

Happy New Year! I hope you ended 2009 well and that 2010 will be even better. I've been very thankful for the way my year ended. I was privileged to spend December 17-23 in Guatemala with some of our High School students and parents and it was an awesome way to close out the year.

While we were in Guatemala we did two things: some of us built a home for a grandmother who lived in the country (pictures) and we all worked at a malnutrition center located in San Juan (pictures).

Guatemala is the most malnourished country in Central America and that is the number one cause of death among children there. However, what impacted me the most was seeing our young people love those children and, in a way, "adopt" a child for a week.

The most humbling moment was our last day at the center, I stood back and watched as our youth, through tears, laid hands on the heads of these infants and children and prayed for them. I watched as they struggled to leave the children they had held & fed for a week—there was silence in the room, it was a holy moment.

I had a hard time too. I didn't shave much while we were there, so I was sporting a thick black mustache. Other than being taller than most of the locals, I guess I looked local. Their dependence on us hit me when one of the toddlers reached for me and called me "Papa."

I thought "how amazing is it that this child is calling me 'Papa'?" He didn't call me "Pastor" or "Senior", he called me "Papa." There was no formality, no sense of boundaries, no fear or shame. With that child it was pure shamelessness when approaching me.

With this in mind, I thought it would be good to begin the year, not by talking about *us* and the resolutions *we* made. But, to begin the year by talking about *God* and how we can approach Him like that, with pure shamelessness.

To do this, we're going to look at a story in the book of Luke. Here, we find Jesus eating with people, telling stories and even hanging out in their houses. You'd think God couldn't have made himself any more approachable. Yet, in Luke 11, we find Jesus disciples telling him they don't know how to approach God. Look with me to Luke 11:1 (read text). In other words, the disciples are saying "teach us how to approach God." Notice how he continues in verse 2 "Father." (read through 13).

Remember what the disciples asked Jesus?—"teach us how to approach God." The story we just read and subsequent explanation is supposed to teach us. So let's pay close attention.

In this culture, midnight was literally the middle of the night. They lived in one room houses and they all slept together. So, the story goes that while everyone is sleeping, a knock is heard at the door. A friend on the outside says he needs some bread. Meanwhile, the friend on the inside says "don't bother me because we're all asleep." He responds literally: "Don't trouble me." Yet, he gets up and gives his friend some bread. Jesus says the man got what he wanted because of his "boldness" or literally, his "shamelessness."

Now, this is a problem and honestly, it's a bit disturbing. It's disturbing because it makes it seem like God is "bothered" by my prayers and Jesus says this is how we are to approach him... "bother God."

We have to remember that this is not an allegory, it's a parable. An allegory is where every part of the story has a corresponding meaning. A parable, however, is a story with a singular lesson. So what's the singular lesson here? The lesson is to be boldly persistent. Remember the question? "How can we approach God?" The answer—be boldly persistent, any time, all the time. Do you approach God like that?

What Jesus has just said cannot be understood unless it's on family terms. It's like when I got off the bus from the mission trip. Amy, Ana & Isaac were there waiting for me. The kids ran over to me and began jumping up and down "daddy, daddy, daddy." So after I loved on them a little, I was trying to pray with the group and they just kept on doing the same thing, persistently, the whole time.

Now, if I was trying to lead a group in discussion or prayer and one of you came up to me and started pulling on my pant leg, I'd think you were just annoying. BUT, if my kids do it, it's different. Jesus says—approach God like that.

Think about it. In Exodus 32:12, God gets angry with the children of Israel and says "I'm going to wipe them out." Moses, however, interrupts God's train of thought and says "Come on God, stop being angry...think this through."

In Genesis 18:24, God tells Abraham he's going to destroy the cities of Sodom & Gomorrah. Abraham's response? "Slow down God, what if there are 50 righteous people?... 40...30...20...10...?"

Think about the Presidents of the United States. The only people who can take such liberty with interrupting them are their children. We're all familiar with the picture of JFK Jr. under his daddy's desk, perhaps you don't know this story. Once, during the civil war, when Abraham Lincoln was meeting with some of his top advisers, the door to

the Cabinet room exploded. On the other side was his son 7 year old son Tad who had just fired his toy cannon. What kind of person can be that “rude” or “bothersome”? A child.

Remember how he’s told his disciples to approach God? He didn’t say “Friend... Judge.... Creator.... It’s in verse 2 “Father...” What we are talking about here is only understood in that relationship.

This makes no sense unless you understand that when you become a Christian, something radically changes in your relationship to God. This is called the Christian doctrine of adoption.

There are, however, two ways of approaching God. One way will show you if you’re just a moral person, the other way will tell you if you are a Christian. Moral people and Christians do the same things, but they do them for different reasons.

The moral way to approach God is like this: “Lord, I have done what you’ve asked. Now, bless me (keep me safe, make me successful, help my kids get into good schools...)” If you think about it, this is how we were taught to approach Santa when we were kids. “Be good and it will pay off.” Through that, we had etched our minds that “he’s making a list and checking it twice, gonna find out whose naughty and nice, Jesus Christ is coming again!” We thought the world was divided between the good and the bad people. But Jesus doesn’t do that. Jesus divides the world between the proud and the humble.

The Christian way to approach God isn’t “I’ve been good, so listen to me...” It’s “I can’t be good, I’m proud, I’m corrupt...but Jesus was good enough. He took the death I deserved so I could be part of your family again.” Adoption isn’t a change of nature or

even behavior. It's a change of status as an act of the Father. This means you have an access to the father that NO ONE else has. This is why Paul says in Phil 3:8 "all the things that were to my credit I count as loss... (literally, dung...poo)." It's also why John 1:12 says "to all who receive him, he gives the right to become children of God."

These two are radically different. In the moral way you'll approach God with an attitude of entitlement. You're prayer life will be anxious and formal and when God doesn't come through you will be angry or confused because you fulfilled your end of the deal and he didn't do his part.

In contrast, in the Christian way to approach God, you will approach Him with an attitude of humility, like be that of a child understanding that your father will do the things that are best for you, even if you don't always understand.

Let's admit it—there are plenty of things that happen that we don't understand. Yet, Jesus still says that we need to ask... Yet the plot thickens because some of us asked and we didn't get it.

I don't think it's an accident that the parable takes place in the middle of the night. Maybe Jesus is trying to communicate that even when it's dark and confusing we still need to approach God repeatedly, aggressively, shamelessly as a father. This is why he says to knock—knocking is repeated. Some of you say "well, I told him once, I don't need to tell him again." Next time your wife asks you if you love her, try that one on her.... "Well, I told you once...." It doesn't work that way.

Tim Keller, author of the Prodigal God says "Your father gives you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows. He redirects, and says 'I know you want this, but this is better.'"

Last summer, Amy and I had put Isaac in infant survival swim classes. They simply teach infants to roll onto their backs and float if they fall into a pool. Naturally, a 15 month old little boy does not want to get dropped into the middle of a pool. He was screaming and crying, gasping for air. A woman nearby couldn't stand it. She walked over to me and said "you should be turned in for child abuse. How can you sit there and watch your son scream and cry like that? We tried to explain to her about Infant swim but she wouldn't hear any of it. She ended our conversation with "you must have a heart of stone... can't you see he doesn't like it?!"

I thought to myself—"if I gave my son everything he likes, he'd be dead. He also likes to grab knives. He puts everything in his mouth and he likes to run into the street. BUT, I know that if he ever falls into a pool, because of this pain, he will survive."

Do you know what God knows? He says "I know you want this, but this is better. I'm generous and I want you to approach me... keep on asking, seeking, knocking and the door will be opened to you. I gave you everything you have and I won't give you a scorpion when you need an egg or a snake when you need a fish or a stone when you need bread.

If you don't understand that God is your father, you are going to be a mess. You have to practice the fatherhood of God. But some of you still feel like an employee approaching an unreasonable boss or like disappointed kid approaching Santa.

This is why he says "If you who are evil can give good gifts to your children, how much more will God give to you." Who is he saying this to? He's saying this to HIS DISCIPLES! He's saying "Those of you who have given your lives to me, you're still so

selfish and filled with issues, but God is STILL your father and he wants you to unburden yourself.

An apocryphal story is told about Jesus and the disciples. One day as they were walking along a rocky road, Jesus asked each of them to pick up a stone and carry it for him. According to the story, John chose a large stone while Peter chose one that he could easily carry in his pocket. He forgot about the stones until some time later when, tired and hungry, one of the disciples asked if there was anything to eat. Jesus told them to pick up the stones they had been carrying for Him. Then He turned the stones into bread. Each disciple was only allowed to eat the bread he held in his hand. Peter's portion of bread was barely a mouthful.

Later in the day, as they headed down the mountain along the same stony path, Jesus told the disciples to pick up and carry another stone for Him. This time Peter picked up the largest stone he could find, so large that he had trouble carrying it. Jesus led the disciples to a river. Then Jesus did a strange thing, he told them to throw their stones into the water. They each did so, but nothing happened--other than subsequent splashes. Then he said "Follow Me," and began to walk. Peter and the others looked at him dumbfounded. Jesus sighed and said, "Don't you remember what I asked you to do? Who were you carrying the stone for?"

And so I ask you, who are you carrying the stone for? Are you coming to God because you want Him or just his blessings? Can you say that you are in his family? Have you let that reality change how you relate to God? As we start this new year, let's be boldly persistent in approaching our father because he longs to give us good gifts.