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The Grace that Validates -- Devotional

The Grace of God is a validator in our lives. Jesus was full of grace and he validated people in need of mercy and grace. He touched them in a way that their human dignity was restored and they realized they had value. They always sensed that they mattered to him and His Father. My wife wrote a journal in her blog earlier today and I asked her if I could include it in mine. It is such a beautifully and powerfully written piece. Be prepared to be blessed as you read it.

The Validation of A Human Heart

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What does it mean for someone to validate your heart?

I want to define “heart” as the part of us we might call our soul. Our soul is often defined as our mind, will, and emotions. Here is more of what the dictionary renders as a definition of soul:

the principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body; the emotional part of human nature; the seat of the feelings or sentiments; the animating principle; the essential element or part of something

So what I am asking you is, “What does it mean for someone to give value to your feelings, thoughts, and actions?”

Value - relative worth, merit, or importance

I looked the word “validate” up in the dictionary and found this definition:

to make valid; substantiate; confirm

I was thinking recently of how someone had deeply validated my heart and the unexpected way that those simple words had impacted me. I realized that I had a hunger to be validated – substantiated – confirmed in my feelings, thoughts, and actions. As I meditated on this, I had a subtle feeling that God was teaching me, not only about myself, but about humanity as a whole.

I guess we all want to believe that somehow we are different from everyone else in significant ways and that our thoughts, feelings, and actions are somehow mystical and can only be opened with some magical key. And of course, we are all unique in many ways so I am not saying that we are all cookie cutter images of one another. However, I do see that there is a humanness that is a basic design within each of us and we all need much the same things.

I just finished reading a book about Adult Children of Alcoholics, of which I am one. I was taken aback to find that in a list of characteristics of ACoA, I had most of them. And I was faced with this reality – I am not a lot different from most of humanity. Any little girl placed in similar circumstances as mine will develop very similar struggles as mine because we are all human.

In the last few months, I have come to see that in my particular “stream” (and please forgive my religious terminology) of Christianity, we have perhaps overemphasized our being made in the image of God (stay with me – don’t jump out yet!) and underemphasized our humanness. As a matter of fact, our humanness was so

important, that Jesus laid aside his divinity and took on our humanness. I feel we have too quickly gone past that.

Yes, we are created in God's image and are to be holy as He is, but we are also 100% human – by His own design!

As we teach about Jesus and think about his earthly ministry, we tend to make him 100% God and maybe 10% human, but that is not what the scripture teaches. He was the God-man. He laid aside divinity to walk in his humanness.

As I read Matthew 9 last week, I asked God to show me the reality of how Jesus really ministered and lived. I tried as best I could to take off my religious mindsets and look at this scripture with new eyes.

This is what I found:

Jesus encountered the paralytic. The FIRST thing Jesus said to him was, "Son, be of good cheer..." Please don't miss this! Jesus was validating the paralytic's heart! He called him "son". To me this is almost like when I called a young girl I was ministering to last week, "Sweetheart". It was tender.. It was non-religious. It was validating.

Then, Jesus said, "Cheer up". Now maybe you will disagree with me but it seems to me that Jesus was more concerned with validating the paralytic's heart than he was with healing him physically. He was healing him emotionally. Think of how much pain and discouragement the paralytic must have had throughout the years! Think of the judgment and condemnation he had endured from the religious crowd who said he was paralyzed because of sin!

I find the same thing later in the chapter as the woman with the issue of blood came to Jesus. Yes, she was desperate for physical healing, but can you imagine her emotional state after 12 years of sickness. Luke 8 tells us that she had spent all her livelihood on doctors and could not be healed by any. Mark 5 says that she had SUFFERED many things from many physicians and was not better but worse. Can you imagine her hopelessness? Yet something in the ministry of Jesus was beginning to awaken hope in her heart again! She said, "If only I can touch his clothes, I can be well." I imagine she didn't have a lot of physical strength left. It must have taken everything within her to get to where Jesus was. But before she took that first step, something had begun to happen in her heart.

Jesus again said, "Cheer up, daughter." Why would Jesus say, "Cheer up" to a woman whom had just gotten healed after 12 years of sickness? I wonder if somehow he was as concerned about her "heart" as he was her "body".

And again, look at how he spoke to her, "Daughter". It was endearing, tender, compassionate.

I am so grieved as I think of how parts of the "Church" have used God's Word to hurt God's children. We have told them that if they have enough faith they can be healed – so the implication is that if you are not healed, it is your fault. We have told them that others can have enough faith for them to be healed which implies their lack of healing is our fault. Must make God want to curse! Okay, not really, don't throw anything at me. It must make God very angry! How about that?

We have used these scriptures to make a formula for healing ministries. You know, I think God hates man-made formulas! But we love them! We love to be able to package God into a neat package, but have you noticed that He just won't get into those packages no matter how we wish He would? We must admit that healing just doesn't consistently work according to our formulas. Yes, there are principles we can draw, but don't you think

we go off the deep end sometimes with our list of principles? We teach them to people and when our magical formulas don't work, they are hurt and disillusioned just as the woman with the issue of blood SUFFERED many things of many doctors, people today SUFFER many things from many Christians as we try to make God jump through our hoops and He says, "Forget it! I won't perform for you."

It is certainly not that God doesn't want people to be healed. That is the beautiful message of the cross. God wants us to be healed in every way. He has given His very best so that we might have that kind of complete healing, but we are so pathetic in our efforts to represent God to lost humanity! We represent Him as 100% God, but we forget to represent Him as Jesus – 100% human.

The 100% humanness of Jesus causes people to connect their hearts with God's. The misunderstanding of his 100% Godness keeps people away. They wouldn't stay away if they could see God's heart, but our fears of God in His holiness and power cause us to stay at arm's length. But when we see Jesus in his 100% humanness and 100% Godness, it makes a bridge in our hearts to cross over from our hearts to God's.

But we Christians have often blown up the bridge. We wouldn't admit it, but we have. We have blown up the bridge that God built because we can't conceptually understand how God could build this bridge and it would have to strength to span an uncrossable river from Him to us. So we totally mess up our explanations of the bridge as we try to reach lost humanity.

Last week, I met a young girl who is 27 years old and an alcoholic. I spent 3 ½ hours with her and listened to her story. I was amazed at how much more I could "hear" than I could have heard a few months ago before my world SUFFERED many things of many people.

I listened as she described herself and I understood. I understood her because in some ways, I was her. Human. The same struggles.

And I knew God was asking me to validate her heart. I listened. I am sick of myself when I see how I have been so quick to give everyone answers for their problems. How many times do they just want us to listen? We really don't have to have all the answers, but we really do have to care. And Christianity is nothing – it is not appealing to lost humanity – without God's heart. I listened. I listened to her heart. I cried with her. I held her.

Then I validated her. I validated her struggles. I had compassion. I really did. My heart broke as I heard how many times she had been wounded. No wonder she was an alcoholic!

I told her I'd take her to AA. I didn't offer her deliverance ministry. It was not appropriate! She needed love at the time, not deliverance. My heavens, how often have we rushed in with our quick and easy answers while God cried as we further damaged someone's heart? I am not against deliverance ministry. It is important. But people, there is no magical formula to set people free. We have to love others before they can "hear" anything we have to say. It is a much quicker fix if we can just get them "delivered" and there were certainly times when Jesus "delivered" people. But have you ever heard that true adage, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care?" It is so true!

I asked her if I could pray for her. I just intended to pray a really short non-religious prayer for her as within me I was thinking, "God, I am overwhelmed. I really don't know how to help this girl. She has many serious issues. Does she need detox? Rehab?" She was drinking to keep herself from shaking and throwing up because she is severely addicted. She said, "Well, wait until I finish drinking because you shouldn't pray while I am drinking." I assured her that God was not worried about her drinking while I was praying. He was concerned about the process she was beginning. I am becoming very non-religious. As one of my friends said, I might need to have a warning label on my forehead right now.

This young girl, someone's daughter, became my daughter as I took on her heart and said as with my actions, "I will care about you!" She collapsed into my arms, sobbing uncontrollably, as she told me how many times she had walked up to the doors where the AA meeting would be held that night and was unable to go in because she was ALONE.

So tonight, I will attend my first AA meeting with my young friend. And maybe, I will be more like Christ than I have before. I will be more human. I will be a type of Jesus with skin on.

I know it is a set-up. God loves to set us up! I will be required to face many of my own memories from my past as I walk with this "daughter" in her journey. No accident here. And how ironic is it that my grad class I began yesterday is "Addiction Counseling".

And God heals my heart as I hold someone else's heart in my hands. I say with my actions and with my words, "I validate your heart. You are too important to God and to me to remain in this condition. You have a destiny."

I saw hope awaken in this young girl's eyes. Then Sunday, I shared about her at church. Afterwards, she came up to speak to me. I didn't recognize her. She was dressed and clean and had on makeup and she wasn't drunk. Oh my goodness, I didn't know she was there. Now, I didn't share her name or any detail which could identify her, but I shared her story as I asked God's people to get real. I was horrified. Would she be offended? I said, "I am so sorry. I wouldn't have shared if I had known you were here." She looked at me and said, "It is okay. I almost came forward and said, It is me." And later she told me something that struck deep within me. She said, "I felt like you were proud of me." Maybe I was getting this thing right. I was speaking life to her by saying, "This young girl is doing something very difficult, and I believe in her." She "got" my validation. And she told me that her live-in boyfriend who came with her had, as he listened to me share about her heart, "got" it, too. He had begun to move past his own struggles and see her heart as he heard it described by a stranger.

And she wants to bring all her "friends" to our church. She called me yesterday and asked me to talk to another one of her friends on the phone. The friend was hesitant. I could hear their exchange on the other end of the phone. She asked the "friend" if she would come with her to our church next Sunday. I couldn't help but smile as she tried to explain, "It's not exactly like AA (her friend had been) and it's not really like church. You can wear your blue jeans."

Maybe we are moving toward getting it right. God help us and guide us as we learn to hold the world's hearts in our hands, tenderly, with compassion and understanding, knowing they are just like us. Human. Humans who need to find the Jesus bridge to God. Humans who need for us to bridge them to Jesus. And may we learn to validate their hearts as Jesus validated the hearts of hurting people whom he encountered day by day.

Value - relative worth, merit, or importance

Validate - to make valid; substantiate; confirm

You have the power to validate the hearts of those around you and lead them in a pathway that will bring life and healing to them. Will you?

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