

Praise the Lord. This is Dr. Dana Gillon. I give honor to God, to Pastor Renée and to all of you my brothers and sisters in Christ. I want to talk to you today about **The Heart's Posture**.

I'd like to start by reflecting on relationships. Throughout the Word of God, we are shown the critical importance of relationships. We first find that God is desirous of relationship with humanity. In Genesis 1, after God created this world, He created man in His image and thus relationship. In Genesis 2:18, God said it was not good for man to be alone, and God made a helper comparable to man. From that point on, we have experienced the highs and lows, the wonders and the struggles of relationship. In Revelation 3:20, God tells us that He stands at the door and knocks; if we hear His voice and open the door, He will come in to us and sup with us. From Genesis to Revelation, if we look, we see the critical importance of relationship. Yet, to walk in relationship as God calls us to, will require us to examine and adjust our heart's posture.

James 1:2-4

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

This is likely a familiar passage of scripture to many of us. It is also an appropriate scripture for the times we live in today. Even as Christians, as this scripture is written to, we experience trouble and trials. We have a troublesome political climate, financial upheaval, even rising crime rates. But often times, our trials can come from familiar places - relationships.

Consider the part of the scripture that reads, "fall into various trials..." This suggests that these trials are unforeseen, unwelcome and we may be completely unprepared for them. Yet, we are encouraged to count it joy, all joy when we experience these trials because they are an opportunity for growth in our faith and in the production of patience.

All of this seems easy to say, but much more difficult to do in the context of relationship. Who of us has not been hurt, harmed, disappointed, dissatisfied, even angered in relationship? One of the most effective tools the enemy uses to distract and dissuade us from relationship with God is our relationship with each other.

1 John 4:20 asks the question, If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Yet, some of us will say, you don't know what they did to me or you don't know how much I've been through. But God did indeed know, and He is compassionate. And, He still expects us to count it all joy, to allow this testing of our faith to produce patience, and to allow this patience to perfect us. He does not desire that we yield to sin. The hurt, the pain, the anger. Justified. Sin cannot be our option; sin cannot be our response to our trials.

Psalm 51:10, the Psalmist says, Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The Bible tells us that David was a man after God's own heart. Yet, David yielded to sin with Bathsheba. David did not honor Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. David did not honor Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. David did not honor his position as the king God appointed him to be. The posture of David's heart was out of alignment with the purpose of God for his life. In Psalm 51, David cries out to God and asks for mercy. David acknowledges his sin. David asks to be restored.

Like David, we may not always get it right when we are exposed to the trials of life, when we fall into various trials. We may not respond well in these relationships. But, like David, we must turn to God first to reestablish the posture of our heart that we might serve Him.

There is so much beauty to be experienced in our relationships. Yet, it is also impossible to be in relationship with God and man and not experience trials and temptations. But, there is a righteous response to pain, hurt and anger.

We are generally familiar with **Ephesians 4:26** telling us not to let the sun go down on our wrath. But we may be less familiar with the necessary behaviors to move us from wrath to righteousness. It is not simply that we proclaim I won't be angry because the sun is going down- that's too legalistic. How do we exercise the faith necessary to move to righteousness? How do we stand in righteousness when we've been wounded?

Those who will not invite the Lord into that space of harm cannot overcome the harm and execute righteousness. It is the Lord's desire to protect us from the harm of the storm even when He allows us to experience the storm. How can I walk in rage when I know God is with me in this hard place where I am experiencing harm? I trust Him to handle those who mishandle me. I trust Him to keep safe that which is precious to me even when everything around me seems to be in chaos. I am not unaware of the chaos. I am discomforted. It is a press to die daily especially when I am being

harmed. But I trust God and I ask Him to help me be still so that I might see His hand.

The storm carries us to places we cannot otherwise go. But, if we are lost in the storm - trapped in the cycle of responding to each experience with anger, rage, and the like- we never reach the destination the storm was designed to take us. The experience of the storm is a tool He uses to perfect us.

There is a song by LaShun Pace Rhodes entitled "If I Were In Control." The lyrics help us see how God uses our trials to position our hearts.

If I were in control...
of my life...
I think that I would have worked things out differently
For you see there would be
No Hurt, No Pain, No Disappointment
Of these things my life would be
Scott Free
But that just goes to show you
How little I know,
About Leading, about controlling my life
for you see all these things
Have come together just to make the best of me

God in His infinite love desires relationship with us. He also desires that we have relationship one with the other. Our relationships are the source of infinite blessings and a tool the enemy uses to thwart the plan of God. It is our heart's posture that allows us to remain aligned to God's purpose and His plan. Oh Lord, create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. Restore to us the joy of Your salvation and uphold us by Your generous Spirit. Then we will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted unto You. In Jesus name, Amen.