

Session #2 – Pursuing a Deeper Relationship with God – Going Deeper

Premise

Although we might think that “eternal life” is only something to enjoy after we die, Jesus says that eternal life is to know God.

Key Scripture Passage

John 17:3 (NIV) Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Eternal Life – Knowing the True God

In perhaps the most quoted verse of all time, John 3:16, we read that anyone who believes in Jesus, the Son of God, shall not perish but inherit eternal life. Later, in John 17:3, Jesus gives us a definition of that eternal life: knowing the true God.

As we’ve established previously, the eternal life that believers are promised is not just for the afterlife. Will we know the true God in the afterlife? Absolutely. But one of the most beautiful parts of our salvation is that we get the opportunity to know God here and now, during our life on earth. Eternal life starts when we die to our flesh and are resurrected with Christ, not when our physical bodies pass away.

Unfortunately, many believers fail to step into their inheritance at the time it is given, not out of rebellion or defiance, but simply out of ignorance, thinking it is just for “someday.” We can easily fall into the trap of living aimlessly, forgetting what Jesus has promised us.

In John 10:10 (ESV) Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” *Abundant life*. A life that is overflowing, more than enough. The NIV says “life to the full.” The NLT translates that as “a rich and satisfying life.” In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson uses the words, “real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

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The word “abundantly” as seen in this verse is the Greek word *perissos*, and it means over and above, more than necessary! Jesus doesn’t just give us life. He gives us a rich, bountiful, extraordinary life that surpasses what we could secure in our own power. Why would we not pursue such a life? Why would we not want to take hold of this eternal life now?

As a reminder, the way Jesus defined eternal life in John 17 is knowing the true God. If we are to find the abundant and eternal life that Jesus came to give, the only means to getting there is through this “knowing.”

So how do we get to know God?

Let’s look at the life of Jesus. I don’t think anyone would argue that Jesus knew God the Father well. You might argue, though, that it isn’t fair to compare our relationship with the Father to Jesus’ relationship with the Father, seeing as how they are both part of the Trinity. However, Jesus’ prayer in John 17 was that we, his disciples, would know God like he knew God, that our relationship with the Father would mirror Jesus’ relationship with the Father.

And if Jesus is our model for how to know God, then, the four gospels give us a good picture of how to pursue such a relationship. Three of the recurring themes we see throughout Jesus’ life on earth that are essential to a growing

Ways to pursue God: knowledge of the Scriptures, prayer and surrender.

relationship with his Father are as follows: knowledge of the Scriptures, time spent in prayer and solitude, and a life of obedience and surrender.

Knowing God: Knowledge of the Scriptures

Knowing the Scriptures is a key place to start as we embark on this journey of knowing God. The Bible is God's Word, and throughout both the Old and New Testament, God reveals his own character, both through his spoken words and through the way he interacts with his people.

One of the first passages in which God describes himself is Exodus 34:6-7. He describes himself to Moses as such:

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands [of people], forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.

In the book *God Has a Name*, author John Mark Comer points out that "... the writers of the Bible circle back to this passage over and over and over again, dozens of times. Moses and David and Jeremiah and Jonah: they quote it and allude to it and pray it and sing it and claim it and complain about it, but above all, they believe it." Why? Because they knew that reminding themselves of the character of God is central to knowing God.

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Think about an important relationship in your life: a best friend, a spouse, a parent, or a roommate. Now let's say that someone else tells you a nasty rumor that they heard about this person. This rumor is completely out of character, making you stop and think, "That doesn't seem like something that _____ would do at all." In this instance, what would you do? Would you believe the rumor, taking it at face value? Or would you, as someone who knows this person very well, do your best to put this rumor to an end?

Just as most of us would know if something about our best friend or spouse is true, we too can combat lies about God when we really know Him and His character. This is one of the main reasons we read Scripture. This is why we meditate on it and memorize it. On days when we cannot remember who God is due to challenging circumstances, or when there are loud voices telling us to believe lies, or when the divisive culture in which we live causes us distress, we must turn to the Truth about who God is, and the place we find that is in the Scriptures.

Note that in our key verse, John 17:3, Jesus prays not just that we would know God, but that we would know the only true God. It is easy to make assumptions about who God is based on what others tell us and the definitions the world provides. We know that God is gracious (that's in Scripture), therefore we may reason that God must be okay with me doing whatever I want to do (that's not in Scripture!).

When we are not rooted in the Scriptures, it is easy to start believing things that simply aren't true about Him. Comer says in his book that "... who God is has profound implications for who we are. Here's the problem: we usually end up with a God who looks an awful lot like us." We want to make God in our own image, when in fact, we were created in His image.

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Comer goes on to say, "Here's how you know if you've created God in your own image: he agrees with you on everything. He hates all the people you hate. He voted for the person you voted for. You never get mad at him or blown away by him or scared of him. Because he's controllable." Knowing the true

God requires us to look at the entire character of God presented throughout the Bible, rather than picking and choosing pieces that sound good to us.

When you enter into a dating relationship with someone, you don't get to choose the parts of him or her that you like and ignore the others. Maybe that's easy to do at the beginning when you only see this person once or twice a week. But when it's time to enter into marriage, you get the whole person, warts and all.

God is perfect; we know that. He is flawless. But there are parts about God that are hard for us to swallow. It's the battle of our flesh versus our spirit; we want to be in control of God, rather than the other way around.

Knowing God: Spending Time in Prayer and Solitude

So first, we get to know God through reading the Scriptures. We learn about his character, what He likes, what He dislikes and the kinds of things He says and does. Second, we get to know God through spending time in prayer and solitude. We see Jesus model this often throughout his ministry. One of those places is in Mark 1:35: "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."

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Jesus had a habit of sneaking off to be alone with the Father often before or after moments of ministry. In this particular instance, he had spent the previous evening at the house of Peter's mother-in-law, healing the sick and demon-oppressed. Instead of sleeping in, he chose to recharge by taking some quiet moments to be with and pray to His Father.

We all know that it's impossible to really know someone with whom we have never even had a conversation. Think about how many people in today's world feel disconnected and lonely despite the thousands of Facebook friends or Instagram followers they have. Watching someone's life happen on a screen can never replace being in the presence of that person. Why else do you think long-distance relationships are so challenging? There's something about proximity that changes everything.

Likewise, it's hard to know God if you never enter into conversation with him. God can feel far off (or non-existent) if you never spend time alone with Him, creating space for Him to be present with you. Prayer is how we communicate with God. It's the invitation for Him to draw near. Prayer is not just a list of wants and desires; it is the way His people show Him that we want Him to be involved in our lives.

Knowing what the Bible says about God (and believing it) is important because this directly affects our prayer lives. What you believe about God will shape the way that you pray. If you believe that God is far off and aloof, you likely won't pray very often. Why would an aloof God listen to your prayers? If you believe that God is a harsh and judgemental God who is always disappointed in you, you will find yourself praying like a dog with its tail between its legs, ashamed to come before the Father. You may find yourself even hiding from Him, afraid of what he might think of you. But if you believe that the Father loves you, is full of grace and mercy, and calls you friend, you will likely come to God often, full of confidence and trust.

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Mind you, this doesn't happen overnight. The journey of knowing God never ends (it's eternal, remember?). If we desire to learn who God is, and be able to pray from a place of confidence and trust, we must put in the time and effort. We can't just quit trying when the going gets tough! Just like any

human relationship, we get to know God when we keep spending time with Him, keep having conversations, and keep showing up.

To review: We get to know God first by reading and knowing the Scriptures. Second, we get to know him by spending time alone with him in prayer. Third, we get to know God by living an obedient and surrendered life.

Knowing God: Living an Obedient and Surrendered Life

Part of spending time with God includes not just speaking, but listening to him. And when we listen to God, we must then obey what He says. In John 15:14, Jesus says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” One of the ways we can listen to God is by, again, knowing the Scriptures. The Bible is full of instructions and commands for the way a believer ought to live.

Another way we listen to God is by obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Another way we listen to God is by obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever said something rude or done something to offend a friend and immediately felt convicted to apologize? Have you ever been mindlessly doing dishes and suddenly felt compelled to pray for or call up a friend and encourage them? Or maybe you have been reading your Bible, and upon reading a particular verse had a very specific person come to mind to share it with. More often than not, these are small nudges from the Holy Spirit (who, don’t forget, is God), and we ought to respond to those nudges with obedience.

Admittedly, listening and obeying isn’t always easy. However, the more we walk an obedient life, the more we understand the Father’s heart, and the more we get to know God. God may ask us to do some difficult things, things we don’t understand. Or he may ask us to refrain from doing some things we really want to do. But in hindsight (it’s almost always 20/20, isn’t it?), we are often able to look back and see how God was protecting us, shaping us, growing us, or directing us in a way that was better. Obedience, especially in the tough times, produces a more abundant harvest than when we follow our own path. This is the abundant life that Jesus was talking about.

There are a number of examples of this kind of obedience in the Bible (Abraham, Ruth, King David, etc.), but someone who is perhaps under-celebrated for his radical obedience is Joseph, the step-father of Jesus.

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Think about it: Joseph is betrothed to be married to Mary. And then out of nowhere, she confesses to being pregnant but claims to not have committed adultery. So not only does Joseph think his fiancée cheated on him; now he also thinks she is either a liar or absolutely insane.

But then, God enters the picture. He sends an angel to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:20) and instructs him to take Mary as his wife as planned. This is crazy, but Joseph obeys. Verse 24 tells us that “when Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife.”

Joseph didn’t have to obey. His plans were thwarted; he wasn’t planning on being a step-father, or having a baby so soon. But he listened and obeyed; Joseph lived a life surrendered. Can you imagine if he had said no and missed out on the opportunity to be the step-father of Jesus!? Oh, how life would have been different, and oh, how Joseph would have carried regret all of his days. Joseph’s obedience led him into the abundant life, and a life of knowing God in a way he never would have otherwise.

How is Jesus inviting you into eternal and abundant life today?

Are you actively pursuing a life of knowing God more deeply, or are you just waiting for “someday?” “Someday” can be a dangerous word. Oftentimes, it is just code for “never.”

In John 6:63, Jesus reminds his disciples that “it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.” Keep in mind that this eternal life is a gift; it is something that is given to us! But our flesh will work against us, as will our enemy (the devil) and the world. The devil is the thief that comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). He will do anything he can to get in between you and your Father. He will steal your joy, kill your time, and destroy your confidence. This is why we must put effort into knowing God. This is why we get rooted in the Word, why we carve out time and space to get on our knees before the Father, and why we tune our ears to listen and obey.

In closing, the words of Simon Peter in John 6:68-69: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and *have come to know*, that you are the Holy One of God” (emphasis added).

To whom else shall we go? Where else can we find eternal life, the abundant life? May we believe, and may we come to know the only true God.

Who are you becoming?

Going Deeper Reflections

See below for some thoughts on how to go deeper.

1. Are there areas in your life where you say to God (or yourself) “someday?” Stop and ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you can make your “someday” today.
2. In what ways am I searching for the abundant life apart from God? Read and meditate on John 10:10 and consider where in your life the devil is trying “to steal and kill and destroy.”
3. Read *God Has a Name* by John Mark Comer.