

LPD Conference, March 7, 8, 2014  
“Living the Story”

Ministerial – session #2 –  
“How Are We Doing at Living the Story?” - *living the story as God’s people*  
Rob Stewart

In this session, we will be using Skye Jethani’s recent book, “WITH: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God,” as a starting point and framework for discussion.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aj-2NfUKpik&feature=youtu.be>

**A quick summary of “With.”**

Skye Jethani, states that Christians and churches have been guilty of “inoculating” people, especially younger people, from the gospel. This is not done intentionally, but by presenting the gospel message in a way, or “posture” that is inaccurate and imbalanced. As a result, young people who leave the church do not typically come back to church at a later phase of life as earlier generations have tended to do – they simply leave and do not return.

He believes that fear is at the route of all religion, and that people try to control God by controlling the world. (Rob’s note: This reminds me of the optimism of science in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the talk of the evolution of religion, from polytheism to monotheism to science).

There is a cycle of fear – from Danger to Fear to Control. As a result, we have developed inaccurate understandings or postures of God – *and the gospel*.

Here are the four inaccurate “postures” he presents:

1. **Life Under God** — moralism. God as a giver of rules and rituals to follow. By following rituals and living moral lives, we “control” God, and He takes care of us. Two things are likely to happen:
  - a. When life does not go as we plan, we become disappointed with God.
  - b. When we fail to live up to moral expectations as presented by the church, we conclude that we cannot be a moral person and therefore, not a Christian.
2. **Life Over God** — Christian deism. We can take direct control over our world through science. God is presented as the provider of useful principles to observe. We can end up encouraging people to have a relationship with the Bible, but not with the God of the Bible. When we follow the biblical principles, yet life seems to still fall apart, we feel that we lose control of life and grow disappointed with faith.
3. **Life From God** — consumerism. The essence of life is my unmet desires. God as a “genie,” to grant us our desires. This is the most popular posture today, by far – especially among youth. This is a “one dimensional” view of God. Health and wealth gospel. “MTD” Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. In the end, when God doesn’t give us what we want, we walk away from faith. i.e. prodigal son – wanted father’s stuff, not a relationship with the father.
4. **Life For God** — “mission-ism.” God as a commander, sending us forth to accomplish a mission. In contrast to God existing to serve us, “we exist to serve him.” Young people may be driven to activism, not through compassion, but in a “search for significance.” Like older brother in story of prodigal son.

He claims that each of these four postures is ultimately about our attempt to control God, and to control our lives. While each of these ways of relating to God has its place, (i.e. we are to ask God to meet our needs and God does send us into service). But being either UNDER, OVER, FROM, and FOR God alone cannot adequately define the relationship to God we’re meant to have. WITH is about into LIFE WITH GOD, and about living both with him and for him.

**Life With God**, he asserts, is the more biblical, and more healthy way of relating to God. Life with God includes three things: *treasuring, uniting and experiencing*, and all three of these emphasize that a life with God is a life that doesn’t view God as an object to be possessed or used, but rather, it is a life that seeks to dwell with God. Jethani then further explores this ‘with’ posture by looking at a Life with Faith; a Life with Hope; and a Life with Love.

Life “with” God is taken from Luke 15:31, in the father’s words to the elder brother, “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

God is not just the “how” to get things. He is also the “life,” and invites us into relationship with him. He is not how we get our treasure – He is the treasure!

John Piper, “*The gospel is not how people get to heaven; it is how they get to God.*”

**Quotes:**

*Relating to the four inaccurate postures:*

*God is seen as a means to an end. For example, LIFE FROM GOD uses him to supply our material desires. LIFE OVER GOD uses him as the source of principles or laws. LIFE UNDER GOD tries to manipulate God through obedience to secure blessings and avoid calamity. And LIFE FOR GOD uses him and his mission to gain a sense of direction. (p.102)*

*The reason a great many churches and Christian ministries fail to see people obey Jesus’ instructions is because the people are not living in the LIFE WITH GOD posture. The teachings and commands of the Bible may be communicated powerfully, clearly, and repeatedly, but until people have their vision of the world changed by living in communion with the Good Shepherd, until they experientially know they are safe, they will be incapable of following Christ’s counterintuitive commands. (p. 127)*

*The first purpose of the church is to give people a ravishing vision of Jesus Christ, and let him draw people to himself.*

*If we seek to attract people through “wrong postures,” we will lose them, as they will grow disappointed. We need to present Christ. i.e. by presenting Christ as the means to an end.*

*The question is not, what do people want from God, it is “do they want God?”*

**In the end, we can experience a new “cycle” of faith.**

- From **danger – fear – control**.
- To, in our fear we **surrender** to the perfect God who loves us – **faith**/following God – **safety** in relationship w/ God.

**Questions for discussion at tables:**

1. Do you resonate with what Skye presents? Why or why not?

2. Which “posture of relating to God to you most identify with?

- in your walk with God?
- in your ministry?

- Is this different than what you grew up with?

In the first session, we provided the following quote from “**Resilient Ministry.**”

“Pastors often slip into the trap of building their identities around their roles and performance rather than being beloved children of God and coheirs with Christ. Pastors need to pursue growth in their understanding of and feelings concerning God’s acceptance. They also need to focus on their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The sad fact is that, for most of us in ministry, our work for Christ comes before our relationship with Christ. We know in our minds that healthy ministry is an overflow of abiding in Christ. We know that godly leadership is an extension of one’s relationship with God. But when push comes to shove, we usually put mission in front of relationship.”

