

HOW TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1 JOHN 1:1-4

When a man reaches the end of his life he doesn't ask to see his wallet, or trophies, or possessions - he cares about his **relationships**. *This was true of John...*

When the apostle wrote this letter he was nearing 100 years old. And a relationship John formed as *a young man* was what preoccupied him as *an old man*. John met Jesus. He spent three years with Him while He was on earth; then a lifetime carrying on that relationship in the Spirit... *So he writes to the Church...*

1 John 1:1, "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 bear witness, and 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."

A relationship with Jesus had dominated John's life, and now at its end, his desire was that we share in that same relationship. John's top pursuit had been to get to know the God who made him - then died and rose to save him!... *Do you have a relationship with God?*

A few years after becoming a Christian I picked up a slim, little paperback titled, "Communicating With God." On the back of the book was a multiple-choice question that challenged me!... "Which is the most important? **First**, to get to heaven. **Second**, to serve God. **Third**, to know God more. **Fourth**, to do God's will." *If you were asked this, how would you answer?*

Hey, before you decide, let's take a moment to think through your options... *What about answer #1?* It is definitely important to get to heaven, but what are you going to do until you get there - and heaven is eternal, once there, how are you going to occupy your time?

Answer **#2** is also significant. We definitely need to serve God, but if all we focus on is service and never seek refreshment we'll become destined for burnout. All work and no rest would turn heaven into a rat race.

And **#4**, we definitely need to learn and do God's will, but once it's done, then what? Is a task or calling all there is? Is the Christian life simply *taking orders*?

That's why the correct answer to our question is **#3, to know God more**. Think of it, the ultimate human objective is to have a relationship with the God who created us. This is why John writes, that we might have **"fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ."**

Hey, as us Southerners say, *I'm tickled pink* to be going to heaven - and it's super rewarding to serve the Lord - and with all my heart I want to learn and do God's will.. *but the deeper purpose behind it all is to know God, to fellowship and communicate with Him.*

And when we're ignorant, or naive, or forgetful of this priority it produces in us a disillusionment and frustration. God's ultimate goal for you and I is not heaven, or service for God, or even God's will... *a location, or vocation, or situation...* Jesus died so you could have intimacy and relationship with your God!

And when knowing God is your #1 goal you end up experiencing your deepest fulfillment and highest joy! This is why John writes in verse 4, **"And these things we write to you that your joy may be full."** A deep-down, abiding satisfaction is the byproduct of knowing your Creator and living your life in the presence of His Spirit.

Today, I want to talk to you about *how you can have a relationship with God - the God who created you, and died for you, and has risen to fellowship with you.*

First, understand that God is a covenant God. When two parties live or work together their interaction is based on either a **contract** or a **covenant**. A contract lays out specific behaviors I can expect from you, and you can expect from me. It's assurance that we fulfill our obligations, and keep our end of the deal!

But a covenant is different. It's more than a series of agreed upon duties, *it's a commitment to the success of a relationship*. You can have a contract and there be very little bonding between people. But in a covenant the individuals vow to do whatever it takes to live in harmony with one another. It's agreeing to fellowship, to be together, to even be friends. It's a commitment.

A real estate transaction is just a contract, but a marriage is a covenant. *Marriage has some contractual elements, but it's more than that...* A married couple has no idea what life will bring and what'll be asked of them over a lifetime. Thus, they take vows to each other to keep working at making their union a success.

And God is a covenant God. Throughout history He continually made a way to have fellowship with His people. God wants to know us and be known by us. In every era He's addressed changing issues and created terms for whatever our relationship with Him required.

The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, enjoyed a covenant with God. Genesis tells us they walked with God in the cool of the day, in the Garden of Eden. They lived their daily lives in a conscience awareness of God's presence... *Yet we know what happened.* The first couple sinned and rebelled against God. They wanted to be His equal, and ate the forbidden fruit.

And just as God had warned, sin brought death. Immediately, Adam and Eve died spiritually and were separated from God. Simultaneously, an aging process jump started, that eventuated in their physical demise.

And God's solution for their sin was a sacrifice! When they rebelled they immediately became *self-centered* rather than *others-centered*. They were now conscious of their nakedness. And God covered the shame and guilt of their plight with a proxy - a sacrifice that could die in their place for their sin. God slayed an animal to replace the couple's fig leaves with fur coats.

Later in human history, mankind's sin worsened. Our rebellion against God brewed and stewed until it became unbearable. God's Spirit could no longer strive with man, and God vowed to destroy the world with water... Yet He still wanted *fellowship* with His creation, and saw a righteous and faith-filled man He could trust.

Noah built a boat. And when the floodwaters came God boarded that boat with Noah. He preserved him through the storm. And when the waters had receded, God made a covenant with Noah. God hung up His bow in the clouds. The rainbow was a sign to Noah that God was no longer at war with mankind. He'd start over with Noah's family. The point is, through Noah God found a way to continue His fellowship with man.

And as soon as Noah exited the Ark, God ordered him to build an altar and sacrifice a few of the animals he had brought onboard. Again, the terms of God's covenant included a sacrifice for the sin of humanity.

Even after God delivered the Hebrews from Egypt, again He wanted fellowship with the people He loved, so He created a sacred space, a meeting place. God designed a tent, or *Tabernacle*, as it was called. It was the place where God would dwell among His people - where God and Israel would fellowship together.

And just inside the door of the Tabernacle was a bronze altar where once again sacrifices were to be offered. For once more sin's penalty was death, and the price paid would be the death of an innocent and spotless animal. Throughout the OT whenever humans fellowshiped with God **a sacrifice** made it possible...

But God eventually tired of the blood of bulls and goats. Animals were innocent, but still stained by sin. Their blood covered sin temporarily, but were repeated annually. They couldn't produce a permanent pardon.

According to the NT book of Hebrews this is why Jesus came to Earth! Hebrews 9:26 tells us, "He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself... so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many..."

In Matthew 27, at Jesus' execution, as He hung from the cross, we're told, "Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land." From noon until 3:00 PM, for three full hours the world was blanketed by darkness. It was "a midnight at midday..."

Verse 46, "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus spoke in Aramaic - the street language of the day. That's why the bystanders were confused. They thought He was calling for Elijah. But Jesus' cry had nothing to do with the prophet. His shout sprang from Scripture. It was the opening line of Psalm 22, a song that described in remarkable detail the death and sufferings of the Messiah, 1000 years beforehand.

Earlier in John 8:29, Jesus had said, "He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." From eternity past, Jesus enjoyed perfect, unbroken harmony with His Father, yet on the cross a breach occurs. The Son of God is stung by His Father's sudden rejection.

I believe when Jesus shrieked, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" - all the sins, of all the people, from all the ages were being thrust upon His sacrificial shoulders. *Heavy was the weight of our sin!*

Jesus was spotless. Morally, his heart was as pure as the fallen snow. It would've been a shock to His system to feel a mere speck of sin - but imagine the piercing fright, the staggering horror that shook Him, when suddenly He sensed the sin of the whole world. *The sin of the rapist, the serial killer, the child molester, the secret gossip, the greedy betrayer* - every sin of every man was thrust upon His innocent shoulders.

2 Corinthians 5:21 sums it up, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus was God. He never ceased being God. He lived forever with the Father in warm, unbroken fellowship. Yet for a moment the *Son of God* became an *orphaned child*. God was separated from God, so we could be reunited to Him.

Years ago, I tasted firsthand a little of the pain God endured to restore fellowship with us! When my oldest son was two, he was hospitalized with an infection. The doc needed to feed him antibiotics through an IV.

Well, when the nurse went to insert the needle, she asked us to leave the room. It would be painful for my son, and she didn't want him associating the pain with his parents. As a nurse Kath was smart. She complied. But I refused to budge. I stood outside the procedure room door to be as close to my little buddy as possible.

Yet I wasn't prepared when the nurse inserted the IV and my son started screaming. I'll never forget him shouting, "[I want my Daddy, where is my Daddy?](#)" I could've jerked that door off its hinges. *But I didn't*, for love made me wait until the procedure was done!...

And standing in that hallway, with tears rolling down my cheeks, God spoke to me, "[Now you know what I endured when My Son died for You...](#)" I've never known God's love as strong as that day! Love made the Father wait just beyond the door! God became separated from God, so we can fellowship with Him.

And God's desire to have a relationship with us didn't stop when the body of Jesus was laid in a cold, stone grave. Three days afterward, Jesus overcame. *He defeated death, and emptied Hell, and escaped the grave. **Jesus rose to have a relationship with you!***

The night before He was crucified Jesus shared the Passover with His disciples. And when He took the cup of wine that for 1500 years had represented the blood of the sacrificial lamb, He gave the ritual new meaning. In Matthew 27:28 He said to His disciples, "[Drink from it all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.](#)" Jesus was establishing a new covenant with humanity.

And now as terms of this new covenant Jesus asks you to "[come.](#)" It's now all about you coming to Jesus! *Turn from yourself, from your sin, from your rebellion, from whatever it is you're living for, and come to Jesus!*

This is why Alli sang, and it's why I say, [Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship.](#) It's not about you following numbing of rules, or conducting necessary rituals, it's about following a person! Christianity is all about Jesus, *our suffering Savior and our living Lord!*

After Jesus rose from the dead, for the next 40 days He appeared to His disciples with many infallible proofs. He removed all doubt of who He was and had been all

along. Not just a **teacher**, not just a **healer**, not just a **rabbi**, not just a **prophet**, *but Lord of life and death - of heaven, hell, and earth - of time and eternity!*

And though it's been a while since we've seen Him, His words still echo through the ages. Before He ascended Jesus left all His followers with a promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus promised us fellowship with Him! He'd be with us and dwell in us. We could know Him and walk with Him. That in our lives He would be discernibly real.

Recently, People Magazine ran an article about a 20 year-old girl who made \$43 million last year. Once a waitress in a country diner, she's now an internet influencer with 10 million subscribers. On her OnlyFans website she sells racy and raunchy images of herself to lust-filled men. She calls it *adult entertainment*.

And here's why I mention her, she claims to be a devoted Christian. Says she watches her "home church" online. She doesn't a conflict between creating lewd content and religious devotion. The magazine quoted her, "*The Lord is very forgiving. He put me on here. He put me on earth for a reason and I'm just living every day. If this wasn't meant for me, I wouldn't be here right now.*" Did you hear that? This girl has the audacity to say God is behind her perversion. And she doesn't care what anyone thinks. She said, "*Call me what you want, I'll be laughing my way to the bank.*"

But here's the problem with this girl's reasoning, a relationship with Jesus is always on **His terms, not ours**. It's not about religion, it's about a relationship, but that relationship is with the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is the Captain of all creation. He calls the shots. His will is supreme. Jesus is da boss, *not you or I!* And until we surrender *our will* to *His will* the relationship we say we have with Jesus is just pretend.

Listen to these lines by Lois Cheney, "*To know the cross is to know Christ. To feel the cross is to feel Christ. To gaze at the cross is to gaze at Christ. To carry the cross is to be a Christian, and not until then.*" You can't live contrary to God's will; then seriously claim a relationship with God, *at least not the real God!*

Recently, a robber in Brooklyn NY ripped off Ziani's, a men's clothing store. But just before the heist the thief was caught on surveillance video making the sign of the cross and praying to God. After his prayer the man threw a brick through the store's plate glass window, took some clothes, and ran off with the loot.

Did he ask God to bless his crime? Lots of folk have a faux-relationship with Jesus. They're self-deluded.

Multitudes today think they possess a relationship with Jesus, but they're relating to *the wrong Jesus*. I hope you know there are erroneous assumptions of Jesus that have no resemblance to the real person!

For example, there's the **Republican Jesus**, he's all for tax cuts and loves guns... Then there's a **Democrat Jesus** who thinks discipleship is reducing your carbon footprint... There's the **Therapeutic Jesus** who helps you cope with problems, heals your boo-boos, tells you how great you are... The **Starbucks Jesus** drives a hybrid, drinks lots of coffee, and has long conversations... Then there's the **All Star Jesus** who helps you run faster and jump higher, and chooses who wins the Super Bowl... There's the **Gentle Jesus** who's just a nice guy, more like the 98 pound weakling on the beach... And **Hallmark Jesus**, who appears on the inside of greeting cards... Or **Boyfriend Jesus** who buys you flowers - he likes to cuddle... And there's **Radical Jesus** crusading to end the world of injustice... And **Good Example Jesus** who recycles his trash, and makes you a better you... etc., etc., etc.

But none of these ideas of Jesus are the real Jesus, **the resurrected Jesus**. Our Lord is His own man! He marches to His own drumbeat. **You don't make Jesus into your image, He transforms you into His...**

You learn quickly in a relationship with Jesus He has His own agenda! There are times when I pray for comfort, *but He wants to challenge me...* I ask to be healed, *but He's teaching me endurance...* I cry for vengeance, *but He loves my enemies...* I'm looking for a way out, *but He's coaching me how to push through.*

The risen Jesus **overthrew** Satan, **overcame** death, **oversees** all things, and will one day **overwhelm** the kingdoms of this world! *The only relationship with God worth having, is a relationship with **that Jesus!*** He's got some clout! You don't treat Jesus like a regular guy.

Think of it this way, imagine every human heart as a board room. Picture a big mahogany table surrounded by leather chairs. And lots of special interests sit at this table making decisions. There's your *social self*, and *business self*, and *recreational self*, and *sexual self*, and *private self*, and *family self*, and *religious self*.

Now let's say, Jesus enters the board room. There're two ways for you to "**accept Jesus.**" Some folks invite him to join the board. Put Him on a committee. Give Him a vote. Jesus adds another voice to the chaos.

But there's a better way to "**accept Jesus.**" You can say, "*Lord, my life isn't working. I need a complete overhaul. And you're the only One who can do it.*" You fire the

committee and ask Jesus to take sole control of your life. This is the relationship with you, Jesus wants!

And when you make that commitment to Him, and begin this kind of relationship, the adventure begins.

Forty-five years ago I knelt down in a gravel parking lot, at a concrete picnic table, not too far from here, and gave what was left of my life to Jesus, and little did I know what would happen... *The places He would take me... The ways He would stretch me... The lessons He would teach me... The blessings He would bring me... Little did I know... very little did I know...*

But I went for it. I didn't just dip my toe in the water, I went all in. I said, "**Jesus, take all of me. I give all that I am to all that You are!**" I believed that Jesus is as alive, as we are today, and He'd live His life through me, if I gave it all to Him. *And today, I have no regrets!*

Todd Skinner was a renown rock climber. But there was one challenge Todd had never tackled. Trango Towers in northern Pakistan is the highest free-standing spire in the world. It's a near-vertical drop. And it's in a part of the world that's not easy to access.

When Todd went out to recruit sponsors for his climb he found most of his regular associates felt that a wall that big, and steep, and remote just wasn't meant to be climbed... *But Todd Skinner was undeterred...*

It took him years, but after gathering a team, pulling permits, planning logistics, preparing physically... *the team faced their biggest challenge when they finally stood face-to-face with the largest, tallest, smoothest, steepest rock wall any of them had ever seen.*

Listen to how Todd described their initial sighting, "**We turned a corner and there it was... Trango Towers rose stunningly... The reality hit us like a shock wave. We stopped dead in our tracks. No amount of bravado or bluff could hide the fact we were absolutely horrified.**" The best climbers on earth had come from around the world for this challenge, but it now seemed too big, too high, too vertical, too difficult. Todd knew there was only one way forward. They had to just "**get on the wall,**" even if they weren't completely prepared.

Experienced climbers know that the final danger in a big expedition is to postpone leaving until every contingency has been considered, and every question has been

answered... *Everyone knows the mountain itself is the only place some answers can be found!*

No matter how well prepared you are, how well-honed your climbing skills, how vast your expertise, no one can climb a mountain if you don't **just get to it!**

Eventually, it took Todd and his three fellow climbers 60 days to reach the summit. Despite their grueling preparation and training, much of what they ended up learning was only grasped after they *"got on the wall."*

And this is true of a relationship with God. Religion is *theoretical, methodical, manageable, predictable*, but a relationship with Jesus is none of that. *It's practical, it's spontaneous, it's out of your control, it's wild and wooly...* Jesus is alive and on the move, and when you commit yourself to truly follow Him He takes you places... He does stuff through you, and works in you, and half the time you don't know what's going on. You're just hanging in and climbing up, and following...

And this is the truth about being a follower! A follower doesn't lead, he or she follows. You don't start following because you've learned where you're going, or you've plotted how you intend to get there, or you've deciphered when you'll arrive... *O, now I'll follow... No!*

You start following when you turn from what's holding you back, and truly trust in the person who's leading. *Listen, everything God wants to teach you - all you need to learn - comes to you once you're on the wall.*

This is why we're told in Hebrews 11:6, *"without faith it is impossible to please God."* Every true relationship with God begins and gains traction **by faith**. *Hey, what about you, do you believe the covenant Jesus offers?*

He died shouldering your sin. The cross is for you. And now He's risen from the dead to live His life in you, and be THE person to follow who knows the way up. It's time to fire the board, *get on the wall*, and accept Jesus as the only One who can set your life straight?

It's not for you to adopt terms with God, amicable to you... or agree to a set of terms that you've designed for your own advantage... *Yet, sadly, this is what many people today are actually referring to when they talk about "their own personal relationship with God."*

Remember what today is about... Jesus conquered death. He earned His rank. All due deference goes to Him. And today, He's calling you to come and be His follower - *to get on the wall...* Hey, you were made to know God. It's the reason you exist. *Don't miss out...*

Amazingly, all that Jesus went through, *He did it to have a personal relationship with you!* Don't let that truth sail over your head. Today, trust Jesus - be His follower - and you can begin a relationship with God!