

# Building a Relationship with God

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Preacher: Nathan Rambeck

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we finished up our Philippian study last week, and I'm going to take an opportunity through the end of the year, maybe a little bit into next year, we'll see, just looking at a few topics. This morning, we're going to look at this concept of building a relationship with God.

Have any of you ever heard the phrase about Christianity that says this, Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship. Right? Yeah. And I'm sure many of us have said that.

Now, technically, that's not really true. Christianity is technically a religion. A religion is defined as the belief in and worship of a supernatural power, especially a god or gods, and that describes Christianity in generic terms.

Right? So, Christianity is, for sure, a religion. But when people say that, usually, what do they mean? They mean that Christianity is not just a religious system of doing rituals, things like that, but that Christianity is different from other religions in that it involves a relationship with God.

And so, I wanted to take the opportunity this morning to talk about, what does that mean to have a relationship with God? Many people don't know that that's what Christianity is about, which is why people say that phrase.

[ 1 : 37 ] People don't know that they can have a relationship with God. We'll look at two verses this morning to kind of set the tone or a foundation here for having a relationship with God.

One in the Old Testament. We'll start with Jeremiah chapter 9, if you would open up to Jeremiah chapter 9. And then after that, we're going to look at Philippians 3. So, we'll go back to the book of Philippians.

Jeremiah chapter 9. You go to the middle of your Bible and then turn over to the right a few books and you'll find Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 9.

And it says this, This is the Lord speaking through his prophet Jeremiah. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might.

Nor let the rich man glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

[ 3 : 03 ] For in these I delight, says the Lord. Here, God is telling his people, Hey, you know, and this is the way it is in most of the world.

Many people seek after riches, power, wealth, and wisdom. Is wisdom a bad thing? Wisdom is not a bad thing. It is a good thing. But when it comes to glorying and boasting are similar ideas.

That the most important thing that we can boast in is not our power, our wealth, or our wisdom. But simply this, that you understand and that you know the Lord.

But is this just an Old Testament concept? Turn again to Philippians chapter 3. Philippians 3 and verse 8.

And remember that as we studied this in the previous weeks, that Paul here in chapter 3 is talking about all of the worldly things, benefits that he enjoyed from his birth to the attainments that he was able to attain to in life.

[ 4 : 27 ] And he says this about all of those things. Verse 8. And so he uses that word knowledge, knowing God.

The knowledge of God. And that speaks to relationship. The most important thing in the world in general, and I think many people recognize this, is relationship.

Right? And the most important relationship is the one that we have with our creator. And that's because God created us to be in relationship with him.

That is the purpose for God even creating us. Now when it comes to having a relationship with God, there needs to be a beginning.

And the Bible says that mankind, because of our sin and rebellion against him, we have made ourselves as his enemies.

[ 5 : 39 ] As his enemies. But God did something for us so that we could be, and the Bible uses the word reconciled. We could be reconciled to him.

Romans 5 verse 8 says this, But God demonstrates his own love towards us. And that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Much more than having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, so much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

We were enemies, and then through the blood of Christ, for those who were willing to come to him, we were reconciled to him. Just a few verses later in that same chapter, Romans 5 verse 1, it says this, Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a description of a relationship. We were enemies, then we were reconciled, and now we have peace with him. Ephesians, in the book of Ephesians chapter 2, it uses a little bit of a different language to talk about our relationship, what we had before, and then what we had after.

[ 7 : 05 ] It says this, Ephesians 2 verse 12, and this is comparing the Gentile world with the Jewish world. Ephesians 2 verse 12, that at that time, you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. So we were once far off from God, distant from him.

We were what the Bible calls strangers or foreigners. Have you ever heard of someone being estranged from someone? That means that they once had a relationship, but that relationship is now distant.

They have become strangers. And that's what our position was before we came to know the Lord. We were strangers. But through the blood of Christ and our faith, we have been brought near. All of these things speak to relationship. Also in Ephesians 2 verse 19, it says this, We have become members of God's family, of his household.

[ 8 : 37 ] We're part of God's family. That is a relationship. John 1 12 says this, But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become what?

To become children of God. To those who believe in his name. So just by trusting in Christ, believing in him, receiving him, we become God's children.

And then ultimately, what does it mean to have eternal life? Eternal life is living forever. But it's a certain kind of life.

It's a kind of life in which we know God. Jesus said this in John 17 3. He says, And this is eternal life, that they may know you, he's talking about God the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

And so having eternal life, being a Christian, it's not just a bunch of rituals that we follow, trying to make our way to God. God has made the way for us to come to him.

[ 9 : 50 ] He has opened up the path, removed every obstacle, and we can have that relationship with him restored. And then, from there on, it's an opportunity for that relationship to grow.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. So, what are some of the aspects of a relationship, or a good relationship?

Well, the first thing that I think about is getting to know someone, right? When you're getting to know someone, you're learning about them, about their past, their background, where they came from, their history.

Get to know a little bit about their personality and their character. What kinds of things that they're interested, their likes and their dislikes. Wanting to know what their dreams are for the future. And then, you also share your life with that person. And then, finally, in any kind of relationship, there are opportunities to love and to serve the other person.

[ 11 : 13 ] Building a relationship with God is in many ways similar to how we build relationships with other people. All those things I just described. We do the same thing with God that we do with people.

But, there are ways in which our relationship with God is different than it is with people. I'm going to tell a story.

This is just a made-up story, but, there was a, there was a little boy. He was five years old in his room. And it was a stormy night. And, there was a loud crash of thunder.

And he starts crying out, asking for his daddy. And his father goes in to comfort him. And it's continuing to thunder outside.

And it's early in the morning, it's two o'clock in the morning, dad is super tired. And, he's wanting to go back to bed. And so, he tells his son, he says, son, I'm going to go to bed right now.

[12:19] But, I want you to know that even though I'm going to bed, that God is still here with you. And the little boy answered, and he said, yeah, dad, I know that.

But, I need someone with skin on. And, you know, that is something that resonates with all of us, isn't it?

It's really actually difficult to have a relationship with someone who doesn't have any skin on. Most of our relationships are with people that we can see with our eyes, that we can hear with our ears, that we can handle and touch.

But, it's not that way with God. At least, not now. The Bible actually teaches that, you know, it's harder to have a relationship or to love someone that you can't see than that you can.

In the book of 1 John, he was teaching, or he was talking to his audience in the letter that he wrote, and rebuking them a little bit or giving them instructions on loving their neighbor, loving those in the church.

[13:34] And he said this, 1 John 4.20, if someone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

You know, it's easier to love someone right in front of you. And if you can't even do that, how can you say that you love God when he's not right in front of you?

Because one is obviously easier than the other. You know, our relationship with God is different. It's a relationship that has a faith element to it. Now, it won't always be that way, but for this very brief time in our lives, in a sin-cursed world, in these mortal bodies, that's how God has determined that it should be.

You know, in the beginning, we read in the book of Genesis, there's an indication that Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden.

[14:52] Right? And it seems to me that that is how God originally intended it to be. That we would be made in his image and likeness, and that God took on a form that ultimately Jesus took on later, right, in a permanent fashion, that he could relate to us and we could relate to him in that way.

I think about the story after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, after his crucifixion, there were a few people that had seen Jesus and they were giving testimony to those others that hadn't seen him that he had risen from the dead and there was one man in particular, one of the disciples of Jesus, who did not believe it and he said, you know what, I'm not going to believe it until I see him with my own eyes, until I actually touch him with my own hands.

Well, Jesus did appear to him and what was Jesus' response to Thomas wanting to see before he would believe.

Well, this is what he says in John 20 verse 29, Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

God really likes faith and he really wants us to walk by faith. Again, it's just a short season, but there is something about faith and relating to God on a foundation of faith that is a blessing to us.

[16:36] That's what he says here. It is more blessed. Blessed are the ones who have not seen and yet have believed. Abraham, Abraham, God had called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, he called him to serve him.

But then Abraham had faith, remember? And God was really, really pleased that Abraham believed him. James speaks to this in James 2, verse 23.

He says this, and the scripture was fulfilled which says that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. It doesn't end there. This is how that verse finishes.

And he was called the friend of God. Abraham was God's friend even though he did not see him.

We are called at this time, again, a very brief time in our lives, to love and to relate to a God who is invisible, a God that we cannot see.

In Peter's letter, in 1 Peter, he speaks to this explicitly. 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 6 says this, in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while if need be, again, he calls it for just a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than gold.

[ 18 : 18 ] that faith is so precious to God. Much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, and our faith is tested time and again, but that it may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There's coming a day when that faith will be made sight. And then he says this, verse 8, whom having not seen you love, even though we haven't seen him, even though he's invisible, yet we love him.

Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. Even now, it's just the eyes of faith, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Now, that's not to say, though, that there is some level of frustration, right, with not being able to see the God that we love. We're used to relating to people in a material way, people that we can see and touch.

We want to shake someone's hand or give them a hug, hold their hand or hear their voice. When we speak and they listen, we want to hear them speak back to us.

[ 19 : 43 ] we want that with God as well. And you know what? We actually see this kind of relationship with God in a very limited way and I want to put emphasis on that.

In Exodus chapter 33 verse 11, it says this, so the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. There's an example in the Bible of where God spoke to a certain man, Moses, as a man talks to a man face to face.

But I think we have to be very careful because that is certainly not the norm. It wasn't even the norm in the Old Testament. In fact, in Deuteronomy chapter 34 verse 10, it says this, speaking about Moses, but since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

Moses was the only one, even among the prophets, those who spoke on behalf of God. They didn't see the Lord. Numbers chapter 12 verse 6 says this, Then he said, Hear now my words, if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make myself known to him in a vision.

I speak to him in a dream, not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly and not in dark sayings, and he sees the form of the Lord.

[ 21 : 33 ] Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? This was a scenario in which some people were coming against Moses, and God got really upset. Among all the prophets, none of them spoke to the Lord face to face.

They received dreams and visions, but did not see the form of the Lord. Now ultimately, there came a day in which some people did see the Lord face to face, for again, a short season.

In the Gospel of John, the very beginning, excuse me, not the Gospel, in John's letter, 1 John, he speaks about the coming of Jesus Christ.

1 John chapter 1, verse 1, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the word of life, the life was manifested, and we have seen, and we bear witness, and we declare to you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us, that which we have seen, and heard, we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and these things we write to you, that your joy may be full.

John was saying, listen, I saw the Lord, I saw him with my eyes, I heard him with my ears, I handled him with my flesh and bone hands, he was manifested to us.

[ 23 : 19 ] God made flesh, but he's speaking to many people who've never seen the Lord. He's bearing testimony, he's giving witness of what he has seen, but he's saying, hey, listen, you have a fellowship with God even though you don't see him, and I'm telling you what I have seen so that you can know that you can have fellowship with him.

You know, as a young Christian, I really wanted to grow in my relationship with the Lord and have more of these human dynamic type of experience with the Lord.

I wanted to hear from him. And sometimes I would see, for example, on Christian television, someone who it would seem would be having a conversation with the Lord right then and there, and

I thought, wow, I really want that.

Or I'd read a book about someone who would receive visions from the Lord. But really, as we read through the scriptures, that is just not the normative case.

That is not how most of us will experience a relationship with the Lord. So let's talk about what does it look like to relate to the Lord.

[ 24 : 46 ] And we're actually going to expand on this in the next few weeks. We're just going to kind of do a quick overview here and we'll expand on some of these things in the coming weeks. When it comes to having a relationship with anyone, the first thing we can consider is getting to know all about them.

And how is it that God tells us about who he is? Again, when you build a relationship, what do we talk about? You learn about someone's history, their past, their likes and their dislikes, the things that they're interested in, their visions and hopes for the future.

God tells us all of those things about himself. And how does he tell us? He tells us in the scriptures, in his word. And so we can open up the Bible, the revelation that God gave to us, and we can read a message from the Lord.

God tells us all about himself, about his history, about our history, about the things that he likes and the things that he doesn't like, and about what he plans for the future, and how he wants us to be involved with those future plans.

some people might say, the Bible is just not enough. I need, and I want God to speak to me out loud.

[ 26 : 15 ] Right? I want God to speak to me. But really, if you want God to speak to you, what do you do? You open up the Bible, right?

And God will speak to you. But I want him to speak to me out loud. Well, you know what you can do? Read the Bible out loud. 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 2 says this, as newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. God's word is described as milk and as meat, and we can consume that word, and we can grow as Christians, but also grow in our relationship, getting to know more about the Lord.

Romans 15 verse 4 also speaks to this, says this, for whatever things were written before were written for our learning. This is talking about the scriptures, specifically the Old Testament scriptures, that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded towards one another, according to Christ Jesus. The scriptures were written so that we might know God, so we might know about him, so we might be comforted by a relationship with the Lord, and that we might have a hope for the future.

[ 27 : 47 ] The next thing, right, in any kind of relationship is communication, right? Now the Bible is actually communication to us, right? It's communicating God's word, what he wants us to know about him.

Well, most relationships, you know, a good relationship, a healthy relationship is two-way, right? And so we can also communicate to God, and what do we call that?

Prayer, right? So, we read over and over and over again in the scriptures about communing with the Lord, about talking to the Lord in prayer.

in Psalm 116, verse 1, it says this, I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplication because he has inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live. You know, when you pray, God listens? Well, how do I know? He doesn't speak back to me, not usually. Well, because the Bible says that he does and he loves to listen to us.

[ 29 : 06 ] You know, some people might ask the question, why should I pray if God doesn't talk back to me? Or, why should I pray if he doesn't even always answer my request?

Now, I'm sure most of us in here have many testimonies when we prayed and asked the Lord for something and he worked in our lives or the lives of others. And so, there's many testimonies to answer prayer.

But then, also there are times when it just seems like God doesn't, he doesn't answer our prayer, at least in the way that we want him to. So, why is it that we should continue to pray?

And it's because of this, God wants a relationship with you. He wants to hear from you. He wants to know what's going on in your life. Now, is it that he doesn't know?

No, he already knows, but he wants to hear from you. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, right, through prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God.

[ 30 : 12 ] Talk to God, tell him what you need. Doesn't always mean that he's going to meet that need exactly how you asked, but he still wants to hear from you. That's what a relationship is about.

We learn about God and then we express, we share our lives with him and he wants that from us. We express our love, we express our trust to him or in him, we express our gratitude and our thanks, and we even express our needs.

Psalm 62, 8, trust in him at all times, you people, pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us. 1 Thessalonians 5, 16, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

And then again back to Peter, 1 Peter 5, 7, casting all your cares upon him because he cares for you. God wants to hear about your cares, the things going on in your life.

[ 31 : 21 ] Again, he won't always answer our prayers exactly how we want them to, but he wants to hear from you. Why? Because he cares about you.

The next thing that you do in a relationship is you serve one another, right? That's how you express love, or one of the ways in which you express love is you consider the desires and the needs of your, let's say in marriage, right?

In marriage, you find opportunities to serve one another. You find out what are the needs of someone, of your mate, and not just needs, but just likes and interests, and you do things to serve them.

It's the same way with the Lord. You know, back in the Old Testament, the service that the Jews did was through the temple or the tabernacle.

It was the tabernacle first, the tent of meeting, and then it became a permanent structure, the temple. And there was something they had called a worship service. And they would go and they would worship there at the temple.

[ 32 : 38 ] Jesus was traveling around Israel, and he was actually in Samaria, and met a woman at a well in the town of Samaria. And as he was talking to her, kind of read her mail, and she said, Sir, I perceive that you're a prophet.

This is in John 4.19. She realized that he was some special guy. He was a prophet of some kind because he knew so much about her. Verse 20, Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me that the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father. You worship what you do not know. Now we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

She was Samaritan. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father is seeking such to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. And so, under the old covenant, when people wanted to serve God in some way, they would go to Jerusalem, they would offer the sacrifices, whatever other rituals that were involved, and that is how they would worship God.

[ 33 : 57 ] It was in a very specific place. That all has actually changed in this age of grace after the cross. In Romans chapter 12, Paul makes an allusion to the temple sacrifices, to the worship that they did, and gives a comparison on how we as Christians, under grace and after the cross, should worship or serve God in this relationship that we have with him.

Romans 12, 1 says this, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

One of the primary ways that we serve God in this relationship that we have with him, is by with our flesh and bone bodies, doing things that honor him, living our lives in uprightness and truth and honesty, serving others, loving others, all of these things are ways that we in our relationship with him, serve him and put a smile on his face.

So we read God's word to learn more about him, we share our life with God, and then we find ways to serve him in our life here on earth.

The last thing I want to talk about to wrap up here is something that really is not at least typical when it comes to human relationships. There's an aspect to our relationship with God that is somewhat different than our relationship with human beings.

[ 35 : 51 ] I'm going to tell a story. So when I met my wife, we were in Bible college and had just started dating, but we had both previously to starting our relationship had agreed to go on a year-long mission trip.

But we were going to different countries. And so we decided to keep that commitment and so she carted off to Indonesia and I went off to Vietnam.

Both in Southeast Asia but still very, very far away. And during that time our communication was somewhat limited, but in those previous months before that I had grown quite fond of her.

So I missed her quite a bit. And I spent a lot of time thinking about her. And every once in a while I would get maybe a letter in the mail and wow that would be so exciting to get a letter to see her handwriting and just to hear what was going on in her life.

Every once in a while I think maybe just a handful of times we would be able to make a phone call and actually could hear her voice. Some emails shared here and there.

[ 37 : 17 ] But it was difficult. It was hard. And I really missed her. And I really looked forward to seeing her again. And I remember as clear as day the first time that I actually saw her.

It was 14 months since I had seen her face to face I should say. I walked off the airplane and there she was.

It was hard to believe. Her smiling face. And I got to put my arms around her and hug her. And then we've barely been apart ever since.

Part of our relationship with God right now is that there is a seeking longing and a longing and a yearning for the Lord that we actively pursue.

There's a future relationship that we will have with God that we do not have now but that we can long and yearn for. We don't see him now with our eyes we don't hear the sound of his voice we're not able to touch him yet you need to know that there is coming a day when we will experience all of those things just as we do with our closest family members.

[ 38 : 55 ] But we shouldn't just passively wait for that day. The Bible says that we ought to seek his face that we ought to yearn for him.

That even though we make the best of the relationship that we have now that is based on faith that we can hunger and thirst for more.

In the Psalms David writes this Psalm Psalm 42 in the midst of his enemies mocking him and they ask him his question where is your God David?

And I'm sure David was thinking I'm not sure because I don't see him in the midst of all of this distress. But this is what he wrote in Psalm 42.

He says, my tears have been my food day and night while they continually say to me where is your God?

[ 40 : 14 ] He says, God, I don't see you but I'm so hungry and I'm thirsty for you. I want to see you. I want to appear before you.

In a similar manner, Job. If you remember the story of Job, he was an upright man, loved the Lord. The Lord allowed Satan to come in and destroy his life.

Sickness, disease, disaster, his wealth disappeared, vanished, his family members killed. And then on top of that, all of his quote, friends come and tell him what a horrible person he is.

That must be the reason why all of this happened. Job is in deep distress. This is from Job chapter 19 by the way. He's in deep distress. He says things like this, my servants no longer respond to me. My close friends, they abhor me, he says. He says this, my breath offends my wife. Anybody relate to that? My children despise me, he says.

[ 41 : 23 ] But then this is how he finishes up that chapter, chapter 19. Job 19, 25, he says this, for I know that my redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth.

And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I will see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Oh, how my heart yearns within me. He is yearning to see the face of God.

That's what he has to look forward to. And that's what all of us have to look forward to. To know God, not just through faith, the invisible God that we can relate to, which is wonderful.

Aren't you grateful that we can experience and love God, even though we can't see him? But there is coming a day when faith will be made sight.

[ 42 : 33 ] When we will be comforted, not just by an invisible God, not just through the comfort of the Spirit, but by a God who is flesh and bone through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the Bible says that there will come a day when the tears that we have will be wiped away. And what will wipe them away? Physical nail-pierced hands.

And we'll see him face-to-face and we'll hear his voice resounding with the vocal cords vibrating into our ears.

And we'll be able to experience, at last, a God with skin on. Are you looking forward to that day? Amen.

Let's finish up there. Pray. Father, you created us, and the Bible shows over and over again, you created us to have a relationship with you.

[ 43 : 39 ] And that is hard sometimes. Sometimes it is so hard. Sometimes harder than others. we ask you to work in us to continue to grow our relationship with you, to grow, to enjoy you, to grow in our love for you, to grow in our understanding of you, each and every day.

and that we would ultimately also yearn and seek for you, yearning for that day when finally our faith will be made sight and we'll get to enjoy you for all of eternity.

We thank you for all you've done for us. In Jesus' name, amen. Thanks, everybody. Okay, so, some final instructions here.

We have the music rehearsal for the kids, kids 12 and under, so you can head back. Miss Sheila will meet you at the kids class. Don't forget, if you'd like to renew your membership, check out the forms on the soundboard there.

Or if you're interested in membership, oh, by the way, the membership forms also, if you'd like to be in the church directory, even though you're not a member, also fill that out. There's boxes to check for signing up for the prayer, what do you call that, prayer network, and the email, and what was the other thing?

[ 45 : 10 ] Oh, and then concealed carry, you can fill out those forms as well. All right, thanks everybody.