



Journey

TO THE HEART

“AND YE SHALL SEEK ME, AND FIND ME, WHEN YE
SHALL SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.”

JEREMIAH 29:13

It's a Relationship

*A relationship with God that is real,
not just religious*

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
and they follow me.”*

—JOHN 10:27

KNOWING GOD

We've probably all heard the phrase: "Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship." This statement is true, but it leaves us with some questions, like: "What does it mean to have a relationship with God? Is it even possible to know God?"

Before we begin pursuing a relationship with the Lord, we have to believe the following truth: **God can be known by us.** Wait! Don't simply gloss over that sentence. Stop and let it sink in. It is possible for us to know God. This truth is so basic, yet often we don't actually believe deep down inside that we can intimately know God. Therefore, we don't pursue a relationship with Him. John 17:3 says: "And this is life eternal, **that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.**" We need to realize that God can be known by us! (This verse also tells us what eternal life is: knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ!) When God opens our eyes through His Word to see that we can know Him, it encourages us greatly to pursue that relationship with Him (see Hebrews 11:6).

It is important for us to see that God initiated our relationship with Him, not the other way around. He loved us before we loved Him. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The essence of true love is not that we loved God, or that we are great people. True love is God loving us. God saved us when we were His enemies, according to Romans 5:10: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." God loves us with a great love (see Ephesians 2:4), and the whole Christian life is simply a response to the love of God.

Love is not merely something God does; love is who He is. 1 John 4:16 explains, "And we have **known** and **believed** the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Often we struggle to receive God's unconditional love for us. There are a few reasons for this struggle. One reason is that we arrogantly believe that we can earn His love. As long as we are still trying to earn His love, we are not fully receiving it, because it is already ours to receive as a gift. We can't simultaneously work for something and receive it as a gift.

Another reason we struggle to receive God's love is because human love is never as unconditional and deep as God's love. We may have never seen love like His before, and we probably are not accustomed to love like that. Before we can really cultivate an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must humble ourselves before Him and receive His boundless love for us. 1 John 4:19 reads: "We love him, **because he first loved us.**" We need to take time to meditate on the truth that God loves us.

Yet another reason we struggle to receive the love of God is because we love the world. 1 John 2:15b reads "...If any man love the world, **the love of the Father is not in him.**" God desires to fill us so full of His love that there is no room to contain anything else. He wants to replace our love for the world with His love. As we receive the measureless love of God for us we will find a love for God springing up in our hearts and our love for the world dissipating.

The phrase "receiving God's love" can sound ambiguous, and you may be wondering, "How do I receive God's love?" God's answer to that question is found in John 15:10: "If ye keep my

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WHAT MAKES A GOOD RELATIONSHIP?

It is impossible to have an actual relationship with another person without spending time with them. Imagine that a young man has just become engaged and is excited about his fiancé. Imagine that he tells her that she is important to him, that she is his first priority in life, and he loves her very much. Then, after saying all that, he only spends about five minutes with her in an average day, and maybe an hour on Sunday, while he spends the rest of his time working and pursuing his hobbies.

What would you conclude about this young man? Regardless of what he might say about loving his fiancé, by observing the way he spends his time, we would conclude that this young man only loves himself, and not his fiancé. What we spend our time

on reveals the affections of our heart. This same principle holds true in our relationship with the Lord. If we only give the Lord five minutes of our day, and spend the rest of our time consumed with our own thoughts, goals and aspirations, we are revealing where our affections really are. We are exposing the fact that the one we love is actually ourselves.

The greatest thermometer of our love is how we spend our time. Every good relationship in your life took time to cultivate. We only know people as we spend time with them. As we turn from the busy things of life each day and spend unhurried time with the Lord, we are getting to know Him intimately and personally. As we spend this time with the Lord, we give Him the opportunity to share His heart with us and for us to do the same with Him.

Trust

Trust is a critical part of relationships. You will not develop a deep relationship with someone you don't trust. Scripture says in Proverbs 3:5: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."

One reason that we struggle to trust the Lord is because we trust in ourselves instead of in Him. Jeremiah 17:5 says: "Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man **that trusteth in man**, and maketh flesh his arm, **and whose heart departeth from the LORD.**" When we put our trust in ourselves instead of God, we are trusting in man and our hearts are departing from the Lord. This severely damages our relationship with the Lord. Psalm 118:8 says: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."

Since trusting God is key to our relationship with Him, how do we trust the Lord more? And where does that trust come from? We find the answer in Proverbs 3:6,

the verse immediately following the admonition to trust in the Lord with all our hearts. Verse six reads: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." The Hebrew word translated "acknowledge" in this verse is *yada*. This word does not mean "acknowledge" in the way we generally use the word—waving and saying hello to someone as we hurry past them. This word actually describes the most intimate form of experiential knowing. God desires that we would intimately know Him in all our ways.

When we first meet someone, we don't naturally trust them very much. As we get to know them more, they will prove themselves to be either trustworthy or untrustworthy. The more we know them and what they are like, we will naturally determine whether or not we can trust them more than we did initially. Trusting another person does not happen by you gritting your teeth and deciding to trust them more; trust springs up spontaneously as you get to know another person and they prove themselves trustworthy. It is the same way in our relationship with the Lord. Trust in the Lord does not come by simply "trying hard to trust Him." Instead, trust springs up out of our experiences with the Lord and His trustworthiness. As we spend time in His Word getting to know Him, He shows himself faithful, and the more He shows Himself faithful, the more our trust for Him will increase! Knowing Him leads to trusting Him.

Communication

Communication is key to good relationships, and it is important in our relationship with the Lord. However, we must remember that communication with the Lord, as in any other relationship, is two-sided. We communicate with God, and He also communicates with us.

A campfire with a large log and flames against a sunset background. The text is overlaid on the image.

Prideful Heart **vs.** Humble Heart

“Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.”

—PROVERBS 16:5

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME!

DO I CONSIDER MYSELF A PRIDEFUL PERSON?

- ☐ Not really.
- ☐ Somewhat.
- ☐ Definitely.

Pride is something most people recognize as wrong, or at least as something that isn't very pleasant to deal with. Yet, it still runs rampant all around us, including within our churches and Christian families. If we take a look at pride in-depth, we will see that it takes on many more shapes and forms than we usually picture. The word *pride* in Scripture means "haughtiness, arrogance" or "the character of one who with a swollen estimate of his own powers or merits, looks down on others and even treats them with insolence and contempt."¹

Another meaning of *pride* is "Showing one's self above others, overtopping, conspicuous above others, pre-eminent."² This is interesting, because in Colossians 1:18, we're told that Christ is to have the preeminence in all things which literally means "to be the first, hold the first place."³ In essence, pride is just putting me first. It can be putting my wants first, my opinions first, my dreams, my pleasures, or

my goals first. It can be giving myself first place in my thoughts. Always thinking about me: my life, my future, my fears, my needs, my skills, my, my, my!

Pride is lifting ourselves above Christ and others in our thoughts, actions, attitudes, and priorities.

It may be a constant focus on how great we are or a constant focus on how much better we should be, but either way it's a constant focus on me. That is pride.

HOW MUCH DO I THINK ABOUT MYSELF COMPARED TO TIME SPENT THINKING ABOUT GOD AND OTHERS?

As we look into Scripture, we will see just how damaging pride is and how much God hates it. All sin is a serious thing because it draws us away from Christ and the life that He offers us, and pride is no exception. In fact, it scores a top spot in the Proverbs 6 list of sins that God hates.

"These six things does the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: A proud look . . .

a heart that devises wicked imaginations . . . and he that sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Scripture gives so many examples of the awful consequences of pride. Pride caused Lucifer, Son of the Morning, to fall from his exalted position in heaven and become Satan with his legions of demons. (See Isaiah 14:12–15.)

Pride motivated Adam and Eve to break fellowship with God and lose their perfect home in the Garden of Eden. Pride was the driving force of King Nebuchadnezzar when he declared, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built. . . by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30), and was immediately driven from his throne to live like an ox. Pride also caused the downfall of King Herod when he accepted the worship of the people and was struck down and eaten by worms.

These are disastrous, and even gruesome examples of how incredibly destructive the sin of pride is. Pride is at the root of every conflict in the world and every broken relationship in life because “Only by pride comes contention” (Proverbs 13:10a). Though we often take pride lightly, God considers it very serious.

WHEN WAS A TIME THAT MY PRIDE LED TO A CONFLICT?

GOD’S WORD ON PRIDE

Pride sees no room for God

The proud are blinded by their pride and think that they have no need for God or that they deserve His favor because of what they’ve done. In contrast, the humble recognize their utter dependence on God, and He delights to meet their needs.

“LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble: You will prepare their heart, You will cause Your ear to hear” (Psalm 10:17).

Pride declares “me” to be the king

Jesus demonstrated humility in everything He did on earth, even though He was the rightful King. A lot of times, though, we would rather be in charge than submit to God’s authority. This aspect of a prideful heart is “building life around myself and refusing to recognize God as God.”

When we accept pride, we have become the most important person in our lives. We think about what we want to do and what makes us look good. But who should be controlling our decisions and “calling the shots”? Jesus not only created us, but He redeemed us and deserves the place of King in every area of life. We can’t be serving Jesus and serving ourselves. There’s only room for one king in our lives.

Christ leaves no room for pride and selfishness in His followers. “Then said Jesus to His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24).

Pride invites God's opposition and brings destruction

"Pride goes before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). "When pride comes, then comes shame: but with the lowly is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2).

"But He gives more grace. Wherefore He says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6).

God warned Nebuchadnezzar in a dream of the destruction that was ahead, but he refused to humble himself. He was driven from his palace, lived in the wilderness, and ate grass like an ox. After seven years, God restored him, and he told of God's greatness and His ability to humble everyone who exalts themselves: "those that walk in pride He [God] is able to abase [humble]" (Daniel 4:37b).


It's not just in the past that God has humbled people. One day in the future, there is a moment coming in which God will bring low everyone who is proud. "For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Isaiah 2:12).

Pride is self-focused

"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts" (Psalm 10:4). Prideful people don't acknowledge God in everything. They're too busy thinking of themselves.

Oftentimes, we think pride is mainly exalting ourselves, but it's much more than that! Pride is a self-focused attitude. Prideful people think about themselves rather than God and others. For example, you may have thoughts such as, "I'm so much better than she is," and "I can do that way better than he can." Or, you might think things like, "I can't believe I messed up again. I'm such a stupid person. I probably won't ever get anything right!"

In either case, whether you are focused on your ability or inability, you are still focused on yourself. **Pride is ultimately making your life about you.** Sometimes we think that as long as we're not saying we're better than others, then we aren't prideful. But if you're putting yourself down all the time and constantly talking about how awful you are, the focus is still on you, and that is also a form of pride.



"True humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less."

—C.S. LEWIS