

## **Take hold of real life: Wholeness**

Lesson: **Colossians 3:1-17** (adapted from The Message)

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%203:1-17>

I conduct premarital counseling with every couple I marry. One of the first questions I ask the couples is “why do you love your partner?” It is not unusual for one of them, particularly if they’re young, to say, “my partner completes me.” As if it took two human beings to make one whole human being. That way of thinking dates way back to the philosopher Plato, of course, and maybe before. Plato thought we spend our entire lives looking for our other half: for the one who makes us whole. There are not one but two books by the poet and humorist Shel Silverstein that make this claim, that our completion is found in another human being.

We yearn for wholeness. We have an aching sense that we are incomplete – not just imperfect, but incomplete. We feel something missing inside us, and look to find it – the way in the Wizard of Oz that the scarecrow looked for his brain and the tinman for his heart.

Most of us don’t actually go looking for a brain or a heart, but we may spend much of our lives trying to find the missing piece. We try to complete ourselves by doing one of four things:

1. finding our “other half” – that person who we think will make us complete – our “soul mate”;
2. acquiring – money, things, knowledge, experiences;
3. distracting – by staying busy at work, with children, with hobbies; or
4. achieving – counting our successes as the markers of our wholeness.

Yet every single one of us knows that there is no other half to have, that acquisition won’t fill the gaping maw, distraction only works so long as you never slow down, and achievement relies on never, ever risking or failing.

We yearn for wholeness. We ache to be at peace with ourselves and in the world. The tricky bit is that most of the things we do to become complete don’t fulfill us. They don’t fulfill us.

The truth is that we aren’t missing a piece: we cut ourselves off from wholeness. We cut ourselves off from what will make us whole. In the cause of finding, acquiring, and distracting, we diminish our own completeness. By spending our time finding, acquiring, and distracting, we become less whole.

Let me demonstrate with our volunteers here.

*Begin by asking one to stand up. Hand volunteer a pen.*

One thing we do that diminishes us is focusing all our attention on tasks at hand – the stuff that seems most pertinent. *Tape around body so that nondominant arm is strapped to side.* Maybe it’s work. Maybe it’s our kids’ activities. Maybe it’s politics. Maybe it’s a project. We’re busy – very busy – working or calendaring or signing petitions or remodeling the house. What we’re doing is productive and useful. We feel useful. We feel as though we’re achieving something. And we are.

What we don’t notice is that we’ve cut off the use of a piece of ourselves. Because we’re able to do the thing we were doing when we disabled ourselves, we don’t even notice. *Ask volunteer to sit down.*

Another way we cut ourselves is by focusing all our attention on the people directly in front of us. *Tape cylinder in front of volunteer #2’s eyes.* Our children, our parents, our spouses become the only people we see. If something affects them, we act on it: if the school closes or they start using drugs or they are diagnosed with Alzheimers or they can’t seem to do their own laundry, then we fight the school board,

search their rooms, call the Alzheimers Association, do the laundry. But if something doesn't affect the people right in front of us, we don't see it. Our neighbor, right next door, could be dealing with Alzheimers, drug use, closed schools, and dirty laundry, but if it's not in front of us, it doesn't exist.

Another way we diminish ourselves is by convincing ourselves we're not capable, not competent. *Place earphones on volunteer #3, and tape "F" to mirror, facing volunteer.* We look in the distorted mirrors that lie to us about who we are. We listen to the demon voices that lie to us about whose we are. We convince ourselves that because we're older we not useful. We tell ourselves that because we're physically disabled we can't do anything. And, worst of all, we convince ourselves because we not someone else, we're not anyone.

After a while, our self-imposed disability feels normal. We don't even notice what's happened.

Then, we're thrown a curve ball. *Toss ball at #1.* Layoffs happen. We're forced into retirement. Our kids don't turn out the way we expect. Politics go wrong. We get sick, or can't sleep. Our spouse leaves.

Or – and this is worse – nothing happens that's different. No curve ball, no big dramatic experience. We simply don't see where our real need is, where our deepest communion might be. God has someone who needs our love (*sidle up to bound arm*), and we can't reach out to hold them. God places people who need what we could be (*come up to periphery of sightless person*) – and we can't see them. God needs exactly who we are, in our brokenness and our wholeness but we can't see beyond our own failings (*put face behind mirror*). And God cherishes us, exactly as we are – and sends us people who love us too, but we can't hear God speaking through them. (*whisper: I love you. You are beautiful. You matter.*)

We have exactly what God needs to do holy work, but we don't even notice. Or we notice, but we feel we can do nothing about it. We feel impotent, broken, worthless. We feel unneeded, unloved. And we may still not realize we have done this to ourselves.

All we know is that we yearn, O Christ, for wholeness.

Here's the secret: we are made in the image of God. We are valuable because God values us. Not for our acquisitions. Not for our achievements. Not for how well our children turn out, or how much we sold our house for. We are valuable because God values us. We are made in the image of God.

We are not whole. That is true. But our wholeness does not come from finding our other half, or from acquiring, distracting, or achieving. It's not that we are missing a piece. It's that we need to be connected to God and others. Our wholeness comes from connection – from being part of the whole, being part of God, part of God's plan, part of community.

*Cut tape.* When you let yourself reach out, you become whole.

*Remove eye shield.* When you let yourself see both the need and the joy around you, you become whole.

*Remove F on mirror and headset.* When you see yourself as you really are – a beloved and valuable child of God – and you let yourself love and be loved, you become whole.

God and community make us whole. Reaching out in love, beyond our own families, and letting ourselves be loved, gives us wholeness.

Being whole isn't about becoming complete. Being whole is about being an active part of the whole.

So when the apostle Paul tells the church at Colossus: you need to act like you've got a real, new, resurrected life, that's what he means. Become part of the whole — connect to God and community. Your new way of life is custom-made by the creator for you. You are part of the whole. You are part of the story. You are part of the message. Your new life is the new life in Christ and in Christ's body, which is the community.

If someone does something good for you, tell others. If you need something, tell others. If you love someone, tell them. Look for those people beyond yourself, beyond your family, that God is inspiring you to love. And then act like you're living in Christ's life of love.

Look around: Who just needs someone to reach out in love with a pot of soup, a book, some weeds pulled, some company? Who needs God? Give God to them. Who needs you? Give yourself, your real self, to them. And let yourself be loved by God and others. That is communion. That is your whole, real, life. Amen.