

God's Desire to Be With You, Not Use You

I have had to yank that lie right out of the ground, burn it like chaff. I know we mean well, of course we do. We say things like: "oh, I just want to be used by God!"

We sing songs: "use me, Jesus!" and we mean so well. When we say "used by God" we mean that we want our lives to count for something bigger than ourselves. Perhaps it's because we have bought into the evangelical hero complex, and now we think God wants big, God wants important, God wants power and famous celebrities and cable television, God has big, important work to do in the world, so it's time to do our part.

Or sometimes it's a bit of false humility. Someone praises our work or effort, and we respond by kicking rocks and looking down: "oh, it's not a big deal, anyone could have done it, I just want to be used by God." For some of us, it was our well-meaning churches or our religious training which fed us this lie, and we've confused discipleship with being a properly obedient cog-in-the-machine, keeping the institution afloat and substantial.

The Church needs power and influence, and we need to play our part (don't ask too many questions, they only get you in trouble, now). You are the sheep – and every one knows sheep are dumb and smelly and stubborn.

The language we use matters because our words tip our hand. Our words reveal what we truly think and believe about God, don't they? Perhaps it's semantics, molehill-to-mountain-making (it wouldn't be the first time I did that, as we all know), but the word "use" makes the hackles on the back of my neck brindle now, my blood get a bit hot: here I go: I don't believe God wants to use me. Not in the least.

I wasn't created to be used. We were not saved, set free, rescued, redeemed, to be used. We aren't here to work and earn our way, we aren't pew fodder, or a cog. We aren't here to prove how worthwhile we are for the saving, there isn't anything left to earn.

God won't use us up, all of our talents, our gifts, our mind, our love, our energy. Despite our tendency to view ministry as a profession, and the work of the Gospel as worthy of the sacrifice of marriages and attendance at school concerts, our value to God is not buried in our workhorse mentality.

Would anyone "use" their beloved? Use their child? Use their friend? If we, being human, know these things, how much more our Father who is Love himself? When we use the word "used" I believe we are missing the wild and crazy upside-down kingdom of God itself, hidden in the very name of Jesus: Immanuel. God with us.

God saved you because he loves you and longs to restore you to relationship. You were rescued and redeemed to be with God. He delights in you. He yearns to walk with you, to be with you, to see you become fully human, fully alive, fully your own self.

God does not want to use you: God wants to be with you because he loves you.

There's the hint in his name itself: Immanuel. His very name is God with us. Not God to us. Not God using us. Not God for us. Not God managing us. Not God working us. Not God manipulating or puppeteering us – he tipped his own hand right there in Isaiah with the word about the Word, he is God with us.

We aren't being used by God. See the difference there? we are walking with God, holding his hand, in step wherever we go, whatever we do, "important" or not.

I've replaced the word "use" with the nouns and verbs of the New Testament: grow, disciple, walk in the way, beloved children, co-heirs, co-labourers. And don't forget now: Jesus called us friends.

Friend of God. Child of God. Beloved of God.

Taste and see: we are invited to the God with us life. In co-creation with the creator, you're a namer, a maker, an altar builder, a lifter-up of the name and the Cross, and you are a pilgrim, a disciple, made in the image of God, you are the one who walks with God, no shame.

So those things we do in this life? Great. Wonderful. Good on us. Rah-rah.

But I'm learning to just go do them because I love to do them, and I love to do them with Immanuel. I'm learning to let them be the natural consequence of the sacred company I keep, but those things aren't my identity, they are not The Thing or The Point of my life. They're not my pathway to God, or my status updates to the Most High, my progress reports. Maybe no one will ever say God "used" me mightily, oh well, that's just fine.

May our daily work and our voice and our words and our prayers matter in our homes and our churches and our neighbourhoods (right there is the whole world). But we are not "used" – not that. Instead when we love God, when we are free, when we are walking with, then we are a sign and a foretaste of how it was meant to be in the Garden, perhaps, God's way of living overflowing organically: the disciple, the friend, the daughter, the son, the brother, the heir, the beloved.

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