



* **“TIME TO DITCH THE GUILT”**

Biblical Text: [Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor
Old Mission United Methodist Church

If you’ve spent any amount of time in church, you will have heard a message or two - or ten or fifteen - about how you can improve your connection with God. I know that I have preached at least that many here – heads are nodding all over the room.

We did the **“The Bible, the Sermon Series.”* We’ve done a **“Walk with Jesus”* series before Easter. There are books, apps and podcasts to guide us – **“Forty Days of Purpose,”* Sarah Young’s **“Jesus Calling,”* Richard Foster’s, **“Celebration of Discipline,”* then there’s always *The Upper Room*, etc. All of them can be helpful.

All of them can help us fulfill Paul’s prayer from Ephesians 3:19, that we might be: **“...filled with all the fullness of God.”*¹ I believe that’s what God still wants for us.

*But the problem with all the *“devotional guides”* or daily Bible reading plans, or spiritual disciplines is this. Unless we find time in our lives to connect with God on a regular basis then it doesn’t matter which ones we don’t use. (*Let me say that again.*)

It’s not that we don’t have good intentions. The research is consistent. Most Christians want to know more about the Bible than we do. Most of us think we don’t pray often enough. Most of us, including me, wish we felt more connected to God.

But when we look at our lives we are left with *three deadly, destructive words that we apply to our lives too often - *“Ought, must, and should.”*

Those same three deadly words live in our hearts regarding the kind of dad or mom we are or have been, the kind of job we are doing, the kind of husband or wife we are or have been. You know how it works. We tell ourselves, *“I ought to be a better parent.”* *“I must work harder at the office.”* *“I should have been a better husband.”*

*I know so many wonderful men and women (*like some of you*) who limp through the Christian life carrying a backpack full of guilt around with us. Sometimes we have internalized the critical words of others. But too often we have judged ourselves by unrealistic standards and we have come up short.

And preachers like me in the Church often haven’t helped. We’ve turned Romans 3:23 into our favorite text, **“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”*²

¹ Ephesians 3:19, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Op. Cit. Romans 3:23. *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

And, of course, it's true. We are far from being God. And only on the best moments of our lives do we ever get close to living like Jesus did. Most of the time you and I are just ordinary people who live ordinary lives. We are not spiritual superstars.

*We're parents juggling jam-packed schedules; businesspeople balancing careers and family; university students carrying full class loads; new moms and dads figuring out how to get kids to sleep so we can find a few minutes of quiet; grandparents who are active in families in our families and communities and juggling the "golden years."

I made myself a promise years ago to stop preaching on Romans 3:23. If I ever do, you have my permission to remind me of my promise. Instead I have made my favorite verse Romans 8:1. Here's what it says, **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*³ People are carrying enough guilt!

*Turn with me to our text today from Ephesians 2. What you'll find there is the spiritual reason why we don't have to live in guilt. God made us; loves us with all our gifts, faults, and failings; and sent Jesus so we could be set free from guilt by grace.

Look at verse 1: **"You once were dead in your trespasses."* No surprise there!

*Verse 3: *"...in our human nature we deserved the wrath of God, like everyone else."*

*But, verse 4: *"God, rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses."*

*And verse 5: *"He has made us live again in Christ - by grace you have been saved."*

*Again in verses 8 and 9: **"By grace you have been saved ... *and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." * "It is not the result of works, so that no one may boast."*

*Verse 10: *"For we are what God made us to be...created in Christ for good works."*⁴

Step one in connecting with God on a deeper level is remembering that Jesus set you free, so you can come to God in freedom rather than through duty or guilt.

God is far less interested in keeping score of how many times you read *The Upper Room* or *Jesus Calling* this week than he is in the state of your heart and your desire to connect with him. And I think it starts by ditching the guilt and embracing grace!

My favorite line from Doug Field's book, REFUEL, is this: **"I want to guide you toward a way of connecting with God that is natural to you and the rhythm of the life you live."*⁵

That's a powerful idea. *He's convinced that we can be intentional about finding ways to connect to God in the daily rhythm of the life we already live. We don't have to wait until we find "the extra time." Because guess what? **There isn't any!**

³ Op. Cit. Ephesians 3:19, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*

⁴ Op. Cit. Ephesians 2:1-10, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

⁵ REFUEL: An uncomplicated Guide to Connecting with God. Copyright © 2008 by Doug Fields, and Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Doug says there are three simple steps we can take. But they are, like everything else anything but simple to do. Here they are: ***Stop. Be Quiet. Make a connection.**

Just as you don't refuel your car while it's in motion, you can't refill your soul while you are in a flurry of activity. **But we can do those three things wherever we are.**

*We're going to look at some practical ideas about how to do that next Sunday, but here's something I am doing that's helping me. I'm trying to take five minutes when I arrive at my destination - Mp3 player off, radio off, while the car's still warm.

Five minutes to stop and concentrate on God, to pray, to look up a verse from the Bible – trying to not feel guilty while I'm taking five minutes till what comes next. I'm doing it wherever I am - work, an appointment, the store, and even in my garage. Of course sometimes, Ann comes out and says, *"What are you doing out there?"*

The best thing is this - it's helping me stay connected. And I am seeing the evidence – in my attitude about life. Will it work for you? It might. I am amazed at the difference just those five minutes are making. And I'm wondering what more God has in store for me, if I make more of myself available to him.

*I love Bonnie Gray's words from her book, Finding Spiritual Whitespace: ** "Grace is giving ourselves permission to rest and see God's beauty, in you and me."*⁶

*I think a lot of Christians think faith in God means not blowing it in big areas of life: committing adultery, stealing money, committing murder - that kind of thing. Aell, they are right! It would be good to avoid those things.

But I wonder if what comes first, really, is smaller and more basic. Like taking the time to notice a sunset or a sunrise. Like being grateful for God's grace that forgives us and frees us from guilt. Like seeking kindness in the words we speak, or post on Facebook. Like taking just a little time to *** "Stop, be quiet, and make a connection."**

Let us pray:

Lord, you are my God. I thank you for wanting to connect with me and for caring about the details of my life. I thank you for freeing me from guilt by your grace. Now, I want to experience all the fullness of life that you have planned for me. Help me value my relationship with you as my most precious possession above all the stuff I own and strive for and worry about. Help me find the time this week to stop, be quiet and make a connection with you. In Christ's name. Amen

⁶ Finding Spiritual Whitespace: Awakening Your Soul to Rest by Bonnie Gray. Copyright © 2014, Fleming H. Revell Press.