

What It Looks Like To Partner With God

1. Warm-up: Tell us about a rewarding partnership you have experienced in life – maybe in a work setting, or school or sports or church, or among family or friends.
2. Jeff gave two examples of great partnerships. He told about how we, as a congregation, by working together were able to rescue two gay Congolese men from a prison in Uganda last week. Jeff also told how, as a kid, he did his part in his family by meticulously mowing and manicuring the lawn, causing his Dad to say the yard looked like a golf course, which made Jeff feel really proud. God invites us into that kind of partnership. In our Scripture passage this week, the Apostle Paul speaks of being “workers together with God.” II Corinthians 6:1. Why do you think an all-sufficient God wants or needs us as partners in doing God’s work on earth? Do you see yourself as a partner of God?
3. As Paul describes it in this week’s Scripture passage, partnering with God seems to be less about what we do and more about how we do it. In other words, partnering with God is not as much about initiating special projects for God as it is about responding to whatever life throws at us in a way that’s consistent with God’s highest values. In our Scripture passage, Paul lists 17 different attitudes that ought to characterize us as partners with God. Read II Corinthians 6:1-10, as printed on p. 3
 - a. In this passage, we’re reminded how much Paul suffered by choosing to partner with God. Why do you think Paul did it? What was in it for him?
 - b. Verses 3-7 are filled with short phrases describing Paul’s experience partnering with God and the attitudes he carried into those experiences. Tonight we’ll focus on three key phrases – “patient in affliction,” “giving no offense,” and “having nothing, yet possessing all things.” But before focusing on those three phrases, look back through all the other phrases used by Paul in this passage. Which one of those other phrases most speaks to you or intrigues you – and why?
4. On Sunday we focused on three key values that ought to characterize our partnership with God, the first being: “patience in affliction” (vs. 4).
 - a. Jeff said that learning to be “patient in affliction” begins with the recognition that a whole lot can and will go wrong in life. When you left your parents’ home and moved into young adulthood, what was one of the first experiences that taught you just how much can go wrong in life?
 - b. As the old saying goes: if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. Jeff gave two examples of how our plans can be wildly upended. He gave the example of his Grandmother and of a good friend from college. How close has your life come to your original plan?

- c. Despite all the tragedy she experienced in her life, Jeff's Grandmother ended up having a sweet and good life, better than most millionaires. Instead of focusing on all she didn't have, she chose to focus on what she did have and to celebrate that. What are some of the beautiful things you celebrate in your life right now?
 - d. Someone recently signed off a note to Jeff by saying, "Have a good day – On Purpose." How is that different from simply saying, "Have a good day"?
 - e. Over a hundred years ago, Fanny Crosby authored many famous hymns. She was blind her entire life. Read the poem on p. 3 that Fanny wrote when 8 years old. Jeff said, "That's what 'patience in affliction' looks like. It's the difference between resenting what is versus making peace with what is." What's happening in your life right now that you need to make peace with it?
5. On Sunday we also focused on what it means to "give no offense in anything" (vs. 3). That doesn't mean appeasing people and only saying what they want to hear. We know that because Jesus himself often shared difficult truth and insisted on change, especially when someone was being treated unjustly.
- a. Jeff said that "giving no offense" means responding to conflict in ways meant to make things better, rather than simply to vent. Too often when we find ourselves in conflict, we just want to lash out and get even, and in the process we only offend and deepen the conflict, instead of winning someone over to the truth. Think about a situation of conflict you've experienced. Did you respond in a way that was meant to slay or a way that was meant to heal? Tell us what happened.
 - b. Westley Egmont says: "Conflict + Love = Progress." What does that mean?
 - c. What's the difference between being a reformer versus a provocateur?
6. On Sunday we also focused on what it means to "have nothing, yet possess all things" (vs. 10). Jeff gave the example of Jennifer Barnes posting on Facebook a description of all the blessings that occurred even as her father was dying in hospice.
- a. Tell us about a time in your life when you "had nothing," yet were really blessed.
 - b. Jesus said, "I have come that [you] might have life and . . . have it more abundantly." John 10:10. What does it mean to have the kind of abundant life Jesus refers to here? What's the difference between someone who has it and someone who doesn't?
 - c. Jeff closed with the story of 20-year old police officer, Wilbert Mora, who died after being shot. When he realized he might not make it, he insisted on donating his organs, thereby allowing 5 people to live. Jeff said, "You never have less than when you're dying. Yet Mora had so much, he was able to give life to five people even as he was dying." What thoughts or feelings does that story evoke in you?

7. Which of the three attitudes we've talked about today – patience in affliction; giving no offense; and having nothing, yet possessing all things – do you most need to focus on – and why?

II Corinthians 6:1-10

We then, *as* workers together with God also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For God says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

³ We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. ⁴ But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience in affliction, in needs, in distresses, ⁵ in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; ⁶ by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, ⁷ by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, ⁸ by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Poem by Fanny Crosby

Oh, what a happy child I am, although I cannot see.
I am resolved that in this world, contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind – I cannot and I won't.