

Experiencing God

II Corinthians 8:1-5

► Introduction

I have several men in my church who are truly unfortunate and they don't even realize it. They tease me about my Ford truck and make wise cracks about it meaning "Fix or Repair Daily."

You see, these men drive GMC and Chevrolet trucks and they just don't know any better. Recently when I drove up in one deacon's yard, he had 4 Chevrolet trucks and 1 car parked out there. They all belong to his immediate family. I wanted to have prayer for the man as I realized it must require that many GMC trucks to have dependable transportation when you need it.

These men boast about their Chevrolet and GMC trucks and tease me about my Ford truck. By I understand the problem is that they simply have not experienced the thrill of the Ford truck ride and dependability. They lack the real experience.

Illus: When I was growing up, my step-father liked to make a funny comment about golf. He would say, "I don't see how anyone can enjoy going out there and chasing that little white ball around." I suspect many non-golfers share his observation.

However, his comments were arm chair observations, not based on any actual experience. He never experienced the addictive challenge of swinging a golf club. He never knew the experience of trying to strike the ball in just the right spot with just the right club and with a perfect swing. He did not know the thrill of getting everything from the feet to the head to work in perfect harmony, causing the ball to travel hundreds of yards and land within feet of where you desire.

My son is a very good golfer but the best word to describe my golf game is "ugly". Ugly or not, I do understand why people love the golf because I have experienced it first hand.

Unfortunately, many people and many Christians go through life never actually experiencing God first hand. Some of these people are professing Christians who rarely even come to church. Others are professing Christians who are in church weekly. Yet, they never experience the fullness of what God has in store for His children.

So, how does one experience the righteousness of God? How are you and I to actually experience the thrill of being where God wants us to be and knowing that this is exactly the feelings and thoughts God wants us to experience?

How do we as a church experience the fullness of God in our congregation and in our worship services? The answer is surprisingly simply. But, I must warn you it requires acts of selflessness. It requires action that runs contrary to our self-centered view of life.

► Read Text Matthew 25:37-40

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" *Matthew 25:37-40 (NIV)*

Prayer

► Content

An untold number of books have been written about man's quest to realize God's purposes. Of course the most popular on the shelf today is Rick Warren's "The Purpose Driven Life." Some others that come to mind include "Experiencing God", "Real Christianity" and "Evangelism Explosion."

These are all wonderful books. However, we can find the answers right in God's Word. Whether we call it righteousness, glory or purpose, we all want to be in God's place experiencing God in our lives.

How do we make that happen? **We touch the lives of others.**

We must reach out and touch the hearts of the less fortunate and hurting just as our Lord did and just as he commanded us to do.

1. We must have Compassion

In order to experience God, we must understand that God is all about people, His creation. God's constant love and compassion is upon His people.

We too must have compassion. We must learn to see people the way God views people, with love and compassion. We must look past the differences and see the needs. We must see the hearts.

a. We must see the physical needs. There are many people around us with physical needs. There are many people around the world hurting and starving. This is our responsibility and our opportunity. Not the responsibility of the USA but the opportunity of Christian people.

Illus: I have a plaque in my office that reads, "When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters - one represents danger and the other represents opportunity.

This is exactly the way must see the hurts and needs of our fellow people. We must recognize others needs as our opportunity. It is our opportunity to help and our opportunity to experience God's righteousness.

b. We must see the spiritual needs. Just as people have physical needs, they also have spiritual needs. People all around us are hurting and searching for answers.

People have problems with drugs, finances and relationships and that is just the beginning. As Christians, we must recognize the spiritual needs and share our faith. We must share our understanding and answers in Christ.

You may be thinking, "How can I help with people's spiritual needs?"

Well, you can call people and invite them to church and other events. You can bring friends and love ones to worship. How many of you made phone calls and invited someone to the concert this past Saturday evening?

If we are to experience God, we must have compassion for the physical and spiritual needs of others.

It was Jesus who said to the rich young ruler, *"²¹Jesus said unto him, If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me."* Matthew 19:21 NAS

2. We must take Action

Our church gives 16% of our budget to missions and for that I am very proud and pleased. However, it is not enough to just give as a church. We must also give as individuals.

We must get involved. We must get our hands dirty and get into the trenches where the real needs exist. It is not enough to pray for the needy, we must help the needy.

God's Word tells us that as much as we do for these, we are doing for Christ. In other words, if you help people in the name of the Lord, then you are helping the Lord. We are spreading the grace and love of our Lord.

It is my prayer that God will show our church opportunities that we can get into the trenches and help. It is my prayer that our church in the coming years when be found with busy and dirty hands as we respond to our God given compassion.

It is my prayer that our church will participate in mission trips where we share the gospel and meet the needs of those much less fortunate.

It is time for action. If we will have compassion and be ready to take action, God will open the doors of opportunity for our church and for each of you individually.

Conclusion

Show picture taken by Kevin Carter (see below).

In 1993 there was a photo-journalist named Kevin Carter. He was covering the famine in the Sudan. 20 people an hour were dying from starvation. At one point, surrounded by death and suffering, Kevin wandered

into the bush just to break away from the suffering. Behind him he heard whimpering and turned to see a small toddler girl crawl out of the bushes suffering from starvation. She was trying to make it to a United Nations feeding station about a kilometer away. She collapsed in a small clearing still alive but suffering. Kevin took out his camera and tripod to take her picture. As he was getting ready a vulture swooped down and landed behind the girl. Kevin took the picture which is shown on the overhead. It became the Pulitzer prize winner for 1994. Kevin packed up his gear and left.

When the picture came out all over the world, many cried out, "What happened to the girl? Perhaps you are wondering what happened to the little girl? Well, the answer is; No one knows!

Many asked, "Why didn't you help the girl?"

After receiving his Pulitzer prize in 1994, three months later Kevin drove his truck to a park - taped his exhaust to his windows and killed himself. In his suicide note he wrote...

"I'm really sorry I didn't pick that child up...I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses and anger and pain... of starving or wounded children and trigger-happy madmen."

This picture symbolizes the physical and spiritual state of many people who walk through our lives every day. If we are to experience God, we must respond to the needs of others and get involved as a church and as individuals. We must get our hands dirty by ministering to others.

Illus: I recall being in Nicaragua a few years ago with a large mission group. It was a medical group and I really had nothing to offer medically since I have no training in that field. However, I ended up working as a dental assistant. We were well in the jungles in a small village school house where we shared the gospel and offered medical and dental care.

Hundreds of people walked miles to stand in line for the opportunity to see a doctor or dentist. We pulled over 800 teeth in 4 ½ days. It was hot and very dry with no air conditioning the entire week.

One evening I was reflecting and praying. It occurred to me that I had forgotten all about my responsibilities wants and desires back home. I was completely absorbed in helping these wonderful people. I thought to myself, "This is the most awesome feeling to know that I am making a difference in these people's lives. This is what it feels like to be right where God wants you to be. This is experiencing God!

I don't want you and me or Barnwell Baptist Church to ever have to look at our Lord and say we don't know what happened. I don't want us to be found making excuses. I want us to experience the pleasure of a pleased Heavenly Father.

Let's experience God by having compassion and taking action. God has wonderful things in store for us as we do.

