

The One Thing God Cannot Do

On Sunday, we studied the story of the prophet Hosea – and in the process learned something really important about God.

1. Warm-up question: What's something you can't do that others often find easy? It might be something large or small – like cooking, mechanical work, pronouncing a certain word, etc.
2. To say that God is great is an understatement! God is the creator of 100 million galaxies in the known cosmos. Many of those galaxies contain as many as one billion stars. The brightest star in the known cosmos was discovered by a team lead by astrophysicist Paul Crowther. That star is 265 times larger than our sun, with a brightness 10 million times greater! OMG, literally.
 - a. Take 30 seconds in silence as a group to imagine being the One who holds the cosmos together. What do you think that feels like?
 - b. But it's not just the cosmos out there. The human body is its own mind blowing ecosystem every bit as complex as the galaxies. Microbiologists tell us that we each carry about 40 trillion bacterial cells. Some bacteria live only on your elbows, some on your gums, some between your toes, or in your intestines. How does it make you feel to realize you are a host for all kinds of tiny living things?
3. In Psalm 50:10, God says, "Every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine." The wealth, power, and brilliance of God are staggering. Yet when it comes time to describe the essence of who God is, the Bible does not say: "God is power" or "God is wealth" or "God is brilliance." Instead the Bible says, "God is love." I John 4:8. That means God thrives on love. Love is the thing that makes God tick. It's the one thing God most wants to give and receive. Because, it turns out, love is the most important thing in the cosmos.
 - a. Jeff shared a story of a time when, as a young child, he first realized how infinitely wonderful it is to realize you are loved unconditionally. Tell us about a time in your life when you received unconditional love. What happened? How would you describe what unconditional love feels like?
 - b. Imagine trying to explain love to an alien from a far-away planet who's never experienced it and wants to know why love is the most important thing – more important than wealth, power, brilliance, etc. What would you say?
4. Although love is the most important thing in life, it's not something that can be seized, compelled, or commanded. It's a chance you take. You risk opening your heart to someone and hope for the best, knowing you could lose them or they simply might not reciprocate your love.

- a. Jeff said, “The great irony of the universe is that the one thing God most wants – your love and mine – God cannot compel. It’s the one thing God cannot do, unless God turns us into robots, in which case, we would not be real and our love would not be real. Real love cannot be commanded by God.” Do you agree that God lacks the power to compel the one thing God most wants, i.e., our love? How does it make you feel to think that there’s something God cannot do?
 - b. If the thing God most wants is to give and receive love, yet God is not able to force that to happen, that means God takes a risk when opening his/her heart to each of us. “That means,” Jeff said, “to be God is to be infinitely vulnerable.” “Vulnerable” is not a word we often associate with God. Have you ever thought about God being “infinitely vulnerable?” How does that make you feel?
 - c. To dramatize how vulnerable love makes us, we watched the short film entitled “In A Heartbeat.” For any who didn’t see it, describe what happened. What insights did the film give you? Have you ever felt like the boy in the film? When?
5. According to the prophet Hosea, God often feels like the boy in the film – or like a spouse who has been betrayed by unfaithfulness – raw and vulnerable. Read Hosea 1:1-11.
- a. Apparently, Hosea fell in love with a woman who was a harlot and felt God calling him to marry her. So he did, then she was unfaithful. It appears he wasn’t even sure all the kids were his. What do the names of the three children tell us about how Hosea felt – and how God feels when we’re unfaithful?
 - b. When in your life have you felt most betrayed (by anyone, not just a spouse), and what did that feel like?
 - c. There is a sudden shift in tone in verses 10-11, where God promises to take Israel back when they’re done being unfaithful. Then God commands Hosea to do the same with his wife. Read Hosea 3:1-6. Why would anyone – God or human – take someone back after they had been unfaithful?
 - d. Read Song of Solomon 8:6-7. Jeff said, “Those verses describe how God feels about you.” Do you buy that? In your heart of hearts, do you believe God feels that way about you?
 - e. When in your life do you feel you’ve been most unfaithful to God? How do you think God felt as you drifted away? How do you think God felt when you came back? (Hint: Remember the ending of “In A Heartbeat.”)
 - f. What’s the most important insight about God you’re taking away from this conversation?