

Volume 1, Day 8: Religion Was Never Meant to Work

Religion was never meant to be the final answer. This relationship, Christianity, works very differently from the way we were taught to build it on our own. So the most important question at this point is how do you see God when you're thinking about Him or talking to Him or listening to Him? How do you picture Him in your own mind? Is He cold and distant so that you have no hope of getting to know Him? Is He stern and angry so you don't even want to know Him? Or is He so disappointed in you that you feel like you have to crawl out of a huge hole before God would even think of smiling at you?

How you think of Him is incredibly important to not just this journey, but everything in life. You won't enjoy a relationship with Him if you don't know Him as the Abba, that tender Father, whose lap you can crawl up into like a daddy or a grandpa. That's the image Jesus wants us to have. We're not to fear God. We are to be endeared to Him because He's endeared to us. "Perfect love casts our fear!"

Now, how do you get there? You must begin it in your own heart and mind. You must explore who God really is. He says of Himself, "God ***IS*** Love!" And how do come to love Him? Look at your own experiences. But don't be informed by religion or poor father role models. If you do, then you will likely **not** think God is an endearing father. Also watch the lives of your friends who have found God to be very dear and very near and incredibly tender, compassionate and patient. He is actually **for** us, not against us. He's not trying to get you to imitate His life. He wants you to enter into a relationship with Him, which will then make you desire to do everything in your life God would want to accomplish.

Volume 1, Day 9: Willingly Dismiss Your Wrong Beliefs

Reread the scriptures themselves. But look at the Word of God through fresh eyes. Dismiss any other opinions about what you read and let the Holy Spirit in you understand what is written. Focus on the stories of Jesus. Jesus was the 'spitting image' of the nature of the Father. So when He comes to someone who's struggling or failing or hurting or in sin, notice how Jesus is treating them? Is He the angry taskmaster demanding their conformity and obedient behavior? Or is He that loving brother who found them where they were and began to invite them to a much better flavor of reality?

Until you intentionally search the Bible for a God who wants to be tender and compassionate with you, you will continue in your present, likely unpleasant, experience of life. Jesus showed us that God is extremely loving toward even the most unlovable people.

You must be willing to dismiss much of what you're so convinced might be true right now. If you've known God only to be distant, uncaring or not interested in being involved in your life, fortunately you have been sadly mistaken. And I stress **sadly**. Well, that's not who He is. So let go of that false view of God. He wants to help you learn to live this life. He's not demanding that you do it **for** Him. That's where this journey begins to take on meaning. Ask God to show you. God says that "If you seek Him, You will find Him." It's a guarantee. (Listen to transitions at the lifestream.org website.)

This is the relationship God wants with you more than you want it for yourself. When you come to realize that he **might** love you and actually **might** be on your side, then this relationship can and will take its course. He is the best lover in the Universe!

Volume 1, Day 10: Love Fully and You Will Behave Well

At some point in our journey we cease to be satisfied with just the taste of this thing. We actually want to go deeper to participate more fully in this life. Many of us have been taught that it's all about praying the sinner's prayer, being baptized, affirming a certain creed and then suddenly we're saved. That means we've got our get out of hell free card. But Jesus didn't talk about salvation as a get out of hell free card. Jesus talked about salvation as knowing the Father and knowing Himself. It's a genuine relationship we are invited into. My misunderstanding happens not only at the beginning, but every day of my life, no matter where I get confused, distraught, perplexed, upset, angry, even at God! If He is **not doing what I think He should**.

Where my relationship gets back on track is when I have that moment of just surrender to Him and I say, "Okay, God, not what I want, what You want! I want to follow your way. I want to know you intimately." I realize I can get pretty messed up and think some pretty wrong things. I have discovered that surrender is **not just the first day I got into this relationship**, but every day that I walk this journey. Surrender is what keeps opening for me greater opportunity to know him in a deeply personal way. That is why Jesus said, "If you want to come after Me, you must take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Me."

Isn't that like you do with your most significant other much of the time? What Jesus means is that we can't keep living life our own selfish way and ask God to bless it or ask God to invade it. Instead, we want to begin to live the way that pleases Him. And His **asks** let us know what He wants. And to be sure, it is not to behave well, It is to love fully the other person.

Volume 1, Day 11: Your MOST Significant Other

Most Significant Other relationships begin simply with the act of surrender, giving up our selfishness to be selflessly desirous to please the Other! God wants to be our Most Significant Other!

Peter talked about it on the day of Pentecost when 3000 people were surrounding him wanting to embrace this thing that they were all experiencing, this **new life in Christ**. Peter told them, “There are some things you must do. First, repent of your selfishness and sin (relationship crimes) and secondly, be baptized (visible expression of your commitment to faith in Jesus for salvation).

Let's consider repentance. **Repentance is not** groveling in our shame promising God we'll never do that awful thing again. In most things we've misunderstood repentance. **Repentance is** simply the word surrender in the context of who is sovereign over your life, you or God. I surrender my pleasure to God's pleasure. I **change my mind** about the way I've been living, and I want to learn to live in ways that please God. Again marriage is a prime example of how God wants to relate to me. And my verbal promise to correct my behavior is not a guarantee that I'm not going to do it again. I will sometimes act selfishly. I'm going to fail in my attempt to always do what pleases my lover.

This is a relationship journey you get to grow in. But you begin by simply telling God, “I'm tired of doing things my self-centered way. God, would you teach me to do things your way, abandoning my agenda and embracing Yours?” Once you commit to God, let God do all the work and provide all the revelation necessary to make you the finest lover of God that you can possibly be!

Volume 1, Day 12: Forgiveness: Past, Present, Future Sins

Peter talked about being baptized. I know that seems archaic to some today. We don't have baptism as a regular ritual in our culture like the Jews did back in His day. But for centuries, being baptized in water has been one of those things that provide the most convincing symbol that we want to die to an old lifestyle to begin in a new one. If you have not been baptized in the past, that is something you might consider. Baptism is a means by which I celebrate the changing of life from the way I've wanted to do it myself, to now I have found a God worth knowing and want to fulfill His desires for my life.

Peter preached those things so that you could embrace the forgiveness of sins. It is important, in order to take this journey to intimacy with God, that you know that in fact, every sin (relationship crime) that you have ever committed or ever will commit has been forgiven by God by faith in Christ as His Only Begotten Son. Now to be sure your sin was not summarily dismissed, Jesus paid the penalty for you. Forgiveness is “paying it forward” to Jesus. God paid your sins forward to Jesus and Jesus suffered the full penalty for you. This is God’s way to provide justice both for the victims and the perpetrators and yet provide a way to restore right relationships between Himself and any of us!

Now that I have been **born again** (in spirit), He's going to have the **long suffering** (inexhaustible patience) with me as I struggle with sin in the future. Even those future sins were paid for by Jesus such that my sins are wiped out in Him and forgiven in advance. He died naked and shamed in order to pay not just for my guilt but also naked to bear my shame. I can let go of my shame and live fully loved by God.

Volume 1, Day 13: Feel God's Love in His Holy Spirit

This is not just something you believe 'factually' in your head. Salvation occurs when it becomes real in your heart and soul. Repentance happens in your heart and soul. When salvation occurs, you actually **feel** clean. And you are clean. You're not perfect. You know you didn't earn it. Finding your way to an effective repentance, through an effective surrender, that alone enables you to **feel** forgiven. It enables you to know that, "Yes, I get to start fresh and clean with God today. And you get to live fresh and clean every day, even your worst one. Instead of groveling in guilt and shame when you sin, jump for joy and shout, "Thank you, Jesus, that you paid for that sin also!"

Find your way into that. Spend time alone with God until you **feel** forgiven. And then, "... we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." It is essential that God comes alive in us. The Holy Spirit makes Himself known in our life and speaks to us and makes scriptures clear. The Holy Spirit inspired every writer of scripture and therefore is the most capable one to properly interpret God's Word to me. I don't need a pastor or priest. I am a "priest" according to the Book of Hebrews. So I can live fully understanding the Word of God. It is the Holy Spirit's role (John 16:13) to guide every believers into all truth. So let Him be your guide instead of hearsay from **any** others.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit, and that's the gift that God gives every one of us who want to follow Him. All you have to do is let the Holy Spirit take up residence in you. It is your commitment in relationship as in a marriage to Him. Only you can make it. As the Holy Spirit comes alive in you, you become part of something so amazing and satisfying that it staggers the imagination.

Volume 1, Day 14: New Creation, New Life

This is the new creation. When Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, "... old things have passed away and behold all things have become new ...," that's what he meant. It doesn't mean I'm totally different from that day on. It doesn't mean I'm free from sin from that point on. What he means is I enter into a whole new way of living the new creation, no longer held captive by the things of the old life or the old creation. Now I've become part of something new where I get to live in his love, experience his life, live by his power instead of my own.

Now, I know many of you have jumped through some of these hoops before. You've said the sinner's prayer. You've been baptized. You've done this. Yet, you still feel like the relationship hasn't satisfied your longing to be loved. I even get emails from people that are just certain, they've committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which explains why this relationship isn't working for them. Or they've committed some other sin that disqualifies them from God's grace.

The 'Christian' religion will make you feel that way. But if you have a desire to know God intimately, you can. God says, "If you seek Me, you **will** find Me." He does not hide from you. But you must be willing to change what you believe about God in order to love Him. If you haven't discovered this relationship yet, now is the time to tell God, "I want to take this journey with an open mind.

Religion set you up for failure. Don't think it's your fault. Don't look inside and believe that there's some reason God **will not do this with you**. When you trust Him enough to surrender absolutely to Him and His ways, this journey becomes effective **for you**. Spend much time asking God to show you what and how to surrender to Him.