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## **How's Your Love Life?**

Genesis 1: 26-31  
Matthew 22: 34-40

Right off the bat, I want to ask you 'What's your love life like?' I'm going to ask you some questions, and I want you to think about each one and whether or not it is true for you. Here goes.

Is your love life fulfilling? Does it bring you life? Does it nourish you? Does it cause you to be a better person? Does it comfort you? Does it re-energize or strengthen you? Does it make you joyful? Does it empower you to go out and serve others? Do you spend enough time with your beloved? What do you enjoy doing with your beloved?

I'm not going to ask for a show of hands of whether or not you thought your love life fulfilled all those things. And its okay if your love life isn't everything you want it to be. That is a lifelong process for all of us. But, I do want to take a ask you one question. How many people thought that I was talking about your relationship with a human partner? And how many people thought that I was talking about your relationship with God? You see, most of us don't associate having a love relationship with God.

The type of relationship that you have with God depends on what your image of God is. How do you view God? Who is God for you? When you answer that question, you'll figure out what type of relationship you are currently having with God.

Since we're taking polls, I want to just take one more poll about your image of God. Don't worry, I won't ask for any show of hands. You can just keep this one in your head. How many of you most associate with God as a Father? Mother? Friend? Companion? Comforter? Teacher? Judge? King? Creator? Lover?

The Psalms are full with many beautiful images of God. I'm not here to tell you that one image is better than another. I just want you to question which image of God you associate most with. The image that resonates most with me is that of a best friend- someone who is with me always, supporting me, comforting me.

I also associate God with a close family member. When I was in Belize, I remember thinking once during prayer about my niece and my nephew. I felt so filled with love for both of them, and I was overcome by this love. At that same time, a feeling came over me: "Wow. God loves me this much! God loves me more than this!"

Is your image of God mostly that of a father who disciplines? A creator who forms you lovingly? A mother who nurtures you? A companion or friend who is with you always? A teacher who helps to guide you to wisdom? A king who rules over you? A judge who judges you? A lover who loves you?

I'm not here to tell you that any one image is better than another. In fact, you could have all of these images of God- that's fine! But, I do want you to ask yourself, as we go back to the scripture today: where is your love for God? That is the question Jesus is asking us in the Greatest commandment: 'How is your love life with God? Do you love God? Does that impact your life in the same way your intimate relationship with a human partner would impact your

life? How does that love for God impact your life?

Do you spend time with God? In any human relationship, there's no way you could expect that relationship to grow if you don't spend time with that person. If I don't spend time with my partner each day, communicating with him or her, sharing my life- joys and sorrows- with him/her, and listening to him/her, are we really going to grow together?

Is our relationship with God any different from our relationship with a human partner? If we don't spend time with God everyday, will we be able to grow with God? In any love relationship, is it possible to grow with someone if we don't spend time with them getting to know them, trust them, and love them?

For some of us, perhaps the idea of a love relationship with God is not realistic. After all, we may not even feel like we know who God is! It's harder to love somebody when you don't know them. If you don't know a human person, usually you consider that person a stranger. The same is true for God. How can we love God if we don't spend time with God, and try to get to know God? For me, it was an amazing realization when I discovered that my relationship with God is no different than my relationship with humans.

One way I want to share with you that I've found as a nourishing way to spend time with God is through prayer or meditation. Prayer might be what we consider "talking" to God. It is great to talk to God. But, what if, in a human relationship, one person did all the talking? How would the other react? "Blah, blah, blah, blah...", "Hey, let me get a word in!"

God might be saying the same thing to us if we are only talking and not listening. For us, it can often be difficult to listen to God. The reason it can be difficult to listen to God is because we are usually restless. Our minds are like a monkey gym- going this way and that, needing to go from this activity to that activity. But, what God invites us to is to "Be still. Be still and know that I am God." That is a wonderful invitation to us. The practice of listening to God is what a lot of people call meditation. You can talk, but you also allow room for God to talk to you. Just don't expect any big booming voices. Rather, look in the very stillness of your heart for God's voice.

Another beautiful way of spending time with God is by journaling. I personally love to write, so that is a very meaningful way for me to spend time with God. Don't be afraid in your journal or other places to have conversations with God. I remember the first time I addressed God directly in my journal. I don't recall before that having addressed God as 'you'. At first, this addressing God directly was kind of weird for me. But after a little while it became incredibly meaningful and personal.

Another beautiful example of written conversations with God is Neale Donald Walsch. Neale's trilogy of "Conversations with God" books have been extremely inspiring to me. I recommend you read them if you get a chance. Neale never sees himself as more privileged than anyone else. In fact, he says that we all have conversations with God every day.

Many other ways to spend time with God are out there. Don't limit yourself to discovering what is meaningful for you! Singing, mindfulness, and service to others are all forms of worship. Think outside the box. See every activity in your life as spending time with God. Taking care of the kids- what a great time to be with God! Going for a run? Why don't I ask God to join me? Driving to work? 'Hey God, why don't you and I catch up? How are you today?'

I want to ask you another question. If someone asked you "What is God?", what would you say? Maybe you'd say 'Spirit', since God is not physical.

I want to challenge you today to ask yourself how you would describe God to people.

There's nothing wrong with describing God as 'Spirit'. However, this idea of God as Spirit is circular. By circular, I mean that we can say 'God is Spirit', then 'Spirit is God', 'God is Spirit', and on and on. If we come up with a description of God, however, that is not just an idea, then we come up with something about God that is personal and real to us.

I do not mean to discount ideas about God. Often, we need ideas about God before we can really spend time with God and experience God. But when we move past ideas about God, we go beyond an abstract God, and say 'who is God for us?' Then, the question about God becomes not only "What is God?", but "What is God for me?" Here are some examples:

'God, who is so full of beauty, and gives me every good gift.'

'God is pure love, who loves and accepts me for exactly who I am.'

'God is compassion, who inspires and empowers us to go and serve the poor and the downtrodden.'

'God is the Creator of the universe, who made me in His/Her image.'

This last experience of God is the experience which was related to us from the first chapter of Genesis today. Genesis here relates how God the Creator makes us in God's own image. What does it mean to us that this loving God created me in His/Her image?

Now, just for clarification, sometimes I say 'He' for God, and sometimes I say 'She'. As you can see, the gender associations I use for God depend on the image that I have of God. If I see God only as a Father, then I might only use 'He.' If I see God also as a Mother, I might only also use 'She.' However, God is ultimately Spirit, and beyond gender categories. Using 'He' or 'She' just helps us to use images to get to know God better.

So anyhow, the fact that God created me in His/Her image means to me that we are *all* that God is. God is love, you are love; God is peace, you are peace; God is compassion, you are compassion; God is joy, you are joy. This also means that just as God is a Creator, we are also a creator. Each of us has our own unique things that we like to create. Some people are into building things and carpentry; others love cooking; and some of us love creating lesson plans as teachers.

However, when I speak of us being a Creator right now, I am not referring to physical things such as cooking and lesson plans, though those are included. I'm referring to creating ourselves in the image of God every single second- as love, peace, compassion, and joy. Have you ever thought of yourself as a creator in this way? Making yourself anew in every second of now? The glory of each second of now is that each moment is an opportunity for us to recreate ourselves as who we want to be.

Did you ever think that you are made in the image of that which you love? If that is true, then love God fully and love all that you see in God. Do this, and you will create yourself in the image of God! Do you want to create yourself as love? Do it! Do you want to create yourself as peace? Do it now! Do you want to create yourself as joy? Don't wait another second! The beauty of God's creation is that we have this ability to create ourselves and to choose who we are going to be. So... choose to be love- in every moment of now, regardless of the circumstances. Choose to be peace- this is the time and place. Choose peace even if others persecute you or seek to do violence against you. Choose to be joy- even when the world tempts to overwhelm you, or make you sad and depressed. Choose compassion- even in the midst of indifference or greed- choose to look at others with beauty and see the beauty, love, and goodness inside of them.

Not only choose all of these things, but see all of these qualities inside of yourself. When you see joy, peace, love, and compassion inside yourself, then you can see these things in other

people, even if these people don't show joy or peace outwardly. When you see these qualities in God, and you realize that God is in all people, this cannot help but touch you in the deepest part of your being in showing you that you are love, peace, and joy, and that all people are these things too.

So, spend time in your intimate relationship with God. Let it nourish, fulfill, and sustain you. Always ask yourself, 'How's my love life?' Ask yourself too: 'Who is God?', and 'Who is God to me?' Let this beautiful relationship help you to see the beauty in yourself and in others, and to create yourself anew in every moment of now as peace, joy, compassion, and love- the very *stuff* of God.