

**INTRO**

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I remember being a very small child, snuggled up to my grandmother listening to her sing the old hymn, “In the Garden:”

*I come to the garden alone*

*While the dew is still on the roses*

*And the voice I hear falling on my ear*

*The Son of God discloses.*

Now Mimi had lost most of her hearing as a young woman, so in all honesty, her singing was not the best. But I didn’t care, and neither did she. When she got to the chorus, she would take a deep breath and belt out:

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,*

*And* ***He tells me I am His own****;*

*And the joy we share as we tarry there,*

*None other has ever known.*

My grandmother was an avid gardener. She grew her own vegetables and had the most beautiful rose garden. As I look back, I wonder how much time she spent praying as she tilled and watered the soil, pulled out weeds and fought off insects and blight. Did she sense the presence of God in her meticulous care of his creation? Did she long to know Jesus more? To actually see his smile and hear his voice telling her that *she was his own*? I know I long for all of that.

All human beings have a desire to be known and loved, but no person can do those things perfectly. Even if we are blessed with wonderful parents, families, friends and spouses, for a lot of us, there is a hidden corner of aching emptiness in our hearts — a space that longs to be filled. Many Christians believe God put that need in our hearts, so we will seek him. As our Creator, he knows and loves us completely. We view ourselves as children of a heavenly Father, not as merely worshippers at the feet of a god who is too big and too high for us to see face to face. Although he is awe inspiring and powerful, we believe God is also personal.

We are wrapping up our 7 Big Questions series with a final question that we’ve just answered. “Can I Know God Personally?” is the question and the Christian response is emphatically, “Yes!” It is what God intended at creation, what sin ruined, what Jesus came and died for and what will be fully realized in eternity. But before you close this week’s lesson and say, “Well, that was a short one,” let’s think about the people who might be asking this question. There are a variety of reasons why one would wonder about the possibility of knowing God. Also, as is sometimes the case with yes or no questions, there are other questions lurking right behind this one. People are wondering, “How can I find God?” and “What would it mean to know God personally? How would my life change?”

This week we’re going to think about why people seek a personal God, how we can find him and what it means to know God personally.

Week 7 | Can I Know God Personally?

A lot of people believe there is a God and many of them consider themselves spiritual. But not all believe God is really knowable. When they hear Christian hymns about Jesus walking with people in gardens, it sounds like a child’s fairytale. For these skeptics, the idea of personal God is hard to accept, perhaps because it simply sounds too good to be true. So they ask, “Can I ***know*** God personally?”

Another group of people approach this question already having a familiarity with Christianity or another religion. Maybe they’re family was religious, so if you quizzed them on their faith, they would know the right answers. But they’re wearing their religion like someone else’s clothes; it just doesn’t seem to fit right, so they always feel like they’re playing dress up. For them, religion is something you do, not part of who you are. God is distant and remote, and if they have a sense of him at all, he is someone you try desperately to please, but can’t know if you’re succeeding. To them, God is more like a drill sergeant who only cares that you submit, conform and obey. These people ask, “Can I know God, ***personally***?”

The third group are those weighed down by guilt and regret. They may feel like their lives are in shambles and they are desperate for help. Perhaps they are like the prodigal son in the Bible. Having made costly mistakes and squandered opportunities, they are now limping home — tattered, torn and beaten down. Sometimes these are people who were actually the victims of someone else’s sin, but now carry shame that is not theirs to bear, or those with sensitive consciences who load themselves up with unwarranted guilt. Regardless, these people cannot imagine that God would want anything to do with them. They wonder, “Can ***I*** know God personally?”

**Day 1**

**Before You Begin**

Thank God today for his love. Consider how deep his love and desire for personal relationship with us must be that he would *give his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life*. (John 3:16)

**Read the Word**

Whatever the reason for asking if God is knowable in a personal way, the Bible has great news. Not only is God knowable, but his attention and love are available to anyone. Take a look at how Paul explains God’s actions toward us.

[Ephesians 2:4–10](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Eph2.4)

**4**But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **5**made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. **6**And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, **7**in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. **8**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9**not by works, so that no one can boast. **10**For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Grace is a word that is difficult to grasp. The closest synonym we have in English is probably “kindness.” But think about how you hear the word, “kind.” Because of the way we use it today, it connotes a bland benevolence that is too understated for God. God lavishes us with such a generous, torrential outpouring of grace, it’s like standing under a waterfall after a long, dry, thirsty hike. For all those dusty miles, it’s exactly what you longed for, but at the same time, it almost feels like too much.

Read again the language Paul uses in verses 6–7. “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Can you imagine? Does it seem too good to be true? God’s grace to us is almost unfathomable in its magnitude because it is so complete and absolutely undeserved.

Though very different, the types of people I described above are all struggling with the same fundamental problem — they do not firmly grasp God’s grace. We instinctively know that God is too big and glorious for us to reach. And we’re right. As Paul says, we were dead in our transgressions (verse 5).

Elsewhere in Ephesians, Paul will tell his readers that they were “alienated from the life of God” (4:18). Paul is not speaking merely metaphorically. The Bible teaches that the result of humanity’s self-centered rebellion is spiritual death. The dead can’t move toward God, but God can raise the dead. In Christ we experience his resurrection, first spiritually and one day physically.

There is nothing we can do to warrant God’s acceptance and nothing we can do to earn his forgiveness. Our relationship with God is an act of grace that we must welcome. Until we understand, accept and trust in that grace, we cannot know God personally.

**Ask Yourself**

Consider these questions and the implications your responses have on your beliefs:

* If you are a Christian, reflect on how you felt when you came to know God personally. If you are still skeptical, have you ever wondered if you could know God personally?
* How do I understand God’s grace? Are there times when it feels too good to be true?
* Have I ever felt like God was too far away for me to reach or something was in the way keeping me from knowing him personally? If so, what was it? How could I overcome it?

**Ask God**

Spend time in conversation with God and prepare your heart to listen. Follow these prompts to discuss today’s passage with him:

* Can you give me a greater understanding of your grace?
* Since my works don’t save me, what kind of “good works” have you prepared for me to do?
* Today’s passage has a lot of superlatives – great love, rich in mercy, incomparable riches of grace. Do you really love me *that* much?

**Ask a Friend**

Pray for an opportunity to start a meaningful conversation on this topic today:

* What is the best gift you remember receiving? Who was it from? What made it so special?
* What gift did you most enjoy giving to someone else? Why did it feel so special?
* I was reading in the Bible about how God’s grace is like incomparable riches. Why do you think we’re so special to God?

**Day 2**

The Bible is full of people who were interrupted by God. Abraham and Sarah were told to pick up and move to a place God would show them. David was brought in from the field where he was looking after the sheep to be told he would be king. Daniel was snatched up by the Babylonians, taken captive but then used by God to shape an empire. Peter, James and John expected to spend their lives as fisherman, but were interrupted by an invitation from Jesus to come and follow him.

This week we’re answering the question, “Can I know God personally?” and today we’re going to consider that we can find God by responding to his call. We’re going to look at how God interrupted Moses with a strange sight and used it to turn a fugitive into the leader of God’s people. Finding God, and knowing him personally means a disruption in the way we think, feel, believe and act.

**Before You Begin**

# Engage with God today with a desire to draw near to him. As James 4:8 tells us…

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

**Read the Word**

In this famous passage from Exodus, Moses is about to meet God. Moses was a Hebrew, but he’d been raised in the house of Pharaoh. After being forced to flee because he murdered an Egyptian, Moses was living out in the dessert with the Midianites. He’d gotten married, had a son and probably thought his future was set. He didn’t suspect that God was about to change everything.

[Exodus 3:1–5](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Ex3.1)

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2**There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. **3**So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

**4**When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

**5**“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” **6**Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

While taking care of his Father in Law’s sheep, Moses catches sight of something. A bush is on fire, which was probably not an unfamiliar sight in the dry, dusty region, but this one is unusual because it is not burning up. “So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight” (verse 3), or as the NET Bible translates it, “I will turn aside to see.” In other words, Moses takes a detour.

Moses could have seen the flames out of the corner of his eye, and said, “well, that’s interesting,” but kept going on his way. He didn’t know God was going to speak through the bush. Moses could have decided that he was too busy to be distracted by this weird phenomenon, after all, there were all those sheep to deal with. “Maybe I’ll come back later without the sheep and check it out” he could have concluded. But if he had done so, he would have stayed a desert dwelling shepherd who’d once gotten away with murder, and he wouldn’t have become the Moses we know of today.[[1]](#footnote-1) Because Moses was willing to take that detour, he discovered the whole other life God had in store for him.

People can have burning bush encounters in their own lives. There are all kinds of things that can disrupt our usual way of thinking and living.[[2]](#footnote-2) It can be circumstances — that moment when you realize you are not as strong, independent and capable as you thought. When life doesn’t go the way we expected, God can use those problems to get our attention. It can be a new Christian friend or co-worker who is living out a faith many people dismiss. Suddenly the religion you thought you knew is nothing like you thought. Even those who have spent their lives in church can sometimes be led to the realization that they have just been going through the motions with God.

A burning bush can be anything that invites you to know God personally. When challenges to our patterns of thought and behavior come, God might be calling us from within a burning bush.

When God saw that Moses was coming to investigate, he calls his name, and Moses replied, “Here I am.” Moses demonstrates a willingness to answer the call of God. When God starts to reveal himself to someone personally, they should not only accept the interruption, turn aside and investigate, but should also respond.

We live in a culture that is comfortable with ambiguity and skeptical of absolute truth. We recognize that there are many points of view and culturally shaped ways of seeing the world and are cautious about taking a firm stand. While that may make us more accepting and tolerant of each other, this caution can also make us reluctant to trust in the evidence that is right in front of us. There is a time for tough questions, but there is also a time to stop circling and land the plane. When God calls, we need to respond, “here I am.”

When Moses responds to God’s call, he was told to stop and remove his sandals because he was “standing on holy ground.” Why was he asked to remove his shoes? There could be a couple of reasons. “First, it may be the sign of acceptance of a servant’s position, for a slave usually went barefoot (Luke 15:22). Secondly, it may be a relic of very early days when men laid aside all covering and pretense to approach their god.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Regardless, Moses needed to know with whom he was speaking. The ground surrounding the bush was holy because God was present.

Many scholars believe that the Angel of the Lord, who is often mentioned in the Old Testament, is the pre-incarnate Christ. When we come to God, we can approach him confidently through Jesus Christ “so that we may receive mercy and find grace.” (Hebrews 4:16). Jesus is able to sympathize with our weakness because he was tempted as we are, but without sin (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus intercedes for us because he is the only mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). He is our personal God.

Moses met God in that burning bush and his life was never the same. God redeemed his past and then used him to lead his people out of slavery. God was his constant companion and spoke to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend (Exodus 33:11). You and I may not be remembered in thousands of years for our participation in the mighty acts of God, but we can be part of what God is doing to bring peace, justice and hope to people right here, right now. God can redeem our pasts and use us to tell people that because of Jesus, they can be free from slavery to sin. Through all that, Jesus will be our constant companion.

If you’re looking to find God, talk to him, read his Word and talk to some Christians who can tell you how they found God.

**Ask Yourself**

Consider these questions and the implications your responses have on your beliefs:

* How well do I handle interruptions in my day? What’s my usual reaction?
* Am I so caught up in my daily routine that I could miss God interrupting me? How could I incorporate God into my routine?
* Have I ever experienced a “burning bush” moment? What was it like?

**Ask God**

Spend time in conversation with God and prepare your heart to listen. Follow these prompts to discuss today’s passage with him:

* How are you trying to get my attention? How am I responding?
* How do I need to change my thinking or behavior to become more aware of you?
* Do I give you the reverence you deserve when I come into your presence? If not, how can I “remove my shoes” to recognize your holiness?

**Ask a Friend**

Pray for an opportunity to start a meaningful conversation on this topic today:

* How do you usually handle interruptions when you’re trying to get something done? How do you prioritize when to continue what you’re doing and when to allow yourself to get distracted?
* I was reading in the Bible about how God used a bush that looked like it was on fire but wasn’t really burning to get someone’s attention. What would God have to do to get your attention off what’s most important to you right now?

**Before You God**

The article, “[How can I find God](https://exploregod.com/articles/how-can-i-find-god)” is a great follow up to our discussion of Moses today. It talks about the important difference between finding religion and finding God.

**Day 3**

As we saw in Day 2, God is willing to be found if we’re willing to look. Once we put our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord, we become a child of God and our spiritual journey begins in earnest. The next question is, “What does it mean to know God personally?” How does it affect who we are and the way we live? Today and tomorrow, we will consider those questions.

**Before You Begin**

Celebrate with God. Right where you are sitting, look for three things God has provided for your joy today.

**Read the Word**

The same grace that saves us is the grace that empowers us to live the Christian life. John 15 is one of the most vivid pictures of the intimacy we share with Jesus. Jesus begins by illustrating this relationship with an extended metaphor in which he describes himself as the vine, and his followers as branches. It’s a beautiful picture of our connection and reliance on Jesus to give us life. We will only grow and flourish if we stay attached to the vine. “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing” Jesus says (John 15:5).

He elaborates on the idea of our dependence on him in the verses that follow. These are the ones we’re looking at today:

[John 15:8–11](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Jn15.8)

8“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.  9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Jesus tells us that when we bear fruit, we honor God (verse 8). When our lives show evidence of God’s presence, people will recognize the love and power of God and be drawn to him. It matters that Christians live what they believe. We won’t do it perfectly, of course, but an honest admission that we are reliant on God’s grace and mercy is a central tenant of the Christian faith. So humble contrition and repentance will also be part of our lifestyle as Christ-followers. The good news is that even in our failures it is possible, by God’s grace, to point people to Jesus.

Look again at verse 9. Jesus sets up a mind-blowing comparison in this verse that he will use all the way through verse 16. Do you see what it is? He is comparing the intimacy between Jesus and the believer to that between God the Father and Jesus the Son.

A couple of time in this series we’ve considered the relationship shared between the members of the trinity. If God had always existed in solitary isolation, he could not be described as “love” (1 John 4:8). Love requires an object. But because God is three Persons, he has given and received a never ending supply of love for all eternity. Father, Son and Spirit chose to share this love with humanity and verse 9 is implying that Jesus loves us with the same love with which the Father loves him. That is an astounding truth. “‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,’ prompts us to reflect and marvel at the thought thatbelievers enjoy something of the intimacy with Jesus that Jesus enjoys with the Father.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

As we’ve seen, obedience brings glory to God, but there is another reason why obedience is so important. It is the means by which we remain in Jesus’ love. “But wait a minute,” you might be thinking, “on Day 1 we saw that salvation is by grace alone. Now obedience seems to be a condition.” Jesus statement must be taken in light of the entire gospel message which is predicated on the idea that we contribute nothing to our own salvation. Nevertheless, there are passages in Scripture that warn of those whose commitment to Christ is purely superficial (1 John 2:19, 2 John 9, Mark 4). Of course this is not a distinction we are able to make from the outside. We cannot diagnose another’s spiritual condition, but God knows what’s in a person’s heart.

What about our own hearts? How can we know if we’re “remaining in” Jesus’ love or not? Consider this: wouldn’t it make sense that people who are intimately connected to Jesus and sustained by his love would have a desire to follow and obey God? The Spirit who brings about the new birth (see John 3) brings about changes in the thoughts and desires of every child of God. In the same way the Spirit regenerates a person from spiritual death to life, he will empower them to follow the will of God.

How do we find God’s will? A quick read through the Gospels will reveal many expectations that Christ has for his followers, so it is a great place to start. These commands are convicting and challenging, but they are good and wise, and thankfully, we aren’t trying to live them in our own strength. We are the branches, remember? The power, strength and wisdom to live for God flows from the vine.

We are not branches thrown on the wood pile and then asked to grow in Christlikeness. Because we are grafted into the love of Christ, we depend on him for life and vitality. As we embrace the love of Christ and allow it to become the defining force in our lives, we must pursue the things of God and shed attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with our new identity.

As Paul says in Philippians 2:13, we “work out” our own salvation just as God is “working in us to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Obedience takes time, hard work and sometimes fierce struggle. Sometimes the desire to obey will not be there and we have to obey anyway, but ultimately, in the long term, the love of Christ will compel it. As we grow in faith, we will recognize the goodness of God’s commands and by the power of the Spirit, we will fight to obey them.

It is only in the pursuit of obedience that a Christian can flourish. Author and scholar D.A. Carson explains it this way:

No one is more miserable than the Christian who for a time hedges in his obedience. He does not love sin enough to enjoy its pleasures, and he does not love Christ enough to relish holiness…He does not feel at home any longer in the world, but the memory of his past associations and the tantalizing lyrics of his old music prevent him from singing with the saints.[[5]](#footnote-5)

It is only when we embrace a life of obedience that we can experience Christ’s joy. This is Jesus’ next point, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (verse 11).

There is a stereotype of Christians that it is past time to disprove. Living for Jesus is not a dreary, dour or humorless existence; it is a life of tremendous joy. Think of a dolphin leaping out of the water or a horse galloping across a field. You can sense their joy because these animals are doing what they were created to do. Likewise, people created in the image of God and filled with his love will flourish when they live according to his design.

There can be joy in struggle. Obeying Christ’s commands especially in our culture is not easy. But our joy will be complete when we remain in Christ’s love and obey his will for our lives. This is what it means to know God.

**Ask Yourself**

Consider these questions and the implications your responses have on your beliefs:

* Where has God “planted” me? How did he “prepare the soil” and nurture me to grow?
* When have I experienced “growth pains”? What joy did I discover on the other side?
* As a Christian, in what areas have I found obedience a struggle? How could deepening my faith help?

**Ask God**

Spend time in conversation with God and prepare your heart to listen. Follow these prompts to discuss today’s passage with him:

* What are you trying to “prune” so I can be more productive?
* How have I experienced your love? How are others experiencing your love through me?
* Am I depending on you for the power, strength, and wisdom I need to live for you? If not, what or who am I looking to for that?

**Ask a Friend**

Pray for an opportunity to start a meaningful conversation on this topic today:

* Do you ever do any gardening? What’s your first impression when you see a garden? What does that tell you about the gardener?
* I was reading in the Bible that God is like a gardener who knows what each of us needs and doesn’t need. What do you think God would want you to have more of in your life? What do you think he might try to “prune”?

**Before You Go**

Want to know more about what it means to love God? The article, “[How to Love God](http://exploregod.com/how-to-love-god)” gives some great insight.

**Day 4**

Yesterday we talked about the importance of obedience to the Christian life. But contrary to the way many people, both inside and outside the church view Christianity, it is not a faith grounded in rule keeping. It is not obedience that allows us to know God personally. As we saw yesterday, it is out of his love for us that we are able to love, honor and obey him in return. As the old hymn goes, “Oh, how I love Jesus, because he first loved me.”

**Before You Begin**

Thank God for the closest friends in your life. Take time to pray over each of them by name.

**Read the Word**

Today we are going to continue looking at John 15 and consider another implication of knowing God personally: The love that he shares with us is to be shared with each other.

[John 15:12–15](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Jn15.12)

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Just as the love Christ has for his followers parallels the love the Father has for the Son, the love we have for each other imitates the love Christ has for us. In verse 10, Jesus has just stressed the importance of obeying his commands. Now he is giving us one, universal command that sums up so much of what the Bible is about. Love others as you love yourself.

Two chapters earlier, in John 13:35, John records these words of Jesus to his disciples:“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Why is this a “new” command? Carson proposes several ways it is new. There is a new standard for loving one another, because we are to love our fellow Christians in the way Jesus has loved us — sacrificially and unconditionally. It is new in the same way that God’s mercies are new every morning — the love of Christ and others comes to us in our need. “But above all it is new in that love is declared by Jesus to be the distinguishing mark of Christians in this new age, the identifying characteristic of true believers before a watching world.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Jesus tells the disciples that they will be known by their love. Unfortunately, Christians, particularly in highly individualistic cultures like ours, have been known to bask in their relationship with God and neglect the importance of shared intimacy with other believers. Anyone who longs for intimacy with God must follow the command to love others. Jesus makes sure we understand that to know God personally is to lay down our selfish ways and be willing to go to any lengths for another, even if that means giving our own life.

Jesus says, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (verse 13). Jesus himself set the standard for this level of sacrifice when, just hours after making this statement, he would be arrested, falsely accused and executed so humanity could be reconciled to God. Jesus says we are his friends if we do what he commands.

Obviously, we don’t define friendship the same way Jesus does. But we do need to consider what it means for us to both love our brothers and sisters in Christ and call them “friends.” In our culture, friends are people that you choose because you have something in common with them, or because they like you and you like them. That’s a much narrower definition of friendship than Jesus suggests. Think about the “friends” Jesus was addressing when he spoke these words — the often arrogant, cowardly, immature and overly-competitive disciples. Jesus did not pick the twelve based on a personality profile that indicated they’d be a fun group of traveling companions. These were people he chose by grace and on whom he would build his church. How often are we difficult and hard to love? Yet Jesus loves us and asks us, in spite of our shortcomings, to love each other.

In all its beautiful, messy diversity, the body of Christ consists of people who at first glance share very little in common, but are bound by the most important thing, their relationship to Christ. The regard we have for our fellow Christians transcends the superficiality of many human relationships because our love overflows from Christ’s love. To know God personally is to have a wonderfully diverse family that may not love you perfectly but will love you eternally.

To be a friend to Jesus is to obey his commandments. But unlike a servant, we are not carrying out directions blindly. “The distinction Jesus draws between a servant and a friend is not the distinction between obeying and not obeying, but the distinction between not understanding and understanding.”[[7]](#footnote-7) We are privileged to know what God is accomplishing in our world.

This leads us to a final observation about what it means to know God personally. Knowing God means having a purpose in this world. To live solely for oneself is to live an ultimately empty life. Most of us seem to know this instinctually. It’s why we get involved with various causes that are trying to make the world a better place. As Christians, we get to do this under the power and guidance of the Spirit and make a difference in people’s lives that not only has value in this life, but in eternity.

Christians should lead the charge against injustice, oppression, violence and poverty. In many places they do. When we bring the gospel along with practical help, we are showing the world what the kingdom of God is all about.

**Ask Yourself**

Consider these questions and the implications your responses have on your beliefs:

* How do I view the difference between a servant and a friend from today’s passage? What impact does that have on my personal relationship with God?
* What does it mean to me to be part of the church – a family of believers? How is it challenging for me? How is it rewarding?
* How am I sharing the love I’ve experienced from God with others?

**Ask God**

Spend time in conversation with God and prepare your heart to listen. Follow these prompts to discuss today’s passage and focus with him:

* What do you need me to know today about how much you love me?
* What do you need me to know today about how I should love others?

**Ask a Friend**

Pray for an opportunity to start a meaningful conversation on this topic today:

* Do you remember playing follow the leader with your friends? Did it ever feel like the leader was trying to make it harder to follow so people would mess up?
* Who has been the best role model or mentor in your life? What made you want to follow in their footsteps? What did you appreciate most about them leading you?
* I was reading in the Bible that Jesus commanded his followers to love others just like he loved them. When have you seen Christians making sacrifices in their own lives to love others?

**Day 5**

To know God personally is to be intimately connected to Jesus through the Spirit, to joyfully trust in God’s guidance and obey him, to have an eternal family bound by love and to have an eternal purpose doing the Father’s work. Which brings us full circle to where we began our 7 Big Questions series with the question, “Does life have a purpose?”

If you’ve been on this journey with us as a Christian, we hope it has strengthened your faith and given you confidence to share what you believe and why. If you’ve been with us as a skeptic, we hope we have represented Jesus Christ well. We truly believe he is the most amazing person in the world — worth living and dying for. We’re praying that the cumulative effect of all these weeks will be that you see that too.

You probably still have some questions, and that’s OK. A lot of us do too, and many of us have been Christians a long time. Comedian Michael Jr. shares his perspective, as only he can, on his journey with questions about God. Check out his video [Exploring the Bible](https://www.exploregod.com/videos/exploring-the-bible) (5:33) for a light-hearted look at what can happen when you give God a chance to work in your life.

**Before You Begin**

Reflect on the past 7 weeks. Where did I find greater purpose in my life? What have I learned about my belief in God and Jesus and the Bible? How has God drawn me closer to him so I can know him more personally?

**Read the Word**

John 17:3

*3Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God,* *and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

“I’m scared.” I was sitting with a friend at a retreat during a time of worship and prayer. Because of some bad experiences with a church, she had been living apart from God for her entire adult life, but he was calling her back to him. It had been amazing to watch. She knew in her heart that God was asking her to commit to follow him no matter what, and she was having a moment of panic.

“I just don’t know what he’s going to ask me to do. What if he calls me to go be a missionary in Africa?” Now, I don’t know why American Christians often make this weird assumption that every Christian is going to be called to Africa, and yet, I understood where she was coming from. My friend was a city girl through and through. The only rustic, outdoor environment she craved was one that could be admired through a window, in a resort. But it wasn’t really Africa that she feared. It was putting her faith in someone other than herself. It was admitting that she wasn’t in control, and really never had been. It was knowing that there is a cost to following Jesus. But what she was also beginning to realize is that knowing God is worth it all.

It’s hard when you’re standing at the threshold of faith to know what it will be like to completely surrender your life to Jesus. Right as you start to step through, there is often a reflex to grab the door frames with both hands and stop to focus on what you think you will have to give up. But Jesus beckons, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus knows that the things we cling to tightly are anchors weighing us down. They are sins that entangle and enslave. They are idols that demand blood sacrifice. He wants to set us free. We don’t need to fear when Jesus tells us to pick up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24), because he’s not going to make us carry it alone. In fact, he will do all the heavy lifting, because he is “gentle and humble in heart” and his “burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). Following Jesus means never being alone (Matthew 28:20).

I am so glad that my friend didn’t let her fear control her. She committed her life to Jesus and the change in her was nothing short of dramatic. People couldn’t help but notice how different she was. She was much more joyful, patient, kind and forgiving. God was making good on his promise to make her more like his Son (2 Corinthians 3:18).

And guess what? A few years later she went to Guatemala on a short-term mission trip. She hiked through the jungle and helped build a home for orphans. A couple of years after that she went on another mission trip. To Rwanda. Which, as you know, is in Africa.

We are all on our own unique faith journeys. God is so patient, merciful and full of grace that he will lead us into a deeper relationship with him with every step we take, no matter how small or tentative. As another old hymn says, “Trust and obey. There is no other way to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.”

**Ask Yourself**

Consider these questions and the implications your responses have on your beliefs:

* What does it mean for me to know God personally? Is it possible? Do I want to?
* What do I find “scary” about being in a personal relationship with *the only true God*?
* What other questions do I have about having a personal relationship with God? Who might be able to help me find answers? What resources would be helpful?

**Ask God**

Spend time in conversation with God and prepare your heart to listen. If you’ve found our answers to the 7 Big Questions helpful in understanding God’s love for you, follow these prompts to discuss your relationship with him:

* I acknowledge I don’t always live the way your Word describes I should. I know that causes separation between us. I’m sorry. Will you forgive me?
* I understand that Jesus’ suffering for my sin is the only way I can be in relationship with you. I want to change the way I live and trust you to guide me. Will you show me grace and mercy so I can know you personally?
* What are the next steps you have for me?

**Ask a Friend**

Pray for an opportunity to start a meaningful conversation on this topic today:

* What famous person would you most want to be your best friend? What about that person makes them “best friend” material? What would make that relationship a little intimidating?
* What’s the most daring thing you’ve done even though it was really scary at the time? How did you feel afterwards?
* I’ve been exploring the 7 Big Questions people ask about God. Can I tell you about what I learned?

**Additional Resources**

The following books may be a good resource for yourself or to discuss with a friend:

* Jones, Barry. *Dwell* Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2014.
* Keller, Timothy. *The Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything.* Grand Rapids, MI, 2010.
* Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973.
* Patton, C. Michael. *Now That I’m a Christian: What It Means to Follow Jesus.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

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*If you want deeper study, the links for each set of verses will direct you to the notes found in the* [*Faithlife Study Bible*](https://faithlife.com/products/faithlife-study-bible/app)*, a free web app in your browser or mobile app available for iOS, Android, or Kindle Fire.*

1. Barbara Brown Taylor. An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith. (New York: HarperCollins, 2009) p.24. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tim Keller “Finding God” (Sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, November 3, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R. Alan Cole, Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 2, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 71–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. D. A. Carson, The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14–17 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Carson, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. D. A. Carson 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Carson, 105–106. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)