

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/14/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 15, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, thank GOD for GOD'S continued presence in your life. Name blessings from GOD for which you are grateful. Tell GOD how GOD'S love changes your life each and every day.*

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Christians have two ways of looking at our relationship with GOD. Each of these two understandings can be described through a correlational connective phrase. Each connection describes how one's interaction with GOD occurs.

The first of these is based on the connective "if-then." It is causal and it puts the action of the individual as the determining factor in how the relationship functions. The way it works is that "if I do something, then GOD will or must do something." For example, if I go to church, then GOD has to forgive me. If I give my offering, then GOD has to bless me. If I say my prayers, then GOD has to love me. How GOD responds to me is based on what I do, and there are many people who view their relationship with GOD this way. As a result, they spend a great amount of time going through religious activities because they believe their future is based on what they do and how well they do it, because that, in turn, will determine how GOD will respond.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that it suggests that we can control GOD. Our actions determine how GOD will act. But does that really make sense? That we can make GOD behave in a certain way because of what we do? GOD has to respond solely because of the choices I make?

The second correlative connective is found in the phrase "because-therefore." It is also causal, but there is an elective quality to it also. It differs from the first connective because it puts GOD first rather than us or me. It looks like this: because GOD has forgiven me, I choose to go to church. Because GOD blesses me, I will give my offering to help GOD'S mission in the world. Because GOD loves me, I will speak my prayers that reflect my relationship with GOD. Now it is GOD who first chooses to act and what we do is our response. And, again, it is elective. We don't have to do anything. GOD will love us whether we respond to that love or not. GOD will bless us whether we share those blessings or keep them for ourselves. And our future is based on what GOD does and how we act in replying to what GOD does and has done.

What is attractive about that first view of our relationship with GOD is that it gives us the control. We don't like to give up control or have our future dependent upon what someone else does. We want to know the outcome based on what we choose to do. We are free to control how GOD will act because it is based on what I do. I know that I am in charge and that what happens in the future is determined entirely by me because GOD must give me the future I want based on the choice I make. Again, when it comes to GOD, that really doesn't make sense, does it?

But there is also tremendous freedom in the second view as well. Only now, that freedom comes as we recognize that we can choose to respond to GOD'S acts of love or not. In the first view, GOD only offers love and grace if we take the right actions. In the second view, GOD'S love and grace are given no matter what we do. They are ours unless we choose to reject them or, at least, choose not to claim them as ours.

Part of GOD'S mission in the world is to help people realize that they are already loved and blessed and forgiven. Not because of anything they will do but because of what GOD has already done. To accomplish this mission, GOD first invites us to claim these wonderful gifts from GOD, and then respond to them by letting others know. We don't have to. We are free to keep them just for ourselves. But we must recognize that when we do, we deprive another of the unlimited gifts which GOD wants for them too. Our response to GOD by

sharing that love with others allows us to live more fully in those blessings and invites others to discover them as well. We don't control GOD, but thankfully GOD has already given us the offer. All we have to do is to decide how we will respond.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey