

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembly together...but encouraging one another.  
Heb 10:24-25

Share the teaching  
Guard the sharing

# Male Call

## May 30, 2008—Atonement—Relationship Restored: Us With God; Part II

6:00 – 6:05	Coffee & Donuts Opening Prayer
6:05 – 7:00	<p>1) Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Something is wrong: the world shouldn't be this way</li><li>b) We are complicit in what has gone wrong</li><li>c) Sin is systemically organic</li><li>d) Something must be done about it, and we can't do it<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) God's salvific plan in Gen 3:15</li></ul></li></ul> <p><i>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.</i> --Jesus (Mk 12:30)</p> <p><i>You want me to tell you why God is to be loved and how much. I answer, the reason for loving God is God Himself; and the measure of love due to Him is immeasurable love...</i> --St. Bernard of Clairvaux<sup>1</sup> (c. 1090)</p> <p>2) St. Bernard of Clairvaux's stages of love:<sup>2</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) I love God for my sake<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Out of my necessity: I can do little by myself, I need God's help</li></ul></li><li>b) I love God for his blessing of me<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Out of his goodness to me and my thankfulness to him</li></ul></li><li>c) I love God because he is God<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) No longer concerned for self</li></ul></li><li>d) I love myself only for the sake of God<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) I seek to do only what God deems best for me</li></ul></li></ul> <p>3) Some definitions:<sup>3</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Transformation in Christ<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) God's work transforming me into Christ-likeness (a life-long process)</li></ul></li><li>b) Spiritual formation</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> *On Loving God.*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Advancing the Discussion: Reflections on the Study of Christian Spiritual Life." *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care.* Spring 2008, Vol 1, Num 1. 11-12.

i) My effort in “working out” my own salvation (Phil 2:12)

4) Our effort “working out” our salvation can include<sup>4</sup>

- a) Spiritual disciplines
- b) Formative strategies (i.e., look to cooperate with God’s transforming work in me)
- c) Spiritual warfare
- d) Obedience
- e) Etc.

*Church history yields many examples of people who took spiritual disciplines to an unhealthy extreme, mortifying their bodies and shunning all pleasures. We rightly recoil from such extremes. Yet as I read their accounts now I note that these “spiritual athletes” were acting voluntarily, and few looked back on their experiences with much regret. We live in a society that cannot comprehend those who fast or carve out two hours for a quiet time, and yet honor professional football players who work out with weights five hours a day and undergo a dozen knee and shoulder surgeries to repair the damage they inflict on themselves in the sport. Our aversion to spiritual discipline may reveal more about ourselves than about the “saints” we criticize.<sup>5</sup>*

5) Motive must be proper—Love

*Difficulties in obedience or surrender are often viewed as problems of the will. This is the reason some Christians try over and over again to “surrender all,” each time attempting to do so with more and more fervor and resolve. But this misses the point of surrendering first to love and allowing obedience to be an obligation of love, not a response to a commandment.<sup>6</sup>*

*St. Ignatius of Loyola notes that sin is unwillingness to trust that God wants our deepest happiness. Until I am absolutely convinced of this I will do everything I can to keep my hands on the controls of my life; because I think I know better than God what I need for my fulfillment.<sup>7</sup>*

*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*

--Jesus (Luke 9:23)

*Every morning I must say again to myself, today I start.*

--St. Anthony of the Desert<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Yancey, Phillip. *Reaching for the Invisible God*. Quoted in *ibid.* 22.

<sup>6</sup> Benner. *Surrender to Love*. 66

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 66-67.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* 75.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 76. Emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

	<p><i>There is no need to feel guilty if you hear the invitation to surrender over and over again, each time responding with whatever surrender you can offer at the moment. Guilt only complicates surrender, leading to more thrashing about.<sup>9</sup></i></p> <p>6) We are back to <u>experiencing</u> a relationship with God...  <i>Genuine transformation requires vulnerability. It is not the fact of being loved unconditionally that is life-changing. It is the risky experience of allowing myself to be loved unconditionally.<sup>10</sup></i></p> <p><i>Transformation demands that we meet God in the vulnerability of our sin and shame rather than retreating to try to get on with our self-improvement projects. But it also requires that we stay long enough in his loving presence to allow our shame to begin to melt away. For love to transform us, not only must we meet in vulnerability, we must linger long enough for it to penetrate our woundedness.<sup>11</sup></i></p> <p>7) Scriptural reflections  a) Romans 8:31-39 (extent of God's love for me)  b) Romans 6:17 (obedience <i>from the heart</i>)</p>
7:00	Closing Prayer

Further reading:

- *The Bible*
- Benner, David G. *Surrender to Love*. IVP Books. 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Desiring God's Will*. IVP Books. 2005.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. *Death on a Friday Afternoon*. Basic Books. 2000.
- St. Bernard of Clairvaux. *On God's Love*.
- St. Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Mansions*.