATION: What we're talking about here is often called "imputation." Imputing is a word that comes from the world of banking. Simply put, it means to put in someone's account. When you deposit money in the bank, the computer credits your account, puts that money in your account. Now when Jesus died on the cross, and when we put our faith in what Christ did on the Cross for us, all our sins were put into His account. He was treated by God as though He actually committed those sins, though He didn't because He was sinless. No longer is the debt owed by us.

But then it goes even further. Because v.21 tells us that then God in turn credited to our account the very righteousness of Christ. Amazing!

Isaac Watts: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."