

## “The Most Important Relationship”

Col. 2:6-7

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Today, in our *FaceTime* series we are going to talk about strengthening and developing the most important relationship in life, and that is our relationship with God. This is actually the title of the message today – it’s VERY creative.

I’m calling it: **The Most Important Relationship**

So far in our series, we have talked about the relationship we have:

- with our mom...
- with our spouse...
- with our children...
- with those who are lost and don’t know Christ...

All of the relationships we have covered up to this point have been the horizontal relationships if you will – and ALL are very important. However, if we don’t get the vertical relationship right – our relationship with God, then those on the horizontal plane will never be what they could be.

Now, I don’t know about you, but I remember as a child really struggling with this idea that I could have a relationship with God.

Afterall, I have never seen God with my physical eyes. I have never heard God speak. I’ve never heard his voice audibly before...talking about *FACETIME* - I remember reading about the relationship between Moses and God in the Old Testament:

**Exodus 33:11a – “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face (FACETIME), as a man speaks to his friend...”**

I used to read this and other Old Testament passages like it, and think, “Well, yeah...if God showed up and appeared to me like he did Moses, Abraham, and others, I’d have quite the relationship with him as well.”

Wouldn’t that be awesome...to be able to punch a button on our phones and FACETIME God?

To hear his voice...see his face...at a minimum send him an email and have him respond or follow him on *Twitter* or *Facebook*. Maybe we could @ mention him and get his attention or maybe a shoutout.

If any of these things were possible, it would at least make the relationship with God seem plausible, right? It would at least feel a bit more tangible.

But God doesn't operate this way, does he? God is Spirit, and so how are we as physical humans to have a relationship with an eternal God, who is Spirit?

THIS is the question on the table today and we're going to not only talk about HOW we can have this relationship with God, for those of us presently in a relationship with God, we're going to talk about how we can GROW, DEEPEN and STRENGTHEN that relationship.

The text I'm using as a diving board today is found in the New Testament book of Colossians. The Bible reads in:

**Col. 2:6-7 – “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,<sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”**

Now, to give you some context and help fill in the blank on who the apostle/missionary Paul is writing to and what this is all about – Colossae was a small city that if you remember from our Acts series had a church planted there on the third missionary journey most likely by Paul's ministry partner, Epaphras.

You can read the earlier parts of Colossians and it really helps us see what Paul is communicating and getting at here.

There was some false teaching that was going on in this city that was attempting to take away from the divinity of Christ – they were attempting to lessen the essence of who he was as God in the flesh.

Now, this is important. Paul writes to combat this and listen to his words in:

**Col. 1:15-20 – “He is the image (exact representation or manifestation) of the invisible God (the eternal God becomes flesh c/f John 1:14 – “the word became flesh and dwelt among us – Jesus is God!) the firstborn of all creation. (not physical birth...the firstborn child, specifically in Jewish culture had the privilege...the right to the inheritance...Jesus has position, rank, eternal authority)<sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.<sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Jesus is the creator and sustainer of all things – he is God!)<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him (KEY – Paul takes pleasure in writing this! “In Christ” God was pleased...) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”**

So, let me translate this as simply as I know how. If we want a relationship with God, who is Spirit, it comes by knowing his Son, Jesus who is God the Spirit, in the flesh.

But how do we do this? How do we initiate this relationship?

Well, the good news is you don't have to initiate the relationship. God initiates the relationship with you. This is why he sent Jesus in the first place – so that he could have a relationship with you and by his Spirit, he draws you to himself.

The scripture says in **John 6:44a** – “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...**”

We believe in a prevenient grace, which means that before we ever decide to seek God, God is first seeking after us. And he desires to have a relationship with us.

Again, this is WHY Jesus came in the first place – God leaves heaven to come to earth but before there can ever be a relationship, there has to be a reconciliation.

**Illus. Three Circles** – We showed it to you like this last week – (Draw it out!)

See, sin separates. And we have an imputed unrighteousness that left alone, makes it impossible for us to have a relationship with God. Jesus comes and dies. He (v. 20) “makes peace (ends the hostility and separation and brokenness) by the blood of the cross.

If we were to keep reading **Col. 1:21-22** – “**And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...**”

This is how one enters a relationship with God through his son, Jesus. The disciple, John put it like this in **John 1:12** – “**But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.**”

So, to all of you here today and watching online, God desires to have a relationship with you. He wants to change you from within, and as a result change the entire trajectory of your life.

Now, I want to transition the message at this point and talk about how you can grow in your relationship with Jesus. Because once you receive Jesus into your life, you are “born again”, you are like an infant.

I imagine that the mass majority of you who are here today have done exactly what I've talked about – you have repented and believed in the gospel.

As a result of confessing Jesus, you have entered into a personal relationship with him and you are now following him by faith and once that decision has been made, it's time to grow!

**1 Peter 2:2** – “**Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation...**”

**Phil. 2:12b-13** – “**...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**”

So, we don't just receive Jesus to get the "fire insurance" if you will and avoid hell. No, we receive him by faith and we are to begin growing up "in him".

Remember our launching point for the sermon today:

**Col. 2:6-7 – "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, (How did one receive Christ? We receive him in a spirit of humility and faith! We didn't do anything for our salvation. God worked in our heart, even giving us the very faith to believe and trust in him. We simply believed by faith and put our trust in him – PERIOD. Notice: walk "in him" (v. 7 – "in him") <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."**

Now, I want to give you what I believe is THE secret to spiritual growth...to advancing in our relationship with the Lord. I tried to think when God taught me this, and I couldn't pinpoint when – I do know I wish I would have been taught this as a high school student.

### **Illus. Position and Practice WHITEBOARD**

The secret to growing in our walk with Christ is by putting our mind on our identity...who we are "in Christ" – and we do this in the same way we trusted in Christ – with a spirit and posture of humility and faith.

We do this and we will be rooted and built up "in him" and everything we DO will take care of itself.

Now, as we enter into this final part of the sermon, I want to remind you that these things we "do" to grow in our relationship with the Lord are not bad things...they are necessities – however, they are a means to an end, NOT an end in and of themselves.

And so, to bring this message to a close in concentrating on our identity "in Christ", we can't do this apart from time in his word BECAUSE:

- this is where we learn our identity...
- this is where we unpack our position...
- this is where we really understand and begin to wrap our mind and heart around WHO we are.

We get ALL of this from the word of God and so it's imperative that we give ourselves to it. If we want to grow in our relationship with God, it will primarily (and I use this term purposefully) – it will PRIMARILY happen by/if we give ourselves to two major practices.

## 1. Give ourselves to God's Word

Let's get real practical on HOW to do this. And the best way I know to do it is to just show you from my personal time alone with the Lord how I do it.

To be clear, this is not a one size fits all as it relates to our devotional lives...its different strokes for different folks and you will need to trial and error this thing to best fit you and your personality.

I've just found through the years in teaching this that it's helpful folks to have an example and that's what I want to show you here...these are just some helpful principles for you as we get going as it relates to your time alone with the Lord.

**a. Set a time and place** – this makes it a priority. We will do what is important to us!

I want my girls to know where to find dad in the morning...he is meeting with Jesus! I've told our staff, our summer interns, I'll tell our residents when we get them together – you have to guard your time alone! Make it a priority and I'd encourage you to make it in the morning!

**b. Slow down** – this is all about pace – you could study God's word 24 hours/day 7 days a week and still not uncover the truths of God's Word. It's NOT how much you take in, it's WHAT you "get in".

Do your best to remove distractions – this is why getting up early and something as simple as not having your phone with you is important!

**Illus. My time - "Hour of Power" (Proverb, 2-3 Psalms, O.T., N.T)**

This is where journaling comes into play...we need to write things down! I believe when we have the Word of God before you, and we are filled with the Spirit of God within us, nothing is coincidence. This is where God speaks – his Word!

Pointers: Ask questions (what does this say about God THEN what does this say about me/to me), make what you read prayer requests, look for certain highlights in scripture...let me give them to you (Talk through):

**Day #1 – Promises to Claim**

**Day #2 – Sins to Avoid**

**Day #3 – Commands to Obey**

**Day #4 – Examples to Follow**

**Day #5 – Blessings to Enjoy**

**Day #6 – Teachings to Learn**

**Day #7 – Review**

- c. **Surrendered spirit** – this is where the action is. There is a critical link between growth as a believer and obedience.

All obedience starts with a surrendered spirit. It's praying just like Jesus in the Garden of Eden, "Not my will but yours be done."

Listen to me...most of us are educated beyond our level of obedience. To be honest, some of us don't need more Bible Study. Some of us need to begin simply putting into practice the Bible we know!

**Illus. Anemic Christians or Bulimic Christians** (I don't say this to make light of any physical disorder – I use these terms though because spiritually it describes some of us...and it's a disorder spiritually!

We either don't eat at all spiritually during the week, thinking that one meal on Sundays is going to be enough to do the trick OR, we eat, and eat, and eat, and eat but never put into practice what we are learning – and we become severely overweight as Christians or just throw it up when we leave because we never do anything about it!

The anecdote to this is SURRENDER! "God, whatever you tell me to do, I'm going to do. Wherever you tell me to go, I'm going to go!"

Why on earth would God continue to show us truth from his Word, if we are not obedient to what he has already shown us or led us to in the first place?

A surrendered spirit says, "God, what you show me today, I'm going to put into practice...I'm going to act on it." And this leads me to this last portion of what it means to give ourselves to God's Word, and that is to:

#### **d. Start now**

There is no better time to start, than right now. There is no better time for action, than right now. Start where you are and watch what God does!

**Rick Warren** writes in *Purpose-Driven Life* – "**Spiritual growth is not automatic. It takes an intentional commitment. You must want to grow, decide to grow, make an effort to grow, and persist in growing. Discipleship – the process of becoming like Christ – always begins with a decision.**"

If we want to grow in our relationship with God, it begins with a decision...a decision to give ourselves to God's word. The second practice we must implement or decision we must make is to:

## **2. Give ourselves to God's Church**

**Illus. Family Camp panel** – Unicorns! Super-stars! ALL said, church and serving within their church.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** – “**And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**”

Listen, everyone needs to be a part of a Bible believing, Jesus exalting, Great Commission church.

- We need biblical community...
- We need a place where we can exercise our spiritual gifts...
- We need a place where we can grow in our love for God and be nurtured in our faith...
- We need a place where people know us and accept us for who we are and if the Church isn't the place, I don't know where it is...
- We need a place where people celebrate life's victories and walk through life's defeats together – where the truth can be spoken in love...

ALL this happens in the context of the local church. This is the locker-room before the big game each week! Can you imagine a team taking the field to battle against another team without meeting in the locker-room first to go over the game-plan one more time, and lock arms a final time to get on the same page before going out to battle?

It's the church – being together in church that we realize we're not the only ones struggling...we're not the only ones in the battle!

We see...and it's reinforced here that life isn't about us and we are reminded of our higher calling and purpose...that there is something bigger in life than what we see physically – we're reminded this world is NOT our home!

You will NOT grow in your relationship with the Lord apart from a thriving dynamic relationship with his Bride.

**Cyprian**, the early church father...leader in the church of North Africa said: “**No one can have God for his Father, who does not have the Church for his mother.**”

He was obviously speaking of the universal church as the bride of Christ, but I believe this is true at the local level...you need the church and you will grow best in your relationship with the Lord, giving yourself to the church.

**Illus. Three homes** – spiritual, physical, church

So, I close this message out with a question of application for/to you. If you want to grow in your relationship with God, you must give yourself to God's Word and give yourself to God's church.

If there is a secret sauce, I believe this is it. So, the question of application is, "Are you?"

? - Are you in are in a relationship with God? And if so, are you giving yourself to his Word and to his Church?

Look, fast-forward 100 years. What else is going to matter? Your relationship with the Lord is the most important relationship in life because it's him you will stand before one day and give an account for your life.

If you don't know God, which is to know Jesus in a personal way, enter into a relationship with him today by calling on him in faith today.

And if you do have a relationship with the Lord, don't settle for anything less than the strongest relationship you can possibly have him. I PROMISE you, he wants this for you, and is waiting for you to walk in him just as you received him.

May God give you the desire to know him and grow in him today.

Let's pray.

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