

## Living in Our World: Two Rooms

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## Living in Our World

Living in our world is not always easy. There is so much pressure, so many challenges, so many voices telling us to conform.

We've heard the story from the Book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve sinned, they heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden. They hid from the Lord among the trees. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you? [God knew where they were, He didn't have to ask.] Adam answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked so I hid."

Adam was the first to struggle with **The Need For Acceptance**

On that day, **Adam began a horrible legacy**, he was the first person to look over his shoulder, the first person to look around wondering what others were thinking, the first person to ever hide, and to pretend, and put on a mask. To try to be something or someone he wasn't.

That horrible legacy has been passed down to us. **We live that story**. So often when you or I get afraid, when we get embarrassed, when we get exposed – we pretend.

As early as we can remember we have performed for acceptance. We think that only if we are good enough, talented enough, beautiful enough, then and only then will we be loved and accepted and happy. And if we are not good enough then we will be overlooked and will have a lousy life.

I think it is the **"Santa Claus is Coming to Town"** view of God. You've sung the song:

*"Oh you better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why, Santa Claus is coming to town. He is making a list, he's checking it twice, he gonna find out who's naughty and nice. Santa Claus is coming to town.*

*He knows when you've sleeping (which is just wrong in my book, I don't want anyone sneaking into my bedroom watching me. Can you imagine waking up in the middle of the night, and seeing Santa Claus at the foot of your bed).*

*He knows when you've been sleeping, he knows when your awake, he knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake."*

That is how we live. In so many ways, we sing this song and dance to its tune because we have been raised to believe it. We believe that there is someone watching. And our value is based on how much we do right and how little we do wrong. There is someone watching. This controlling, condemning, legalist Santa Claus is coming to town. So you better watch out. You better put on a good show. Santa Claus is coming to town.

This is how we think. The highest value is to be accepted. To put on a mask and dance to the world's tune. But dancing is hard because when we fail, and we do fail, we can't let anyone know. So we perform and we pretend because Santa Claus is always watching.

**And Then Comes the Gospel.** The good news of Jesus Christ.

*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has gone, the new has come!*

- 2 Corinthians 5:17

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- **2 Corinthians 5:21**

Do you see what He did? Jesus took my shame, my embarrassment, my fear and He gave me righteousness.

I found myself believing it. I didn't have to put on a mask anymore. I become new. I start believing that I am lovable just because He loves me. I come to believe that He has created me just as He wanted me to be – bald and forgetful. He frees me from the dance of the world's acceptance.

Don't believe the lie that you were created worthless and evil and despised by God. That is a lie. No, God created you. God wanted you. You are special to Him. Because of your worth, Jesus came and died for you. That is the precious story of Jesus Christ.

Well I began walking through life, at 22 years old, with hope and peace and love. And then something happened. It happened to me, it probably happened to you. We go through a time when we don't feel God's love as much, probably when we think we've failed Him again for the upteenth time in something we said we would never do again.

The old lie reawakens. You begin to think that He is not happy with you. He is mad at you. He going to punish you. In the back of your mind, you hear a song..

*"Oh you better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why..."*

You begin to try to work things out on your own. You tell yourself that you have to do better.

Not long after this you come to **A Fork In The Road**. And there are road signs. You are just walking the path of your Christian life and there is a big pole and there are two signs. One says **"Pleasing God"** And the other says **"Trusting God."**

I don't want to choose, I just want to keep walking. But there they are. They are the **Primary Motivations** for how I walk the rest of this Christian journey. The primary motivation of my heart. Will I start out pleasing God or will I start out trusting God? So I look at these two paths...**Trusting God**...what is that ... Trusting God ... it doesn't do anything. When do I, you know, do something?

Then I go to the other side...**Pleasing God**... yea, yea, that sounds right. That's what I want. I want to please God. Yes! That's what it's all about isn't it? I mean after all He did for me, I want to live my life to please Him. I want to make Him happy. Yes! That's what I want to do. I'm going to take this path. I want to Please God. I get excited and fired up.

## Pleasing God

So I go down this road for awhile and soon I come to a large building. And it's got a door and above the door it says, **"Striving to be all God wants me to Be."** Yes, that's right. I want to strive to be all God wants me to be. I want to be all that I can be.

I'm going to do it. I just need this direction. I just need this motivation. Yes! This time God we are going to be close.

There is a door knob and it says **"self-effort."** I say "well, of course." I just need a bit more self-effort. I have to care. I have to do my part. I just need a bit more self-effort. And I open the door and walk inside. And I'm excited. It is a huge room filled with people and there is lots of noise and activity. And it feels so right.

A hostess walks up to me and says, **"Welcome to the Room of Good Intentions."** I say, "Thanks, this is great. Hey, how is everybody doing?" And all of a sudden it gets really quiet, and then almost as one voice I hear, "We're doing fine, fine. Yea, fine, as fine as fine can be. We're fine. Things are going fine. Family is fine. Work is fine. Yea, were fine, just fine.

Then the hostess asks me, "And how are you?" So I say, "well, thanks for asking, I'm well, I'm struggling a bit, I'm having some problems..."

The hostess goes "shhhh... and hands me a mask ... and I look at the people in the room and they all nod their heads. So I put on the mask and say, "I'm sorry, I'm fine. I'm doing just fine." And everybody goes back into their conversation.

I am in **The Room of Good Intentions**. And as I walk through the room I notice a banner on the wall that says, **"Working on my sin to achieve an intimate relationship with God."** I think, yea that's right. I just need to work more so that I can be closer to God. Maybe, like me, you have been in the room of good intentions.

Those times when I try to talk with God, but it feels as if He is way over there and I am way over here with my sin in between us. Those times when I feel that in order to get back into a relationship with God I'm going to have to shrink my sin. To fix my stuff.

Those times when I call out to God, "I WANT TO BE CLOSE, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU CAN HEAR ME... I LOVE YOU I'm going to try. Just wait. Just give me a little time. I'm going to try. Soon, soon, were going to be close. I just have to work on my sin. And this time, this time, maybe it will work.

But nobody tells me that everyday there is another bucket-load of sin that is brought into the room and nobody tells me I really don't know how to work on my sin.

I'm in the room of good intentions. Its got sincerity and perseverance and a desire to please God so I try, and I try, and I try with the hopes that one day God and I will be close.

But as days turn into weeks and into months I start to notice some things. Many of the people here look kind of tired because they are working so hard. Conversations are superficial and guarded.

I'm starting to think different too. I'm not relaxed. I working hard but I'm not making progress. I'm thinking that if I don't do better maybe these people won't like me as much and maybe God won't like me as much either.

So I work even harder but I'm so tired. I feel as if I am making every effort to please a God who is never pleased enough.

It seems the banner of **"Striving To Be All God Wants Me To Be"** turns into the banner of **"What must I do to keep Him pleased?"** I am so tired I can't breath, I fell as if I got to get out of this place and so I stumble out of the room of good intentions and go back to the fork in the road. I feel discouraged, so discouraged.

You see the Room of Good Intentions has this problem – it reduces godliness to a formula. **More right behavior plus less wrong behavior equals godliness.** Did you catch that. More right behavior (I'm doing great things) plus less lustful thoughts equals "godly-man." That is everything but biblical.

When we follow this formula for godliness, we put our masks back on. We forget what God has already done for us. When we strive to live the Christian life and try to sin less in our own strength, we so often struggle and instead we put on a "Christian mask" of how we think Christians should act.

## Trusting God: The Room of Grace

So now I am back at the cross roads again. **"Trusting God"** I still don't really know what that means. It seems vague. It seems like the "wimp's way." It doesn't give me anything to do other than "to trust." So a bit discouraged I walk down this road until again I come to a huge building, with a door, and words over the door which says, **"Living out of who God says I am."** Whatever... "Living out of who God says I am" Then I see the door knob which has written on it **"humility."**

It starts to make a bit of sense because I have tried so hard, so stinking hard. I have tried so hard to try to pull it together and I just can't.

So I walk in the door and the room is full of people. Another hostess walks up to me and says, **"Welcome To The Room of Grace."** I have been in a room like this before, so I say "Thank you." She says "How are you?" I am a bit leery and so lying through my teeth I say, "Fine, I'm pretty fine, who wants to know?" The room suddenly gets quiet and everyone seems to be looking at me, and I feel a bit out of place and a little angry. So I shout out, "Already, listen up, I am NOT FINE, I haven't been fine for a long time. I'm tired and confused and ashamed. I feel guilty and lonely. I can't make my life work. I feel like giving up. If you knew half the thoughts that are racing through my mind, you would want me here. So there, I'm doing "not fine." I think I better leave

I turn to walk back out of the room. As I reach for the door knob, I hear a voice "Is that it?, Is that all you've got?" I'll take your confusion and guilt and raise you addiction and credit card debt. I don't know how I am going to pay my rent let alone my son's college tuition. You have nothing compared to me, buddy.

The hostess smiles at me and says, "I think he's saying your welcome here." I feel a little better and say to the man, "Do you struggle to try to stay organize and have lists of things to do?" He says "my life is such a mess I can't even find my lists anymore."

There is much warm laughter as I am ushered into a sweet family of kind, painfully real people. There is not a mask to be seen anywhere. You've met these people. Some of you are these people. We are in the "Room of Grace."

There is a banner on the back wall. I read it but don't really think about it yet. It says, **"Standing with God working on my sin together."** I am in the "room of grace." Grace.

Oh, how the religious leaders of Jesus' day hated grace. Paul tells us about the grace of God. But the religious leaders of the time got so angry. They said, "Don't you dare tell people this." "Don't you dare tell people who they are in Christ." "Don't you dare tell people that the "Santa Claus" list is over." If you do ... you will lose control, you know these people, they will take advantage of the situation, you will lose control, they won't care as much, they won't tithe as much, they won't be religious as much.

Paul might say, “you might have a point there, except for a couple of things.” They have a new identity. I have a new identity. On my worst day, I am Jesus Christ in Tim Brannagan. Jesus in Tim with a robe of righteousness on me always. Always. Paul would say, and not only that, they have the Holy Spirit living inside of them guiding, encouraging, and strengthening.

Paul says to the religious leaders “They don’t want to take advantage of God” and even if they did. they could do it under grace or under law.

What if the goal was to free our hearts so that we could come and be intimate with the God who made us, with the God who saved us and with the God who knows us so well – that would take grace.

That is exactly what God did. In a world that says *“Oh you better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I’m telling you why....”* In a world that tells us that in order to get ahead you’ve got to shape up, shut up, and put up, God says “No, I offer you grace.”

The New Testament, the Word of God, is God saying:

- What if I take away any element of fear, or condemnation, or rejection.
- What if I tell them that I love them and that I will always love them.
- What if I tell them that they are righteous with my righteousness right now.
- What if I tell them that even if they ran to ends of the earth and did the most unthinkable, horrible, terrible things, and were unfaithful to me and to others that when they came back I would receive them with tears and a party.
- What if I tell them that they don’t have to be bound by men’s religions or rules.
- What if I tell them that there is no list.
- What if I tell them that they don’t have to put on a mask. That it is really okay to be exactly who they are this moment with all their junk and not have to pretend how close we are, how much they pray or don’t, how much Bible they read or don’t,
- What if they knew that I will never ever, ever use the word punish in relation to them.
- What if they were convinced that bad circumstances are not my way of getting even.
- What if I told them that I kind of like Classic rock music too but I really don’t like the Christmas handbell choirs with white gloves.

This is what God wants to tell us (except for the Classic rock music and the Handbell Choir thing - I made that up, but I think it is still true.

You see there is this verse in **Hebrews 11:6. It says “And without faith it is impossible to please God.:** Do you see the two paths there.

Do you notice that **Trusting IS what pleases God.**

So I can try to walk down the path of "Pleasing God" and I can never please Him enough, because it is all about me - what I do.

But over here as I learn how to "Trust God" I find that God says, "Tim, I have never been as pleased with you as I am right now"

**Pleasing God is an incredible good thing to do**, it just that it can not be the primary motivation. It will reduce godliness to a formula, and we will put on a Christian mask.

But as I trust in God, he is pleased with me and I please Him more out of delight not out of duty.

So I think back again at the banner at the back of the "Room of Grace." It says **"Standing with my God and working on my sin together"**

For the longest time, I thought that God was way over there waiting for me to get my act together, waiting for me to work on my sin, waiting for me, so that we could be close.

But it is not that way. If Jesus Christ walked into this room, he would walk right up to me, He would hold me by my shoulders and look into my face, and say "I know, I know, I know all about it. I know all about the sin, I know all about the struggles. I know all about the things you have worked so hard to hide. But I am not ashamed of you. Nothing you can do will make me love you any less and nothing you can do will make me love you any more. It's a done deal. You belong to me. And I love you."

If He puts His arm around me and we turn to look at my sin together, He might say, "Whoa, that is a lot of sin" "My, my, my" .... But we will work on it together. I will stand with you and help you and strengthen you and encourage you. I've got you covered. My grace is that powerful. What I did on the cross for you is more than enough. It's covered. I love you."

For those of us who have Jesus Christ in our lives, have we been changed? Absolutely. We have been given a whole new identity. We have been changed, and now we get the chance to mature into who we really are.

***"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has gone, the new has come!"***  
***- 2 Corinthians 5:17***

**God has given us the DNA of godliness.** We are saints, we are righteous, and nothing we do will make us more godly in God's eyes. God knows our DNA, God know we are "Christ in me," but do we? While we might "know" it, do you really "believe" it? God is asking us to join Him in what He already knows is true.

So here we sit today, maybe some of us are bluffing. I know that some of us have been beaten up real bad. Some of us are afraid, both inside and outside of the church. Some are afraid that it might not be true. We are still watching out for Santa Claus.

Some of us are still playing the Christian game, wearing a mask that is so tight. You're scared – you're scared that someone might find out what is on the inside.

Friends, where ever you are in your faith journey, know that Jesus wants to look you square into your face and say "I know, I've known, I know all about the fear, the shame, the guilt. Just allow me into your life and allow me to cover you with my grace and my mercy. I've got you covered"

## Trust opens the way for God to bring us to maturity

The Apostle Paul asks us:

*“Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?”*

- Galatians 3:5

I like the way The Message paraphrased this verse:

*Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving or because you trust him to do them in you?*

- Galatians 3:5 (The Message)

In our world there are two rooms:

- \* The room of good intentions, where we work in our own strength to try to Please God.
- \* The room of grace, where we trust God to help us be all He would have us to be.

## Living in Our World: Two Rooms – God is pleased as we trust in Him

Let me encourage you: when you think that you are not enough, look around this band of rabble of misfits, this church of Jesus Christ, The Church at Perry Creek. Look at the love and leadership of John and Kelly, of John and Sarah and others ... and when you are finished telling of your failures, and weaknesses and struggles and temptations, and your lusts and your emptiness” then listen closely, and you just might hear, “Is that it, is that all you’ve got?” You are more than welcomed here.

Maybe you will sense Lord Jesus Christ Himself as He holds you in His arms and look into your eyes and say, “I love you, I’ve got you covered, You don’t need to be ashamed.” You accepted here with my family.