

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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The Unknown Quadrant

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A hundred years ago a pair of English ornithologists took some birds from their mother's nest on the island of Skokholm off the coast of Wales. They tagged those birds; they transported them to various places and then released them to see if those birds could find their way home. One of those birds was taken to Venice, despite the tremendous distance, about a thousand miles and the fact that this species was not native to that region, the bird found its way home by a path it had never flown in 341 hours. That experiment was repeated over even greater distances. Two birds were transported by train in a closed box to London and then flown by airplane to Boston, Massachusetts. Only one of those two birds survive that trip but the lone survivor, bird number AX6587 flew all the way across the Atlantic Ocean and navigated its way back to its mother's nest in 12 days and 12 hours. Pretty impressive, even ornithologists are amazed by this inbuilt capacity called the homing instinct. It's the inherent ability of some animal species to find their way home across great distances despite unfamiliar terrain.

There is in all of us a homing instinct. It's this longing for belonging and we find a measure of fulfillment in our human relationships. We find them through our affinities and fraternities, the teams we cheer for, the clubs we are members of, maybe the political party we are part of. And I certainly hope the church that we call home; in fact, we like to say that God has given us two families, one biological family and then a spiritual family that we call church. But this longing for belonging cannot be fully satisfied by human relationship and that would include marriage. There is a homing instinct hardwired into the human soul that only finds its true identity, its true destiny in a relationship with our creator. Yes, we are better together, but we are best in relationship with God. I don't think we can reach our full potential outside of a relationship with the God who gave it to us.

Now, the fourth century church, Father Augustine of Hippo said it this way, our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee. The 17th century French philosopher, Blaise Pascal called it the God shaped hole; Pope Francis calls it nostalgia for God. And I love the song by Gungor, The Great Homesickness. It's this longing for belonging that finds its ultimate fulfillment in relationship with God. Why? Because that's whose image we bear because that is the nest we come from.

Now, we say this with a degree of frequency around here, that we exist to help people find their way back to God. What does that mean? Well, we have to go all the way back to the beginning. In the beginning, God created us in his image, male and female. He created us in his image, Genesis 1:27. And so we bear the image of God, each one of us. So, every time you look in the mirror, the reflection looking back at you is a reminder of the God who created you. Now you can deny his existence, we all have friends who do and you can act out of the character of that image. You can avoid him at every turn, but you will still see his image every time you look in the mirror, there is no escaping who you really are and the God who loves you more than you can imagine.

Everything is made somewhere, made in America, made in China, made in Argentina. We have a team there right now. Pastor Rob, Gainesville pastor is there. Here's my point. You were made in the image of God and the very first thing God does after creating us is what? He blesses us. It says, then God blessed them and said, be fruitful and multiply. Now, I just finished writing a 67,000 word book on blessing and Lora and I will give you a free copy in October, got to do a few edits first. Now, let me give you the elevator speech. Before original sin, there was original blessing. Adams earliest memory is God's blessing and I think that's the moment that this homing instinct is integrated into the human spirit. This innate longing for blessing is as old as Adam, and here's some good news. God's most ancient instinct is blessing. It's his default setting. Now we have to posture ourselves for that, but that's God's desire. Ephesians 1:3 says it this way.

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms, with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

If you have a Bible this weekend, you can turn to Psalm 139 and if you have a phone, you can Google it. We'll get there in a minute.

A few weeks ago talked about the Johari Window. It's this matrix on human relationship, and I want to pick up where I left off, so let me do a quick recap, we'll put this up on the screen. The Johari window consists of four quadrants. The first quadrant is the Arena Quadrant consists of those things you know about you and others know about you, it's your public persona, but it's the tip of the iceberg. By the way, based on the laws of buoyancy, 91.7% of an iceberg is under water, it's only 8.3% is visible. Now, I know that there are some who may be are a little bit more transparent, maybe a little bit more vulnerable than the average person, but I think this probably represents by 8.3% of who we are.

Now, the second quadrant is the Facade Quadrant, consists of those things you know about you but others don't know about you. This is your alter ego if you will. This is who you are behind closed doors, and I want to say this again for a good measure, everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. The way people treat you might be more of a reflection of how they feel about themselves than how they feel about you and it's that recognition of what might be happening behind the facade that helps me sometimes operate with a little bit more grace. Not an excuse for their behavior, but helps us be a little bit more like Jesus full of grace.

Now the third quadrant is the Blindspot Quadrant. This is what we talked about three weeks ago. It consists of those things others know about you, but you don't know about you. And this is where we need people who are full of grace and full of truth, people who love us no matter what, honest with us, no matter what. This is where we need people who see things in us that we can't see ourselves, who call out the potential but also care enough to confront, call us on the carpet when we need a little bit of tough love.

That brings us to the fourth quadrant and that's where I want to focus this weekend. It's called the Unknown Quadrant and it consists of those things you don't know about you and others don't know about you. This is where we need a relationship with God. Why? Because he knows us better than we know ourselves. Psalm 139 these are the lyrics to an ancient song written by a

man named David about 3000 years ago and as I read this song, would you take it personally? When I read me, would you understand it's you and let's jump in and here we go.

¹ *You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.*

² *You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.*

³ *You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.*

⁴ *Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.*

⁵ *You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.*

⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.*

⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*

⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*

⁹ *If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,*

¹⁰ *even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*

¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"*

¹² *even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*

¹³ *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

¹⁷ *How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!*

¹⁸ *Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you.*

Can I challenge you this next week to perhaps spend some time reflecting on this song? Maybe that's meditating on it, maybe it's memorizing it, but one way or the other, the goal is not to get

through the Bible, the goal is to get the Bible through us. And I have a hunch if you spend a little bit of time reflecting on it, it might get from your head to your heart, might get from your heart to your gut. And that's when the promises of God begin to be our gut instincts as the children of God.

Alright, let me unpack this a little bit. I do not begin every sentence this way, but here goes, the average ejaculations contains 100 million sperm. Do not let anybody discount you. You are not one in a million; you are one in 100 million. There was once a swim meet and there were a hundred million swimmers and you, my friend you won and so did the person next to you. Now until recently, the moment of conception [laughter] (take a breath, take a breath), until recently, the moment of conception was really a mystery, but this is amazing. Embryologist, a few years ago captured the moment of conception via fluorescence microscopy. The moment the sperm enzyme penetrates the egg it releases billions of zinc atoms that emit light, its like sparks fly, literally. I think that moment of conception, it's like a microcosm of this moment of creation when God says, let there be light. Here's my point, there never has been, never will be anyone like you. Now, that's not a testament to you, it's a testament to the God who created you, but the implications of that uniqueness are pretty profound. No one can take your place, no one. We have this core value, everyone is invaluable and irreplaceable. Here's a way to think about that. When we sing a song, say Great is Thy Faithfulness. We all may sing the same words, but each one of us is singing a very different song. Why? Because when I sing it, I think about being on a respirator for two days after emergency surgery for ruptured intestines. I'm singing out of that moment when God spared my life and a thousand other moments when God has proved his faithfulness to me. And so we may sing the same words, but you are singing a very different song. If you don't sing, listen, probably no one is going to miss your voice, but you're holding out on God because you're giving God praise that is irreplaceable because no one can sing of his faithfulness like you can.

Now, you may be here this weekend and you may feel like you know next to nothing about God and that's okay. Glad you're here. I would say this, I would say the more you know, the more you know how much you don't know. And A W Tozer said eternity won't be long enough to learn all that God is or praise him for all that he's done.

Let me flip that coin. You may feel like you know next to nothing about God, but God knows everything about you. You were not just conceived by your mother and father. You were conceived in the heart of God. The psalmist said it this way, *your eyes saw my unformed body and all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*. It was God who knit you together in your mother's womb. It's God who orders our footsteps and prepares good works in advance. So, you can turn your back on God, you can run the opposite direction as fast and as far as your legs can carry you, but you cannot outrun his love. You cannot out sin His grace. You cannot out test his patience, it just cannot be done. *Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? .*

You know, sometimes our theology if we're being honest, is a little off as we preach it or sing, this is just being real cause how often had you invited the presence of God? Listen, God is here, there and everywhere. God is present and accounted for. What's absent is our awareness and so

God is here. If I go up to the heavens you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

I love the last line of Psalm 23 *surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*. The word follow is the Hebrew word radaph, it's a hunting term, in other words, God is hunting you down. Why? To show you his goodness and his mercy. Why? Because his most ancient instinct is blessing, and if you would turn around, I think what you would discover is a God with his arms wide open. I remember when one of my children, very young, informed me that he was gonna run away from home. And I said to him, that's fine, I'm going with you. He didn't know exactly what to do with that, but I think that's the picture here. There's a God who loves you too much to give up on you.

Stick with me, there are people all around us all the time that I believe are homesick for God. I don't know if they would call it that, but there is this longing for belonging, there's this yearning for blessing and they aren't sure what to do with it. And we live in a culture that's so good at distracting and entertaining and medicating, but the homing instinct is still there. So, if you're already in a relationship with God, what does that mean? Well, it means that we probably ought to be looking out for the people around us who are homesick for God.

Now, can I give you a couple of warnings up front? I live by what Oswald Chambers said; he wrote that little devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest* and he said, let God be as original with others as he was with you. In other words, my prayer for you is that you would have faith with your fingerprint on it. It's going to look a little different from mine, but God's big enough for that, he loves each of us that way. How do we help people find their way back to God? Well, I don't think its beating people over the head with a Bible and we better know why we believe what we believe, but I have not met that many people that have been convinced that they're wrong and I'm right. What I have discovered is a lot of people that get loved on long enough that they finally begin to see the reflection of God's image in the mirror. I think it starts with being full of grace and truth, and that's what love looks like.

During the sex scandal involving Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, Billy Graham was invited to the White House to meet with the president. Now, there are some theories and opinions about that invitation, I'm not going to comment on those. But Billy Graham took some friendly fire from some fellow Christians who felt like maybe he shouldn't do that, and I love the way that he answered his critics. He said, it's the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love. I know there's a sin of silence. I know that we need the courage to be counter cultural when the culture is wrong and if I have to choose between political correctness and Biblical correctness, I will choose Biblical correctness seven days a week and twice on Sunday. I hope we're humble enough to admit that we're not omniscient and we're not perfect, we just have a God who loves us more than we can imagine.

Here's what happens when we love our neighbor or like Jesus said, we love our enemy; I think then we become the mirror that reflects the image of God so people can see themselves for who they are. It's a love of God that casts out all fear. The 1 John 4:18 it's the love of God that begins to unlock our untapped potential. It's the love of God that begins to reconcile some of these racial and political divisions that exist. I think what I'm getting at is this; how could we do a series on

Better Together and leave God out of the mix? The only way we are better together is if God is in the equation.

Let me close with this. We're going to celebrate communion this weekend and I love that word, you know, I like putting hyphens in words, it's co-union. It's this moment where because of what Christ accomplished on that cross as our mediator, we are reconciled to God. Now, there's a fancy theological word for that, atonement, but I even liked putting hyphens in that; its at-one-ment, put two little hyphens in there. I don't know where you're at in your spiritual journey, but two challenges this weekend and it really comes out of 1 Corinthians 11:27, it says you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. Could we do that? Could we examine ourselves? And two challenges this weekend; one, is there a next step that you need to take in your relationship with God? I think sometimes we want God to do something new while we keep doing the same old thing. We're about to begin a liturgical season called Lent, it begins with Ash Wednesday, six weeks. And really the historical significance is that it's a time to prepare ourselves through a little bit of self denial to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Often it involves giving something up. The challenge is a lot of people then don't add something too. So here's a thought; fasting is kind of one of those spiritual disciplines that's difficult for a lot of us to a practice. And I'll tell you why because we like food. But you know what? I think sometimes giving up a meal or practicing this idea of fasting, and I will say this, I think you can fast television, I think you can fast social media. I think there are other things that you can give up as well, but it's about giving something up and then I think it's about adding something to the mix. Can I just give you a little idea? Our next booklet we put a Lent reading plan right in here for you, and so if you don't have a regular Bible reading plan, I think over the next six weeks it would be a wonderful thing to perhaps do this reading plan and just see how that helps you take that next step in your relationship with God.

Finally, let me issue a second challenge. Maybe some of you are here this weekend and you need to take that first step in a relationship with God. Well, how do I do that? What does that look like? You know, ironically I think it looks a lot like any relationship. You know, when I was 18 years old, I knew who I wanted to marry. I just hadn't asked her out on a date yet and it took a few attempts. This was way before caller ID and so I don't know why, but Lora never answered the phone. It's always her mom and like that was just embarrassing to me and so I hung up. Now listen, my mother in-law attends our Gainesville campus, I want to apologize on the record right now, a lot of hang-ups kind of right in that little time frame. But you know what I asked Lora out and 26 years later God has blessed us with three children. He's blessed us with more moments and memories than I can count. But can I tell you how it started? I asked her out. I took one step into a relationship.

Listen, because your relationship with God is going to look a little bit different than mine. I can't tell you how all of it is going to go, but I do know this. You have to take that first step. And when you do, I think what you'll discover is there is a God who meets you more than halfway. And so maybe you've had a few false starts spiritually. I'm guessing that most of us have a few false starts, but aren't you grateful for the God of second chances? I can't think of a better way to take that next step then maybe this weekend to celebrate communion for the first time.

I'm going to invite our ushers to come at all of our campuses, invite our worship teams to come. And simply put communion is a pilgrimage back to a place called Calvary where Jesus gave his life for us. He modeled what love looks like and in the process he reconciled us to God. The bread represents the body of Christ, the cup, it represents the blood of Christ and it's through those elements that we find that right relationship with God.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for the gift that is ours in Christ. God I pray for those who need to take the next step. Lord maybe they've taken a few steps back or maybe have just been in a holding pattern. God, I pray that by your spirit, each one of us would be able to discern, Lord, what maybe we could do to interrupt the pattern and just catalyze our spiritual growth. God help us discern what that step is. And Lord, for those who are taking that first step of faith today, or we welcome them to the family and we rejoice with the angels in heaven. Amen.