

Look

What does the Bible say about your relationship with God?

Everyone has some kind of relationship with God. Some deny his existence; others feel he is real, but very far away. Some try to find him inside themselves, others seek to know God through religious teaching or tradition.

But in every case their perceptions of God, their belief or unbelief puts them in some kind of relationship with God.

What does your relationship with God look like? How would you define it today?

Some relationships, like your relationship with the sales lady at your local grocery store, don't have much impact on your life. Others, like your relationship with your parents, or spouse, are hugely significant.

Your relationship with God is one of the most significant. What you believe about him has a profound impact on every area of your life.

The Bible is an amazing source of information about God. For thousands of years people have found answers to the basic questions of life in its pages.

Did you know that your relationship with God is described there? This study is an invitation to look closer at what it says.

To do that you will need to look at four things:

- Look at yourself
- Look at your biggest problem
- Look at God's solution
- Look at what you should do.

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Jeremiah 29:13

We might try to fill our God shaped vacuum
Through pleasure
Through friendships
Through accomplishments
By acquiring things
Through travel or new experiences
Through a girlfriend or boyfriend
Through our work

But the vacuum is just too large, and the thirst always returns.

- Have you ever had expectations that one of the things above was going to satisfy you, and then been disappointed? Describe what that feels like.
- How do you think most people deal with that disappointment?

In the next lesson we will find out what keeps us from a relationship with God.

"God, you have made us for yourself, and our souls are restless till they find their rest in you."
Augustine

A deeper look

Where did the Bible come from?

The Bible is actually not one book, but a collection of 66 books. It is divided up into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was written before Christ, the New Testament contains the life and teachings of Jesus, the history of the first Christians, and letters written to the early church.

Even though the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years, and by 40 different authors, it has a unified message and focus. That is because the writers were guided and inspired by God, as they recorded his revelation and wrote down his message.

The power of the Bible's message is demonstrated by the fact that it has been translated into more languages than any other book, and outsold every other book in existence. No other piece of ancient literature has such enduring popularity.

Another uniqueness of the Bible is the fulfilled prophecy that it contains. Just in the life of Jesus over 60 distinct prophecies were fulfilled - all recorded hundreds of years earlier in the Old Testament, and accurate even to very specific details.

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#1 - Look at Yourself

Are you here on earth just because your parents decided to have a baby, or does your existence have a greater design? Are you just the product of time and chance, or is there a purpose and destiny behind your life?

The gospel of John was written by a man who spent over three years personally traveling with and learning from Jesus. In his book he describes the life and teachings of this man who claimed to be the Son of God. The first chapter starts this way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made: without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light: he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:1-13

- Who was the Word?
- If it says he created all things, what does that mean about you?
- What do you think John meant when he said “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind”? In what ways do we need “light” and “life”?
- Why do you think John used the phrase “Children of God” to describe a relationship with God?

There are three key things you need to know about yourself.

1. You were created by God

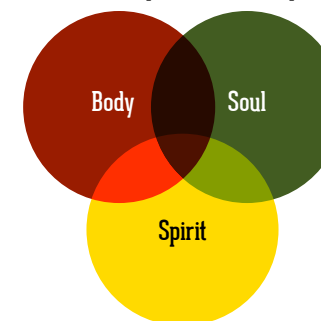
Through him all things were made: without him nothing was made that has been made. John 1:3

- How do you think it impacts your sense of value and purpose if you believe you were created by God?
- How will it impact you if you don't believe that?

2. You were created for God

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:11-12

The Bible says that each of us was created with a body, soul and spirit. Our bodies were designed to need things like food, water, exercise and sleep. Our souls are nourished by learning, by interactions with people, by opportunities for personal growth. Our Spirits were meant to be filled up in a relationship with God, as we communicate with him, experience his help and power, and follow his leading.



If you are doing this study with a believer, ask them to describe how they experience their relationship with God. What does it look like practically? Feel free to ask them any questions you have.

3. Without him you will be thirsty

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind John 1:4

- What do you think happens to your spirit when it doesn't have “life” and “light”?

The great French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal said “There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus”

Every person experiences this vacuum or “thirst” in different ways. Just like some people try to fill a vacuum of loneliness by eating, often we try to fill a spirit need by feeding something to our body or soul.

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A deeper look

Why are there so many religions?

There is no culture on earth without some form of religion. It seems to be a basic instinct of man to reach out for spiritual answers, for connection with the unseen world. This actually is one of the evidences for God's existence. Why would we have a universal longing, unless there existed something that could fulfill it?

Some religions are monotheistic, meaning that they worship one God. Others are polytheistic, believing in a multitude of Gods. Still others believe in some kind of impersonal "force" that people find inside of themselves or in nature.

What they all have in common, however, is that each promotes a system of religious adherences, or a particular set of good works that will give you favor in God's eyes, or gain you help from a supernatural power.

All have this in common - except Christianity. The Bible teaches that neither religion nor good works are enough, that we can't reach God by our own efforts or merit. The only way to God is through his effort and his merit - something we will learn about more in the next lesson.

#2 - Look at your biggest problem

All of us face problems, every day. Our car breaks down, or we get sick, we forget an important assignment for school, or have a misunderstanding with friends. Some problems are trivial, others very serious. But sometimes there are very serious problems that we are unaware of.

Let's say that today you decide to seek God. You want to know him personally, to have a relationship with him. Immediately you will run into a very serious problem.

You are a sinner.

Sin is falling short of God's standard. Have you ever:

- Lied
- Acted selfishly
- Taken something that wasn't yours
- Been prideful
- Been jealous
- Responded in anger
- Tried to hurt someone else
- Etc...

One of the problems with sin is that it often controls us even when we don't want it to. We would like to change our behavior, but it is more difficult than we think. As Jesus said...

"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family." John 8:34-35

Sometimes we compare ourselves to others and start feeling pretty good about ourselves. "I've never committed murder like that guy", we think, "and I'm a whole lot nicer than that girl". Actually, sin is such a strong poison that it doesn't take much. Even a very small amount of sin can have devastating consequences.

There are three key things that you need to know about your biggest problem.

1. Sin separates you from God

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

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"...your iniquities have separated you from your God: your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." Isaiah 59:2

- Why would sin cause separation from God? Does this seem fair to you?

God is love - he cares deeply about you. But he is also ...

Holy - separated from anything unclean or impure
Just - always fair and right in his judgment

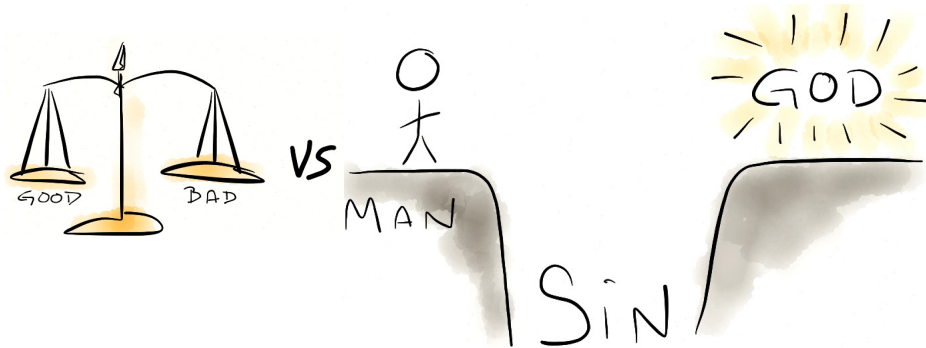
That means that he can't allow sin in his presence. It also means that he is required by his character to judge us for things we have done wrong. That is why sin has such devastating consequences.

"For the wages of sin is death ..." Romans 6:23

- What do you think this verse means?
- How do you think we experience this "death" or separation from God?

2. Good works are not enough

It seems logical to try and balance out things we have done wrong by doing other things right. We think if our good deeds outweigh the bad, then our account is even. Unfortunately, the standard for good works is 100% perfection - and all of us fall short.



"For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God..." Galatians 3:10-11.

- Why do you think the Bible says that one who relies on doing good works is under a curse?
- Does this mean that we shouldn't try to do what is right?

3. Religion is not enough

Back in the gospel of John a man named Nicodemus came to visit Jesus. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council, and also a Pharisee, which means he was very faithful at keeping the standards of the Jewish religion. Here is what John says about the conversation.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." 3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked, "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. John 3:1-6

- Why do you think he came to Jesus at night?
- What kind of attitude did he have toward Jesus?

It seems that Jesus should have commended him, but instead he warns him that he might miss the kingdom of God. What do you think he meant when he told him he needed to be "born again"?

Nicodemus thinks he is talking about physical birth [born of water], but Jesus is talking about spiritual birth [born of the Spirit]. How do you think being "born of the spirit" is different from being religious?

In the next lesson we will talk about God's solution to your biggest problem.

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A deeper look

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

The resurrection is one of the key teachings of Christianity. When Jesus rose from the grave the power of sin and death was conquered, and a way was opened for us to also experience life after death. But did it really happen? Could it be just a fabrication the disciples made up after Jesus was crucified?

There is strong evidence for the reliability of the resurrection story. An elite Roman guard was assigned to guard the tomb, yet three days later it was empty. A huge stone was rolled over the entrance, and the seal of the Roman emperor placed on it to prevent it from being disturbed. Still, on the third day, Jesus was gone.

In the next 40 days he appeared on multiple occasions, and was seen by a total of over 500 people. Seeing their master alive turned his followers from a group of frightened outcasts to bold preachers who changed the civilized world in one generation.

The Romans or Jews could have stopped it all by just producing a body. If the disciples had made it up, would they really die for a lie? In the face of intense opposition, how did the message of his resurrection spread so effectively? Those who had seen the events for themselves concluded that it was true.

3 - Look at God's solution

One of the things the Bible teaches us about God is that he initiates - he seeks us when we are lost. In fact, without him reaching out to us, we would have no hope of finding him. Knowing that our very best attempts are not good enough to deal with the problem of sin, he paid a very high price to offer us his solution.

There are three key things God did to open a way for us:

1. He sent his only Son, Jesus, to earth to become a man.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 [John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"] 16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and f is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. John 1:14-18

Though Jesus "became flesh" when he was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, the Bible teaches that he has eternally existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit. These three form the "trinity" or "three in one". God is one, yet exists in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Ask the person who is doing this study to explain this more to you if you have questions.

- Why do you think it was so important that the "Word became flesh"?
- What does it mean that he was "full of grace and truth"?
- Why do you think no one has ever seen God?
- How do you think Jesus made God "known"?

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2. Though he was perfect, Jesus died on the cross and took the punishment for our sins.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness: "by his wounds you have been healed." 1 Peter 2:24

- What do you think John meant when he called Jesus the "Lamb of God"?
- Why do you think our sins required a punishment so severe as death?

Imagine how you feel when you have to carry the guilt and punishment for something you have done wrong. What do you think it would have been like for Jesus, who was totally clean and perfect, to bear that kind of pain?

- What do you think it means when it says, "by his wounds you have been healed?"

3. After three days, God raised him from the dead, breaking the power of sin and death.

Shortly before his death, Jesus predicted that he would come back from the grave

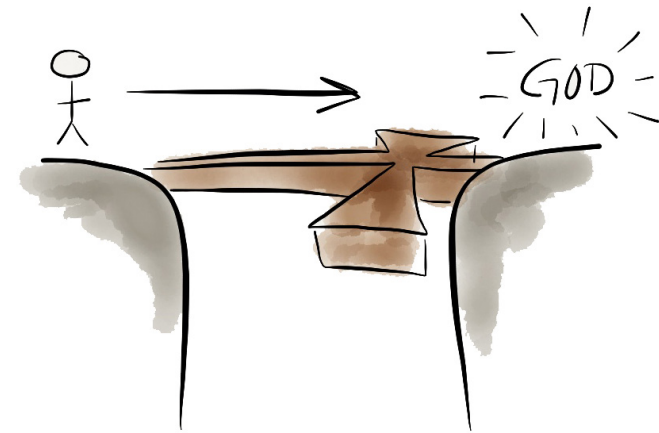
Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." 20 They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. John 2:19-22

- Why do you think it is significant that he made this statement before he died?
- Why do you think his followers [the disciples] believed when they later remembered he had said this?

Just a few months later, after the resurrection, Peter, one of Jesus followers, described it this way to a group of Jews in Jerusalem

This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Acts 2:23-24

- Why do you think it was "impossible for death to keep its hold on him"?
- Peter made this point a central part of his message. Why do you think the resurrection is so important?



Now we have seen three amazing things that God did to reach out to us when we were far from him. In the next lesson we will talk about what you need to do to make his gift apply to you.

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Here is just a partial list of the things that happen the moment you place your faith in Jesus:

Your sins are forgiven
You become a child of God
You have eternal life
You are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, to lead and guide you
You become a part of God's family, with brothers and sisters all over the world
Your name is recorded in the "book of life"

A deeper look

Making the impossible possible

While it seems quite simple to believe, it is actually impossible without God's intervention and help. Because of the impact of sin, we are blind and dead spiritually. This means that our spirits don't naturally perceive God, or respond to his truth.

God has to do several miracles to make it possible for you to believe. First of all, his Holy Spirit has to begin to bring light to your conscience, help you realize that you are sinful and separated from him. You may experience this as a sudden wave of guilt, or a sense that you are alienated from God. Then God has to begin to open your eyes to the truth. Without that supernatural work, all the Bible passages we have studied now will be impossible for you to understand, and will appear "foolish" or "stupid" to you.

The Bible says that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him. This means that if you are seeking God, it is only because he started seeking you first, and drawing you to himself. If you are at all interested in knowing him, it is because he is calling you. Stop and pay attention to his voice. Don't harden your heart and reject what he is doing to reveal himself to you.

#4 - *Look at what you should do*

Gifts are not really gifts unless they are freely received. That is why God does not force his gift on any of us. Though Christ's death on the cross made it possible for you to live in close relationship with God, which is what you were created for, that doesn't mean that this relationship is automatically yours.

Lets look back at a passage we saw earlier in the book of John.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... " John 1:10-12

- Why do you think the world did not recognize him?
- Why did you think so many did not receive him?
- What did someone need to do to become a child of God?
- What exactly does it mean to "believe" and "receive"?

Becoming a child of God is something that happens in the unseen, spiritual world. Remember what Jesus said in his conversation with Nicodemus?

"Flesh gives birth to flesh, spirit gives birth to spirit."

We also know that becoming a child of God has nothing to do with religion or good works. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

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There are three key things you need to do in order to become a child of God. You can remember them by the acrostic "C, B, A"

1. Confess - agree with God that you are a sinner

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8-9

- Have you ever known someone who claimed to be "without sin" when they were really behaving horribly? What is that person like to relate to? What will happen if you try to help them?
- Do you think it is easy to "deceive ourselves" about our sin? Why or why not?
- Why do you think confession is a condition for receiving forgiveness?
- Does this mean that you have to remember everything you have done wrong?

2. Believe - accept in faith that Jesus is the son of God and died for your sins

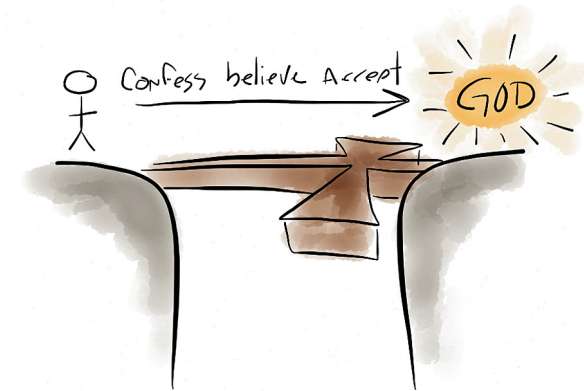
16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:16-17

- Why is belief so important to receiving eternal life?
- What is the difference between just knowing about Jesus and believing in him?
- What was God's purpose in sending his son into the world?
- What will happen to those who don't believe?

3. Accept - personally receive Christ's gift of forgiveness and payment for your sins. Receive him as your Lord and Savior.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:12-13

- What happens when a gift is not accepted?
- Why do you think God doesn't just make us his children without waiting for us to accept?
- What does it mean when it says, "nor of human decisions or a husband's will, but born of God"?



These three things, confess, believe, accept, can be done at any time, in just a few minutes, alone or with another person. Putting your faith in Christ is not complicated, but this simple step of faith makes the difference in where you spend eternity. Generally people do these three things out loud in prayer, which is just talking to God. You probably want to put it in your own words, but it can be as simple as the prayer given below:

"God I know I am a sinner. I believe you sent your son, Jesus Christ, to die for my sins. I accept him as my Lord and Savior, and in faith I receive the gift of his payment for my sins. Thank you for forgiving me and making me your son/daughter. Amen"

- Is there anything holding you back from putting your faith in Christ? Would you like to do it right now?

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