

RELATIONSHIP – IT’S WHAT GOD WANTS. PART 2

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

Date: 21-06-2026

Scripture: Jeremiah 9:23-24, Hosea 6:6, John 17:3

Last week we spent a fair amount of time at Mount Sinai, hearing the wonderful line from scripture that God spoke to the children of Israel, saying, “You yourselves have known how I bore you on eagle wings and brought you to myself.” We examined what that was and that, above all else, God desires a strong relationship with us. We looked at that and said that sometimes we lack faith in having that kind of a relationship. And so many of you raised that as a prayer request to God saying, “Increase my faith.”

This week, I want to push through a little bit more on that. I want us to explore what that might mean for us. What does it mean to have a good relationship? What does it mean for us to grow in that kind of a relationship with a God who we don’t see?

So, we’re going to explore that a little today. But first, I want to preface what I’m going to say with a few scriptures that kind of put this in context.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 says, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not the wise men boast in their wisdom. Let not the mighty boast in their might. Let not the wealthy boast in their wealth, but let those who boast, boast in this, that they understand and know me.’”

Hosea 6:6 “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

John 17:3 Jesus Himself says, “And this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

So, we’re going to push through on this and see what all of this means for us.

At Sinai, God says, “I brought you to Myself.” Centuries later, through Jeremiah, God tells people what matters most – not wisdom, not strength, not riches, but that we understand and know Him. From Exodus to the prophets to the New Testament, God’s heart has always been the same. He wants a relationship with His people.

So, let’s look at this whole idea of relationship. What does it look like? How are God’s people meant to live once they have been redeemed? How do you and I live our lives after we have been saved by Him?

And that raises another question. If God has brought us to Himself, and that’s where we are today, what next? What do we do next? Many of us think that salvation is the destination. But salvation is the doorway – the doorway into a life lived with God. It’s the first step. A wedding is not the end of a relationship; it’s the beginning. In the same way, salvation is not the finish line of the Christian life. It’s the starting line. God saves us so that we may know Him, walk with Him, and live in fellowship with Him every day.

So, this morning, I’d like for us to consider four questions.

1. What does a relationship with God look like?

2. How do we grow in that relationship?
3. What might possibly threaten that growth or that relationship?
4. How do we continue to sustain that relationship?

God's invitation is not simply to believe in Him from a distance, but to live each day in a growing lifegiving relationship with Him.

1. What does a relationship with God look like?

Most people understand relationships because they live in them every day. And so do we. We all live in relationship. And a healthy relationship has three elements.

- Presence
- Conversation
- Trust

Presence: The first mark of a healthy relation is presence. People who love one another want to be together. They make time for one another. They enjoy each other's company. When God says, "I brought out to Myself," He's saying, "I want you near Me." And we see this throughout scripture.

- Moses spoke with God in the tent of meeting. Scripture says that the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Moses did not simply come to receive instructions and leave. He lingered in God's presence. In fact, after experiencing God's presence, Moses repeatedly asked for more. "Show me Your glory." The more he knew God, the more he wanted to know Him.
- Mary of Bethany understood this as well. While Martha was busy with all the other responsibilities and preparations, Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to His words. She was not doing anything productive by worldly standards. She was simply enjoying being with Jesus. And Jesus said that she had chosen the better part, because relationship is always more important than activity.
- Jesus Himself modelled this priority again and again. The gospels tell us that He withdrew to lonely places to pray. The Son of God who carried the weight of the world's salvation on His shoulders, still made time to be alone with the Father – before major decisions, after demanding days of ministry, and in moments of deep need. Jesus sought the Father's presence. If He needed that communion, how much more do we need it?

Your relationship with God is not sustained by occasional visits or hurried conversations. It grows through presence. And that means intentionally seeking Him, making space for Him. Not merely saying our prayers but enjoying His presence. Not merely speaking to God but being with God. Just as every healthy relationship requires time together, so our relationship with God deepens as we learn to dwell in His presence.

A husband and wife can live in the same house and hardly speak. Likewise, a Christian can attend church regularly and yet, spend little time consciously with God. So, the question is not simply do I believe in God, or even, do I go to church? The deeper question is: Am I spending time in His presence? Because relationships don't grow only through proximity; they grow through presence.

Conversation: Every meaningful relationship involves communion with each other, conversation with God. No relationship flourishes without communication or having conversations. God has brought us to Himself, and He invites us into an ongoing dialogue with Him.

How does God speak to us?

- Through scripture,
- Through the Holy Spirit,
- Through circumstances,
- The community of believers.

Scripture is a primary way God reveals His character and His will. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Word, convicts us, and prompts obedience. Circumstances may redirect us. And wise believers can offer encouragement or correction and counsel. In all these ways, God is graciously teaching His people to hear and to follow Him.

How do we respond so that there is conversation and dialogue?

- Through worship
- Through prayer
- Through thanksgiving
- Through confession.

Prayer is the privilege of speaking honestly with our Father. Worship lifts our eyes up to observe His greatness. Thanksgiving remembers His faithfulness. And confession brings our failures into the light so that we can receive grace.

When you read the Psalms, we see how earthy they are. It shows that God welcomes joy and fear and confusion and anger and praise. He would rather have an honest conversation with us than polished words that hide the condition of our hearts.

Trust. This is the deepest part of any relationship. Think for a moment about the children of Israel standing at the edge of the Red Sea. The sea was before them, Pharaoh's armies behind them, and no visible way forward. In that moment, Israel faced one question: Could they trust this God? When they could not understand or see what God was doing, could they trust Him? God had already proven His power to them. But now He was teaching them something much deeper. He was saying to them, "Can you trust Me even when you don't understand what I'm doing?"

Trust is forged in the moments when we cannot see what God sees. And many of us know that place. We've all been there or could be there even now. We pray, and sometimes the illness still remains. We ask direction and the path is still unclear. God may not be asking us to understand everything but, at that moment, He may simply be asking us to trust Him. Faith is not believing because I can see God's hand, but trusting because I know God's heart.

2. How do we grow that relationship?

How do we grow those elements so that the relationship gets strong? After all, we know that relationships don't remain healthy automatically. They don't! A marriage either grows stronger, or it grows weaker. Friendships either deepen or drift apart. Relationships require intentional investment. The same is true of our relationship with God. The good news is that God has not left us guessing. Throughout scripture, He has given us practices, habits, rhythms that help us draw closer to Him. These are not ways of earning God's love. They are ways of responding to the love that He has already shown us.

In other words, if presence, conversation, and trust describe what a healthy relationship with God looks like, then the next question is equally important for us. What do we put in place for these

qualities to grow? And the answer is found in spiritual disciplines that God has given us, regular practices that create space for God to deepen our relationship with Him.

Spiritual Disciplines:

- 1) We spend time together.

No relationship grows accidentally. Every meaningful relationship requires time, requires attention and intentionality. And the same is true of our relationship with God. One of the most overlooked verses, I think, in scripture, is Exodus 33:11 "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp. But his young aide Joshua, the son of Nun, did not leave the tent."

After Moses finished speaking with God, Joshua just stayed behind. Scripture doesn't tell us exactly what he did but it shows us his hunger for God's presence. We grow closer, not through occasional spiritual highs, but through the daily habit of spending time with Him, of lingering in His presence in scripture, in prayer, in worship, and in quiet reflection. Joshua's secret was not extraordinary ability; Joshua's secret was that when everyone else left, he stayed. He lingered in God's presence.

- 2) We need to learn His heart through His word.

Imagine trying to know someone without ever listening to them. imagine trying to build a friendship while ignoring a letter that may have been written, or a conversation that you've had, or every expression of their thoughts and feelings. It would be impossible.

Relationships grow as we listen. And the same is true with God. Scripture is God's self-revelation. That's how He reveals Himself to us. the Bible is not merely a book about God. It is God's chosen way of revealing Himself to us. Through scripture, we learn His character. Through scripture, we learn about His will, His values, His purposes for each one of us.

The goal of scripture is not just information, but transformation and communion. So when we read, we should ask, "What does this passage teach me about God's heart?" The more we understand God's heart, the more we trust Him. The more we trust Him, the deeper our relationship with Him gets.

- 3) Obey what He says.

A relationship grows through obedience. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep my commandments." Notice that Jesus does not say, "Keep My commandments so that I will love you." No, the order is important. Obedience is not a condition for earning God's love. It's a response to God's love. Because He loves us, we choose to be obedient to Him. Just as a healthy relationship is strengthened when trust is expressed through action, our relationship with God deepens when we put His words into practice.

It's one thing to hear what God says. It's an entirely different thing to do what it says. Obedience is the practical expression of trust. Every time we choose God's way over our own, we're saying, "Lord, I believe that Your wisdom is greater than mine. I believe that Your plans are better than mine, and I trust You." That is why obedience is never merely about following rules. It's about responding to the person of God.

Think of Abraham being called to leave his homeland or Peter stepping out of the boat into the water. Neither knew exactly what would happen next. But, in obeying, they discovered God's faithfulness. Through obedience, they discovered God's faithfulness in deeper ways than they could have otherwise imagined.

The same is true for us. sometimes, God may be asking us to forgive someone when we would rather hold on to that grudge. Sometimes, He may be asking us to give when we'd rather keep it to ourselves. sometimes, He asks us to step forward in faith when we would rather remain comfortable and secure. And in these moments, obedience becomes the pathway to a deeper fellowship with Him.

Every act of obedience opens the door to a fresh experience of God's faithfulness. As we obey, we discover that His commands are not burdensome, but lifegiving. We begin to see that God's commands are not fences that are designed to restrict us, but guardrails that are designed to protect us and guide us into abundant life. and every step into obedience deepens intimacy because obedience says to God, "I trust You enough to do what You want."

The Christian life is not measured simply by what we know, but by how we faithfully respond to what God has revealed. The goal is not merely hearing His voice but heeding His voice and following it.

4) Walk with Him daily.

Grow a relationship by walking with Him daily, through the day. Many times, we divide life into the sacred and the ordinary. Sunday is sacred time. Monday to Saturday is ordinary time. We'll pick up God on Saturday night and say, "Lord, we're going to church tomorrow. Would you come with me?" And yet, God must be involved in every moment of our Mondays, our Tuesdays, our Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Scripture shows that God is present in every part of our life, not only in church, but in work, in family, in waiting rooms, in disappointments, in celebrations, and daily routines. God is there and must be involved.

Brother Lawrence, author of 'The Practice of the Presence of God,' discovered this while doing ordinary kitchen work in a monastery. He learned that washing dishes could become fellowship with God when done with a heart turned toward Him. That's what Paul meant when he said, "Pray without ceasing." A life that is lived in continual fellowship with God.

Relationship grows when we learn to include God throughout the day. Maybe as simple as thanking Him, asking Him for wisdom in making a particular decision in the office, seeking help in difficulty, pausing to recognize His nearness. These small acts train our hearts to live with God rather than merely visit Him on a Sunday. We begin the day with God, but we don't leave Him there. We walk with Him through the entire day, hand in hand.

3. What threatens this relationship with God?

Every relationship faces challenges and so does our relationship with God. What are those challenges?

1) Disappointment with God.

Sometimes, God does not do what we expect Him to do. Prayers seem like they're unanswered. Dreams seem to collapse. People die. Pain remains. Many believers struggle not because God has changed but because their expectations of Him have changed.

John the Baptist sat in prison wondering whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. Even great believers experience disappointment. And the answer to that is to bring that disappointment to God rather than away from God. And that's what he did as he sent messengers to Jesus to ask if He was the Messiah.

2) Busyness.

One of the greatest enemies of intimacy is perhaps not evil but distraction. Martha was busy, but not with Jesus. We can become active in ministry while becoming distant from God. I repeat: We can be extremely active in doing things for God without really being close with Him. The doing gets more important than the being. And that can never be. If you're doing things for God and not being with Him, you'll burn out. You'll finally find yourself like a car that's running on empty. It'll stop.

3) Sin.

Sin creates distance not because God stops loving us but because we stop walking openly with Him. And the answer, of course, is confession and repentance. Relationship is restored not by hiding like Adam and Eve did, but by returning to God.

4) Suffering.

Sometimes, pain can either drive us toward God or away from God. And yet, when we look at the Psalms, we see that suffering often becomes the place of deepest intimacy. Many of you here would testify to that as well, to be able to say, "I learn more about God in one difficult season than in years of comfort."

5) Doubt.

Doubt is not the enemy of faith. Unaddressed doubt is. Thomas doubted. The father of the demonized boy cried, "Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief." God often meets honest doubt with grace.

4. How do we sustain this relationship with God?

If it is so imperative for us as Christians to have this relationship with God, how do I keep it sustained day in and day out?

Three simple practices:

1) Remember.

Israel was constantly told to remember what God had done. Memory fuels faith. Keep rehearsing God's faithfulness.

2) Remain.

Jesus said "Abide in Me." The Christian life is not about striving but remaining. Remaining connected to the vine. Stay close. Stay connected. Keep coming back. Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing." Stay connected into the vine as a branch that will then bear much fruit. Remain.

3) Rely.

The relationship is sustained by grace. The same grace God who drew Israel out of Egypt continues to draw His people to Himself. We don't hold on to God nearly as securely as He holds on to us. Scripture reminds us so eloquently, "I will never leave you; I will never forsake you." We know that. we've heard it so many times.

There are another couple of verses in Isaiah that bring home this truth.

Isaiah 49:15-16 says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palm of My hands."

God's love is not only the love that delivers us on eagles' wings; it's the love that never forgets us, never loses sight of us, and has our names engraved on the palms of His hands.

So, in conclusion, let me say this. God didn't simply save Israel to change their location from Egypt to Canaan. He saved them to change their relationship from slaves under Pharaoh to children in His presence, sons and daughters of the Most High God. He bore them on eagle's wings and brought them to Himself.

Church, that is still His invitation to us. Don't settle for knowing about God when He has invited you to know Him. Don't settle for visiting His presence when He has called you to abide in Him. Don't settle with hurried prayers, occasional worship, and distant faith when the living God has brought you close to Himself.

And so, if you've drifted this morning, come back. If you've grown busy, make room for Him. If you've been disappointed, bring your disappointment to Him. If you've doubted, bring your doubt honestly before Him. If you've sinned, don't hide. Return. Ask for forgiveness after confessing it.

The Father, beloved, is not calling you merely to duty. He's calling you to Himself. So this week, would you draw near, open His word, speak to Him honestly, listen for His voice, trust His heart, obey His leading, walk with Him through the ordinary moments of life. And remember, the greatest gift that God has given us is not merely rescue, not merely blessing, not merely heaven someday. The greatest gift God has given us is Himself. So, let's live every day in the joy, the security and wonder of that relationship. Let's stay near to the heart of God, near to the God who has already brought us to Himself.

Amen.
