

A LIFE LIVED IN FELLOWSHIP, PART 6

Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13b, NIV)

I WONDER IF WE MIGHT BE AIDED TODAY BY A LESSON IN THE OBVIOUS. Here goes: It's not your best plan of action to hit a putter off the tee. We won't dig too deeply here, because the reasons are plain, but a putter is designed with a very small face and a much different swing weight for a reason. It is meant for hitting shorter, softer shots than the blasts you wind up to hit with your driver. In fact, we might put it this way: your clubs are designed to be played in a particular order, with a strong relationship to your distance from the hole. That is, generally speaking, you'll hit the lower lofted clubs from farther away.

In our accompanying video today, Judge Tim Philpot suggests that there is a similar order to our understanding of God, to our theology. This does not mean that God changes but that the way we come to see him becomes more rounded and more intimate as our life with him goes on.

Tim suggests that first we see God as Judge, an arbiter of right and wrong. Then we come to know him as Father, the one whose care for us is good, both in its discipline and its mercy. Finally, we land in a place of deep connection—God is the one whom we “marry,” our Bridegroom. All of these titles have biblical support, and while we may progress through them in our understanding, each maintains a merit throughout our lives.

This is not a novel suggestion. Children often see their parents in the same way. As wee ones, we find in our parents the code of conduct that is acceptable and modeled; our parents are the key prescribers of right and wrong in our early lives. As we move into our teen and young adult years, though, we begin to recognize the sacrifices behind the provision of our parents and also the wisdom of their instruction on various (if not all) matters. Eventually, though we will still always love them as Mom and Dad, we do so with something much more akin to devoted friendship; there is an endearment.

Now you may think that this is an idealistic view of the child-parent relationship. And you are right. But it is in idealism that we often find the nearer truth to who God is. It's a reasonable approach because God is the ultimate ideal!

Lives lived in healthy fellowship never halt at judge-accused. Instead, they move to family, friends, and covenanted lovers. This is true with people and with God.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2017 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available at <https://youtu.be/wqVAJLjuk1I>.

Opening questions How do you play the role of judge when you first meet someone? Why doesn't this relationship work in the long run? • In what capacity would you say you currently view God?

READING 1 Cor. 4:5, 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 7:9-11, Heb. 12:7-11; Eph. 5:31-32

God as judge (1 Corinthians 4 & 2 Corinthians 5)

In what aspect is God our Judge? What kind of response does this provoke in you? Do you feel close to God when he is established as your Judge?

God as Father (Matthew 7 & Hebrews 12)

What do these passages say about a father's role? How is God's fatherhood set apart in these passages? Do you feel close to God when he is established as your Father?

God as husband (Ephesians 5, also Revelation 19:6-9)

How can we describe our relationship with God as something akin to marriage? What aspects of covenant and intimacy exist in this relationship?
