

More Like Jesus: Relationship

There is a difference between knowing a fact and knowing a person. When it comes to our relationship with Christ, it can be hard to treat him like a person rather than a principle, for the simple fact that we cannot see him and interact with him as we do other people in our lives. This week, we will be focusing on activities that will help us begin to treat Jesus like a person, and to transform our spiritual walk.

Day One

Meditation Part 1

When looking at practices that will help us to start reformatting our faith from principle to relationship, perhaps the place to start is with meditation. Why start here? Because God's word is always primary, that is, he is always speaking, and our speech to him is answering speech. Without God starting the relationship, it could not exist. We could never know anything about God if he did not reveal himself, since God is spirit and is therefore not knowable by our actions alone. God speaks to us in his word, and rather than be satisfied with just studying, we should try to interact with it as a word coming from the place of relationship. When we receive a letter from our grandmother, we do not get out our lexicon and we do not start diagramming sentences. We first read the letter relationally. What does that mean? It means that we first begin by placing the letter in the context of our relationship with our grandmother. This has a couple of aspects to it. First, we put the letter into the context of our grandmother's life. What is she telling us about and why? What are the events contained in the letter and how do they fit into her life's story? With the word of God, this means figuring out how the word fits into the story of God and his interaction with mankind. Why did God reveal this truth about himself when he did? What did it mean to the relationship with man? How did the relationship change because of the revelation? What did it reveal about God's love toward man or how man should love God? Next, what does this truth have to do with OUR relationship with God? Why is God bringing my attention to this now? How does it fit into our relationship? What should I change based on this truth? By following this kind of meditation, I start to contextualize the truth of God's word into a relational frame. Try this with the word today!

Verses: Matthew 4:4, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Romans 10:17, Psalm 119:11

Prayer Topics: Connection, Love, Joy

Day Two

Meditation Part 2

When we receive a letter from someone who is very important to us, we tend to read the letter many times, thinking deeply about what it means and what it changes about our relationship. When we receive a letter from someone with more knowledge and wisdom than we have, especially when we know that person cares about us and is concerned with our lives, we tend to think of ways that it can be applied to our lives in a way that is beneficial to us and reflects the hopes and wishes of the sender. Since God is making you aware of this truth now, how should you apply it to the circumstances of your life? Do you look for ways that this truth applies to you? Do you assume that it has value for your life? In this week's sermon, we went over a Psalm that spoke of the love of God's law. If you were to read and meditate on that verse, what would it mean for your life? You can think of this in general or even abstract terms, but another way to approach it would be to look for opportunities throughout the day to apply and learn from that passage, asking yourself what it means to you in the circumstances you find yourself in throughout the day. What does this passage mean to me now that I am at work? Is there any way that love for God's law could be applied in my job today? What about in my confrontation with my boss or my subordinate? What about when I go home, and my family is having an argument? Does God know my life, and can I learn from what I am being spoken to right now? Try this type of meditation today. Not every moment will contain a revelation, but many will. So give it a try.

Verses: Psalm 119:97, Romans 7:7-25, John 1:17, Romans 10:4-13

Prayer Topics: Truth, Peace, Unity

Day 3

Make Prayer Personal

Sometimes our prayers can become very impersonal, as if we are writing a corporate memo. I remember very clearly when the prayers my parents led me in were expected to change from rehearsed to spontaneous, and how difficult that change felt. Rather than just recite the words, I would have to think about what to say, and that seemed daunting, primarily because I wasn't really thinking of God as a person with whom I had a relationship. If you struggle in making your prayers personal, if you feel like your prayers to God are lists of requests or feel very formulaic, there are some things you can do to start making them more personal. First, make the language you use personal, and think about the words you are saying. When Jesus prayed, he did not use the formal word for father, but the informal and familial word. Would you feel weird starting your prayer with the word "Dad," instead of "Father?" Why? How would it change the way you perceived the person you were talking to? Would the informality and personal nature of the change intimidate you or make you feel presumptuous? When we are told that we can approach the throne of grace boldly through Christ, in what way is that true? Next, to make your prayers more personal you can ask God to make himself known to you in a personal way, and you can ask him to help you reveal yourself to him in a more personal way. God listens to our prayers and responds, and being open and honest about our difficulties in seeing God personally is a good way to start the process of becoming closer to Him. Finally, we need to make our prayers come from our hearts, letting our thoughts and feelings be a part of our prayer time. When I was a kid, it was not unusual to have people pray in King James language, even though they didn't speak that way. While the New Testament was written in an everyday form of Greek that was common to people of the day, we have a tendency to create a "holy" language that doesn't leave room for things to get personal. God is a person, and he

wants to relate to you as a person, having a relationship where you love and are loved by him. Let prayer become a pathway to that end.

Verses: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 8:17, Jeremiah 29:11-13

Prayer Topics: Family, Love, Truth

Day 4

Make Prayer Responsive

Have you ever had a friend who would prattle on and on, and when you tried to respond to them, they just went on with their discourse as if you hadn't tried to be a part of the conversation? Many of us have seen people like this, but few of us have tried to be their friends. Most of us, when having experienced this, realize that friendship with such a person is almost impossible. They are looking for an audience, not a friendship. The problem is, for most of us as Christians, we are that person when it comes to our relationship with God. Many of our prayers are streams of consciousness interspersed with some requests, followed by some mental wandering, and we usually struggle to connect the things we are saying with the things that God is saying to us. How do we make our prayers more of a conversation? We pay attention to what God is speaking into our lives, and we make sure that our prayers revolve around a response to his initiative. How do we know what God is saying to us? First, we spend time in his word, and as the spirit convicts us of his truth, we respond with prayer. What has God been teaching you? Are you struggling with any of the lessons you have been learning? Are you upset by anything that the bible says? Are you finding anything comforting? Talk to God about what he is saying to you. Next, we know that God sets the times and places for us to live, and that he allows things into our lives. When we read the book of Job, we see that Job spends a lot of time talking to God about what God is doing in Job's life. Job doesn't understand a lot of it, and what he does understand he doesn't really like, so he lets God know. God is working in your life. Do you have any questions about that? Are you pleased? Are you angry? Tell God. Finally, there are people in your life that God is using to speak to you. They have problems, issues, and they also sometimes have words of encouragement for you. They present challenges and opportunities to you, and let you know about things going on in their lives that need prayer. Do you see God speaking to you through others, and can you lift these things up in prayer? In all of these ways, we can start to make our prayers a conversation, and that helps immensely in starting to see our interaction with God as a personal relationship.

Verses: Psalm 145:18-19, Matthew 7:7, 1 Chronicles 16:11

Prayer Topics: Wisdom, Understanding, Perspective

Day 5

Be a Child or Friend, Not an Employee

Another way that we interact with God is through obedience. The nature of our obedience can be personal or impersonal, so it makes sense for us to spend some time thinking about the nature of our relationship with God that is expressed in our obedience. When I go down the road, I often take notice of speed limit signs, and they occasionally have an effect on the velocity of my travels. When this occurs, I do not think about the people who passed the speed limit laws, the person who signed it into law, or the workers who put up the signs. It is very impersonal. I might occasionally think of the policeman who might pull me over, but that is the extent of the personalization of the process. Many times, we obey God in the same impersonal way, never really thinking that the command that we are obeying came from a person with a will toward us, a person that loves us and has expressed that love toward us in the command itself. Rather than obeying like an employee of a faceless corporation, or a subject of a nameless bureaucracy, try thinking through your obedience like a friend or a son or daughter, images that the bible has used to describe our relationship. How would this change the nature of your obedience? Do you look at the request of a friend differently than the request of a boss or a bureaucrat? How will this change the nature of your relationship with God? Try this for the weekend, and see what happens.

Verses: 1 John 3:1, Galatians 3:26, Romans 8:14-17

Prayer Topics: Family, Unity, Love, Peace