



CONNECT GROUP NOTES

Sunday 24.03.2024

“Naming & Knowing”

Preacher

Shane Willard

Scripture

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

24 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”

Acts 17:22-28



Thought

It's fascinating to think that Paul, visiting a group of people who didn't follow any of the practices associated with Judaism or Christianity, would not denounce their beliefs, but rather use them to show that God had been in their midst the whole time.

Speaking again to this group of unbelievers, Paul states "He is not far from any one of us", they just didn't know His name. How often do we see those with different beliefs, even those we view as ungodly, as being far from God, yet Paul challenges us with the thought that God is perhaps closer than we know. Closer to the faithless, closer to the immoral, closer to the abhorrent, and, well - closer to us, who, whether we admit it or not, are sometimes all those things ourselves.

Could it be that in our world there are countless people who know the undeniable drawing of God's spirit, but don't yet know His name? Those drawn to the internal hum within their heart that urges them to say 'yes' to something bigger. What if our goal was not to convince them that their expression of faith must look exactly like ours, but rather, as Paul did, to reveal to them that Christ is already threaded through the tapestry of their own lives, culture and experience?

And yet, there's another category of people we find, and we may indeed find corners of our own hearts within this category. It's the category of those who proclaim His name loudly, but maybe don't truly know Him. Not just knowing *about* Him, or knowing how to *argue* for Him - but a deep, transformative, life-changing and heart-renewing understanding of His character which must, in turn, confirm us to His character.

We find ourselves in the category of proclaiming Him, but not fully knowing Him, when our faith is more of an argument to win rather than a life to demonstrate. When we feel justified pointing the finger at the speck in the eye of the other, blinded by the log in our own. When our outrage over another's beliefs or morality or political view or theology outweighs the still, small voice of Jesus who implores us to be the one kneeling beside them in the dirt, rather than the one casting the first stone. When we assume we're the good guys, and not the ones needing forgiveness.



Paul is reminding us that God is at work in every person. Christ didn't come into the world to destroy it, he came to bring life to it. It's not the 'ins' and the 'outs'. It's not the 'us' and the 'them'. All have fallen, yet all are His offspring. He gave his life for us all - our greed, our racism, our elitism, our pride - failings that are common to us all, whether we know His name or not.

The only appropriate response to His grace is exaltation to Him, to offer our whole lives to Him. To recognise that Christ has, and is, working in the lives of those who are vastly different to us, and to be willing to step into their lives, not to try to argue or change them, but to find the God story that is already at work within them. To examine our hearts and focus less on holding up the banner without first living out His character. To allow God to truly make our lives a sweet offering to Him who gave it all for us. May that sweet aroma permeate the lives of those around us, and may they, too, come to know the beautiful name of Jesus, our Lord.

Discussion Points

1. If truly knowing Christ means becoming more like Him, what actually are the character attributes of Jesus?
2. How does our approach to others change when we assume that Christ has been working in their lives way before we arrived on the scene?

Prayer

Dear Lord,

Challenge my heart today and reveal it for what it truly is. Show me that which is not pleasing to you; the attitudes, the hidden motives, the wrong mindsets. Expose my heart and change me, I pray. May my life wholly point to You, not just in words but in pure Christ-like nature. Transform me at the deepest level and let my very life be a testament that points to You.

Amen.

Becoming Christlike

BEING, THINKING, AND DOING

Characteristic of a Disciple: Humble and Teachable

Curiosity and openness to new insights into the truth of Jesus.

Thought

We're made for rhythms of life. We primarily drive the same routes to get to work, listen to the same songs or stations, get takeaway from the same places, etc. These rhythms help give structure and a sense of order to our daily lives, which is super helpful. We can do this with our thinking as well. Brain researchers call these thinking patterns *neuropathways*.

In other words, it's easy to keep believing what we've always believed and only listen to or take seriously information that aligns with our previous ways of thinking. This fact has some great positives, but it also has some inherent dangers.

One of these dangers is that we can begin to place ourselves in a superior position to those who might think or live differently from us, further separating us from the very ones we are called to love. Also, if we're not careful, we can end up preferring *our ideas about Jesus* to *who Jesus actually is* and in doing so, miss out on truly hearing and responding to his message to us.

It is of great benefit as we mature into Christlikeness that we remain soft, pliable, and humble in our thinking and preferences. We should expect and rejoice in the fact that Jesus will ALWAYS bring a challenge and critique to our assumptions and preconceived ideas about reality.

God desires to draw us closer to His heart and deepen our knowledge of him. For this to take place, sometimes we must humble ourselves and allow His Spirit to breathe fresh into us again, asking that He replace our unhelpful patterns of thinking with the Mind of Christ.

Practice

Step 1 - **Reflect:** When you heard Shane's message, what stood out to you? Did anything cause you to "bristle up" on the inside?

Step 2: **Assess:** Being honest with yourself, is this bristling an invitation from the Holy Spirit for some needed growth in your life? Pray about this with your group or in private - ask the Lord for insight into this.

Step 3: **Act:** What is a very practical way that you can open yourself up to obeying or receiving this stretching from the Spirit this week?