

# Realizing There's No Place Like Home

## *Hitting Refresh*

21.01.10 | Mike Krause

Every year around this time, we, as a community, spend some Sundays looking back at the year that was, looking ahead at the year that's coming and asking ourselves some intentional questions. What kind of changes do we need to see and to make in us and around us to enter into the new year in a way that better reflects the person of Jesus? And it seems to me, and to us, that there is no more important year to be doing that than in the year that followed what 2020 was for most of us. Given all that it was, I think, one of the elements of 2020 that we have talked about the least, and maybe not talked about enough, was the impact that 2020 and the pandemic have had on relationships. There are some studies now being done about this - in particular about the relationship between the pandemic and how people are doing in marriage. But the themes apply to roommates and friendships, family relationships, anybody who lives in the same space together and bubbled together.

They were saying that people who are used to being together with each other a few hours a day, were now for long stretches being forced to relate to each other 24/7. It's a lot harder to be in relationship with somebody 24/7 than it is for just a couple hours a day. Some of the personality quirks and character flaws that are livable in small doses become really hard when they are all the time. The boredom sets in and people begin to get irritable. Never mind the stresses that were introduced in the last year, financially, employment wise, even just the anxiety of the pandemic itself, introducing all these negative emotions into these relationships that were being now done in confined spaces around the clock. It has been taxing on many relationships, never mind the fact that for some of us, there are small children who are a part of the equation as well. We're now instead of sending them off to school, sharing space and desks and resources and computers and bandwidth, never mind having to be "homeschool teacher," which we never signed up for.

There's frustration introduced in all of that. There's complications for our sibling relationships and family relationships and friendships. When it comes to how we have each uniquely thought about the pandemic and the individual decisions we've made about masking and social distancing and vaccinations. It's all made relationships more complicated. In a spirit of pressing refresh, what would it look like to press refresh on the relationships that matter most to us?

Last week, Jeff talked about pressing refresh on our relationship with God, acknowledging that our life with God is not something that we can earn or deserve, if we work hard enough. It's just something that we receive as a free gift, in humility, knowing that God gives it just because God loves us. We receive it in faith. Not because we mentally believe that there is a God, but faith as in trusting with our whole lives that the way of Jesus that's described in the scriptures and exemplified in the life of Jesus himself is the way to experience abundant life.

That means being transformed into the character of Jesus and being committed to advancing the cause of God in the world, living our life to fulfill God's wish list of filling the world with love, rather than living our life expecting God to fulfill our wish list of making us comfortable.

The question that was rumbling around in my head as Jeff was talking about all this was, "How would you know that you had successfully pressed refresh on your life with God? What would that look like?" One of the verses that came to mind was out of the gospel of John 13: 35, where Jesus says,

***This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.***

***JOHN 13:35 [CEB]***

Jesus just says it's pretty plain and simple. The evidence that you are living your life aligned with the life of God will be seen in the way that you love other people. In fact, Jesus says much of the same thing at the end of his most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. (The one that I hope that many, if not, all of us, are taking advantage of the opportunity to read throughout this month in order to recalibrate our compass in a "Jesusy" direction for 2021.) But at the end of the

sermon on the Mount, after Jesus has said everything that he wants to say about a life with God, this is how he summarized it. He said;

***Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.***

***MATTHEW 7:12 [CEB]***

Jesus says, if you want to live a completely biblical life, if you want to live a life in alignment with the life of God, it will show up in the way that you treat other people, period.

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say people will know that you're my disciples because you prayed a prayer once when you were a kid or because you rededicated your life to Jesus (though those can be good things). He doesn't say people will know that you're my disciple because you feel it on the inside (though I hope you do). He doesn't say everyone will know that you follow me because you raise your hands and sing and worship (well, maybe less at home). He doesn't say they'll know by the number of Bible verses you read, or whether you read the whole Sermon on the Mount every day this month or by the number of minutes that you pray. Jesus, doesn't say everyone will know that you're my follower by your inspirational social media posts or the "God talk" in your conversation. He doesn't say everyone will know that you're my followers because of your church work or your commitment to volunteerism or your heart for missionary work to love and serve people across an ocean somewhere.

He says, everyone will know that you love me by the way you love the people around you. The people, especially the people who are closest to you. I saw this tweet a little while ago by Dr. Jennifer Powell McNutt that I thought summarizes exactly what the Bible says. In very simple terms it just says this: "Question: Are you a Christian? Answer: ask my neighbor." The truth is that if you want to know whether I am devoted to living my life in alignment with the life of Jesus, you shouldn't ask me. You should ask my wife, Christa. You should ask my kids. Ask my brothers. Ask my dad, or my stepmom, or my mother-in-law. Ask my best friends, right? Because the people who see our lives the best, the people who know us the deepest, are the people that we live in closest contact with most of the time.

They're the ones who see us at our worst and at our best. They're the ones who know our uncensored thoughts and who hear our unfiltered words. They're the ones who watch us fly off the handle or who are, too often, the objects of our wrath. They are the ones who hear the sincerity or the insincerity of our attempts to reconcile, or not. They're the ones who see our character flaws, who know our moods, who see what we're like when we're frustrated. They're the ones who see how we spend our money, whether generously or selfishly. They're the ones who see how we talk about and treat people who are different than us. They're the ones who see how much space we create and sacrifice we live on behalf of others. They're the ones who see us for who we truly are. And this is the point, that if we're going to enter into 2021 pressing refresh on our relationship with God, that is necessarily going to mean and need and require that we press refresh on our relationships with the people who are closest to us. Those two things are related.

Back to a month ago, Dr. Drew Hart told us as a community that Jesus' two great commandments are love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. He said if you're going to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, you're going to have to love your neighbor as yourself. In fact, he went further and said one of the best ways, if not the primary way, to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength is to love your neighbor as yourself, to love the people who are closest to you. Because those two things go together.

We recently finished a book study in the Book of Galatians. Near the end, the apostle Paul writes these words, which we read often in our community, it says:

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.***

***GALATIANS 5:22-23 [CEB]***

It possible, Paul says, when you press reset with your life with God, the life of God comes to live in your life by the power of the Holy spirit. What spills out of your life, what radiates from your life, the aroma that your life gives off, is the aroma of Jesus, which is the aroma of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness

and goodness and faithfulness in relationship and gentleness with each other and self-control.

Imagine how our closest relationships, our roommates or family or siblings or parents, our kids, our spouse, our friends, imagine how those relationships would be transformed if they suddenly received an infusion of love and joy and peace and patience and so on. They would be fundamentally different, transformed, changed to look more like Jesus, because that's what happens when you press refresh with God. Paul says just before the fruit of the spirit in verse 16, he says,

***I say be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires.***  
***GALATIANS 5:16 [CEB]***

One of Paul's points in this whole passage is that the impact of the selfishness of sin or the sin of selfishness is that it destroys relationships and tears down people. So the opposite is true. That when you fill your relationships with the fruit of the spirit, the life of God, the love of Jesus, you will actually bring healing and growth to people and you will build up relationships. The very best thing you can do to invest, to press refresh on the relationships of the people who are closest to you, the people you love the most and who love you the most, is to press refresh on your relationship with God. It would change everything, especially with our kids.

I mean, love, joy, peace, patience. Those would transform our friendships and our marriages, our family relationships. Around Southridge, we believe that primary caregivers are also the primary spiritual influence in the life for our kids. And that being surrounded by Christ-centered adults is the best way to raise up kids to become Christ-centered adults. The very best thing you can do to parent your kids is not to learn a bunch of tips and tricks and techniques about parenting, to get them to eat their vegetables or to resist peer pressure. The very best thing you can do is become more like Jesus because kids emulate what they see.

A couple of months ago, the world's most famous and arguably the best golfer in history, Tiger Woods, played a tournament in which he partnered with his 11-year-old son, Charlie. After the tournament was done, aside from everybody being astonished at how amazing Charlie was at golf, people could only talk about

how similar Charlie was to his father, Tiger. In fact, I saw a video, I'll show you a short clip of it. Check out how similar the two of them are to each other.

[Video]

What makes Charlie so much like Tiger? It's not that Tiger took a course to learn a bunch of tips and tricks and techniques to parent Charlie to become like Tiger. He didn't sit Charlie down and say, "Okay, when you're done your golf swing, spin your club before you bring it down. Or when you sink a long putt, you know, turn your hips and make a fist and then pump it in the air." Charlie became what he saw. That's the primary way that our kids are formed. That's a primary way that they're shaped into the image of Jesus.

Now that's not to say that tips and tricks and techniques, when it comes to marriage or parenting, aren't important. They really, really are. In fact, we need to invest in that. 500 years ago, Martin Luther said "Pray as though everything depends on God, because it does." And that's kind of what we've been talking about, but then he followed it up by saying, "But then work as though everything depends on you, because it does." Martin Luther is saying, yes, invest in your relationship with God and have the life of God infuse your life and have that life of God spill out of your life, because this is all about what God is doing. Of course that's true. But then he went on to say but work your tail off to make sure that it's actually happening in your life and in your relationships. He wasn't saying anything different than what the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5: 18, Paul says, "You'll be filled with the Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit's power and life in your life. Control your life so that it produces behaviors that look like Jesus." But then three verses later, he writes this:

***...submit to each other out of respect for Christ.***

***EPHESIANS 5:21 [CEB]***

He says, "Yeah, be filled with the Spirit and be transformed, and then intentionally make the decision to live your life in loving submission to those who are closest to you." Then he fleshes that out in terms of marriages and family, parent-child relationships. He could have talked about sibling relationships, but he talks about co-worker relationships. In those days, they would have lived, co-workers, slaves

and masters, would have lived in the same household. So household, roommate, friendship relationship. He says be transformed by the spirit and then make the intentional decision about how you're going to live this out in the context of the relationships that are closest to you. Intentionally invest in pressing reset on those relationships so that they look more like Jesus.

If I were to challenge us, heading into 2021, I would say we need to intentionally invest in the relationships that are closest to us. I mean, going into this year in another lockdown, COVID has sort of reduced our world to these essential relationships anyway. So what would it look like if we just spent a disproportionate amount of time and energy investing in pressing refresh on those relationships to make them look more like Christ, on our marriages and in our parenting. We've already heard about Right Now Media and our Southridge Channel. One of the things that we have done with our Southridge Channel is to stock it full of marriage and parenting curricula that we could take advantage of as families or as life groups, to walk with each other, to invest with each other in making our marriages and our parenting and our family relationships look more like Jesus.

In fact, one of the short-term groups that starts in February is a parenting group that uses material that came out of a church in Georgia. Sign up for that group! Make an intentional investment in your marriage or your parenting. But what about more broadly than that? If we just decided, each one of us, to identify somebody in our world who most gives off the aroma of Jesus and to ask them whether we couldn't sit down with them and ask them questions about how they brought that into their marriage, if that's appropriate or into their parenting relationships or into their friendships or into their work environment. Just to sit down with somebody whose life radiates love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control, and ask them, "What did that look like in your relationships that mattered most to you?"

What if, and I want to challenge all of us to do this this week, what if each one of us identifies two to three people who are closest to us who know us the best and who love us the most and ask them whether they would sit down with us and have the fruit (virtually of course) of the Spirit open in front of us and ask them

for their loving and prayerful feedback on the ways in which they see the life of Jesus in us, on how loving we are, how much joy we bring, how much peace we make, how much patience we exude, how much kindness and goodness and so on. To give us feedback on the ways that they see Jesus and to challenge us in the ways that we could better reflect Jesus in our life and talk about what that could look like.

Friends, heading into this new year, the relationships that are most active in our lives are our relationship with God and our relationships with the people in our “bubble,” the people who are closest, the people who know us best and who love us the most. The people that we know best and who we love the most. The people who see us at our best and our worst. What would it look like for us to press refresh on those relationships, to be intentional in the coming days and weeks and months? To infuse those relationships with love and joy and peace and patience and so on, in a really intentional way? So that those relationships look more like Jesus than ever before. How could that transform our 2021?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we want to be people whose life with You is reflected in our love for the people that You've brought into our lives. Especially for the people who are closest. God, would You infuse our hearts with the desire to be filled with Your Spirit so that our lives would radiate love and joy and peace and so on. Would You, God, so fill our lives and loving relationships with the fruit of Your Spirit that everyone looking in from the outside would know that the center of our life is You? Would You transform our friendships, our families, our households, our marriages, and our relationships with our parents and our kids, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.