

# Experiencing a relationship with God

John 14:15-31

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This is the second sermon in our series through the farewell discourse. This will be five sermons that deal with Jesus' last words before he was arrested. Jesus has just told his disciples that where he is going, they cannot come (John 13:33). They were very troubled, and so Jesus began to comfort and instruct them. He comforts them with a strange idea. He insists that it will be possible to have a relationship with him even after his physical departure. This seems to be confusing to these eleven followers of Jesus. Honestly, you can understand the confusion. Jesus wants them to understand that there is another way. There is a new reality that they do not grasp. So, how can the disciples keep a close relationship with Jesus even though he goes away? The answer is that it is possible through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I know that in our day, the words "Holy Spirit" can immediately cause some Christians to become guarded. In this church, there are many different people from many different countries with many different ways of thinking and talking about the Holy Spirit. Can I ask you all to try and do something for me? I want you to look with an open mind at the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the English language, there is a proverb type saying that explains what I want you to do. It says, "Do not throw out the baby with the bathwater." Imagine that you are in a place that does not have indoor plumbing. There you are with your child, maybe 2 years old. They have played in the mud, and now they are very dirty. So you get your tub or big bucket and fill it with water. Then you proceed to clean the child. After washing them, you have separated the baby from the dirt. But you have a bucket with the dirty bathwater that you need to carry outside and dump. Could you imagine dumping both the baby and the bathwater out? That is what many of us do with the Holy Spirit. In a day filled with wolves in sheep's clothing telling lies about the Holy Spirit, we need to hear Jesus clearly, and so wash away some of the lies about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We need to clearly separate out the baby from the bathwater, which is the Holy Spirit from the misunderstandings told about him.

We will have two passages about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Today's passage, John 14:15-31, is about the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer, to help us have an ongoing relationship with God. In a few weeks, it will be on the Holy Spirit's ministry through the believer to the unbeliever. Today's passage has three main ideas that repeat mixed up throughout the passage. So, I will tell you these ideas and how they apply to you today:

1. To have a deeper communion and relationship with Jesus, we need to love and obey him.
2. God responds to our love and obedience by allowing us to experience him.
3. God's way of giving himself to us is experienced through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Let's take a look at a few of the verses that appear throughout this passage. And then we will try to understand them and think about how they apply to us today.

## 1. To have a deeper communion and relationship with Jesus, we need to love and obey him

- *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* (v. 15)
- *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me."* (v. 21)
- *"Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.'" (v. 23)*
- *"Whoever does not love me does not keep my words."* (v. 24)
- *"But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."* (v. 31)

Love is connected to obedience. It is connected in a way that can make us feel uncomfortable. There are people who say that they love Jesus, but they do not obey him. There are those who say they obey him, but they do not love him. Jesus says neither is true. What is the connection then between love and obedience? Love is complicated. I don't mean romance. I mean the concept of love. We, as Christians, often speak of God's love as if it were simple and uniform. Love in the Bible is not a simple idea. To correctly understand how the relationship between love and obedience works, we need to understand that in the Bible, there are at least four different kinds of love that God has:

First, is that God loves everything that he has created. This kind of love speaks to God's concern for animals, the planet, the environment, and everything that he has made. Our God calls the stars by name and does not let a bird fall to the ground apart from his will. He clothes the lilies, cares about destroying Nineveh, which is filled with animals, and has decided to resurrect and restore not only us but all of creation. We might feel this same kind of love for a beautiful landscape or a puppy in a photo.

The second kind of love is God's love for the lost and rebellious people. This love has nothing to do with whether one receives or accepts it. It is not about whether the person has done good or bad. It has nothing to do with being lovable like the landscape or puppy. As the Bible says, *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* This is God's love for his enemies.

The third kind of love is God's electing or choosing love. In the Old Testament, it is said that God loved and chose Israel and Abraham. It was not because Abraham was a righteous man, for he was a pagan. It was not because Israel was mighty and lovable, for they were slaves in Egypt. But God set his love on them differently from all the rest of the world. He chose to rescue them when they did not deserve it. You see this love also in the way he saves the apostle Paul. Paul was on his way to persecute Christians, when he was blinded and eventually called to serve Jesus in

ministry. He was elected or chosen by God. In the Bible, God does not choose to reveal himself to everybody as he did to Israel, Abraham, Moses, or Paul. The Apostle Paul writes the letter to the Romans to a group of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the city of Rome, saying, ***“to all those in Rome who are loved by God.”*** Paul means that God loves the Roman Christians in a way he does not love creation or the lost people.

The last kind of love is the one that appears in our passage today. This kind of love fluctuates. It is the love that exists in a relationship. That means that there are times when it can be greater or lesser. If we are not careful, we can make God’s love sound as exciting as going to the dentist or reading a government policy. God’s love is a diamond that has many sides to it. It is always true to say that God loves everyone, but it is not true to say that he loves everyone and everything in the exact same way. Jesus is inviting his disciples into a deeper relationship with God. He is inviting them into his relational love. That means that to have a deeper communion and relationship with Jesus, we need to love and obey him. It is easy to spend an entire sermon just addressing this issue, but I believe understanding everything the passages are saying will help us to love and obey Jesus best. So let’s see how God responds to our love and obedience.

## **2. God responds to our love and obedience by allowing us to experience him**

- ***“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” (v. 15-16)***
- ***“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (v. 21)***
- ***“Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’” (v. 23)***

If you’re not careful, you can get confused reading these passages. So, let me say clearly that you cannot earn God’s love, but you can choose to grow deeper in your relationship and experience more of his love. We make a mistake to think that earning God’s love and an effort to love God are the same thing. But God is not opposed to our efforts to love him; he is opposed to us trying to earn his love. So, as you read this, do not confuse the two ideas. Jesus promises three things to those who love him and obey him. These three promises are all examples of God’s relational love. First, he promises that God will give them the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to be with them forever. Second, he promises that he will manifest himself to the one who obeys and loves him. Third, he promises that he and God the Father will come and make their home in the person who loves and obeys Jesus.

I want you to think about how these statements are profound examples of God’s desire to have a personal relationship with us. Think about the words of Jesus when he says, ***“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.”*** God’s desire is that our relationship would not be limited to one hour on Sunday mornings once a week. God desires to be with us in a personal relationship forever. Second, think about the phrase ***“I will... manifest myself to him.”*** Do you know what the opposite of to manifest is? The opposite of manifest is to hide.

Let me ask you a question today. Do you feel that God is hidden from you? Are you confused about who God is? Do you doubt about who Jesus is? You may feel that you have reasons for this doubt. You have a feeling about God that makes it hard for you. So, what is Jesus' solution to your doubt and feelings? Jesus is saying to you that if you love and obey him, you will experience him manifesting himself to you. Can you imagine a church filled with people who were constantly experiencing God this way in their lives? Could you imagine a church that was confident that God was real, not because they had the right arguments for every philosophical and scientific objection to their faith, but because they have an experiential relationship with Jesus?

The last promise is even more incredible than the others. Jesus says about the one who obeys him and loves him that **“My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** We know that he is referring to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But I want you to understand that where the Holy Spirit is, Jesus and the Father also are. That is the nature of the Trinity. But look at the way he speaks: **“We will make our home with him.”** Jesus is not talking about a distant God who you cannot experience personally. No matter how you try to interpret these passages, one thing should come across very clear. There exist a kind of relationship with God that is deep and powerful and personal. It should also be clear that that kind of relationship can only happen when we love and obey. Jesus is telling his disciples, I may be going away, but that does not mean I will not be with you in a very real way.

### 3) God's way of giving himself to us is experienced through the ministry of the Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit, and what does he do in this passage? Let's see a few characteristics.

#### ❖ The Helper

- **“Another Helper”** (v.16).
- **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit”** (v.26).

– *English Standard Version*: **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Helper**, to be with you forever.”**

– *New International Version*: **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **advocate** to help you and be with you forever.”**

– *King James Bible*: **“And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another **Comforter**, that he may abide with you forever.”**

– *Holman Christian Standard Bible*: **“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **Counselor** to be with you forever.”**

Please note that these versions differ in trying to translate one word in the Greek language that is very hard to communicate in English with a single word. The Greek word is *Parakletos*, and it means many things. It is described of lawyers who would assist a person in a court of law. That is why “advocate” makes sense. It is also used by people who would give you advice when you needed it, like a counselor. It is also used to describe a person who comforts others when there is grief in their life. All of these statements are true and very well could be what Jesus means.

Our translation may have chosen the best word, though. It uses the word “Helper”. Saying that *Parakletos* means “Helper” is not saying that the Holy Spirit is your servant or your slave. The idea is that now, shortly after saying these things, Christ Jesus will not be physically present in their lives, and they will need “another Helper”. Jesus was their first in for most counselor, advocate, and comforter. He was their Helper when they needed him most. He was their teacher. And now that he’s leaving, he will send his replacement, another Helper. The Holy Spirit is our Helper to do whatever God calls us to do or be. God knows what he is called each one of us to do for him. He knows that we desperately need a Helper to do that. Praise God that he has not left us alone, but has come to us in the person of the Holy Spirit. That is not all we learn that the Holy Spirit does for believers.

#### ❖ The Spirit that communicates truth

- *“The Spirit of truth.”* (v. 17)
- *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”* (v. 26)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He is teaching and reminding the disciples of the truth. Is that clear? Can you see that Jesus sent Him to do that? You may be asking, how does this Holy Spirit teach and remind us of the truth? To answer that, we need to zoom out from this passage and consider a few passages in the Bible that sheds light on this passage. I want to answer three questions:

#### a) What is the truth that the Holy Spirit teaches us reminds us of?

John 17:17 says, *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”* There are many mistaken Christians. They tend to fall into one of two camps. There are the Christians of the Holy Spirit. There are the Christians of the Word of God. But if you really want to be a Christian according to the Bible definition, you must be both a person of the Holy Spirit and a person of the Word of God. As a matter of fact, the Spirit of Truth is the Spirit of God’s word. 2 Peter 1:19-21:

*“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,<sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

What you need to understand is that it is the Holy Spirit who inspired the very word of God, and therefore if you do not pay attention to the word of God, you are not paying attention to the Holy Spirit.

#### b) How does the Holy Spirit teach us that truth?

The answer to this may surprise you. You have to remember that what Jesus is repeatedly asking his disciples is that they would love and obey him. The Spirit’s main motivation is not to fill our minds with knowledge to deep theological questions. His purpose is to reveal what God is saying to us through his word, now, today. He is there to encourage us to love Jesus and to obey him.

First, you should focus on correctly understanding the Bible so that you really hear the message that God inspired. Many people take and use the Bible out of context. That is not the way the Spirit of truth operates. The Spirit of God will never contradict the word of God. So, whenever you listen to the Bible, read the Bible or study the Bible, you should ask the Spirit to help you to know what God is saying to you. Pray for understanding like Paul prays in Ephesians 1:16-19:

*“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,<sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,<sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,<sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.”*

Paul prays for Christians that God may give us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him to have the eyes of our hearts enlightened. Many times, our Bible reading is not transforming us because we treat the Bible as we would treat a novel or a newspaper. If we would just stop and ask for God’s help and for the teaching of the Spirit, we just might be shocked at how much we can get out of our reading. There’s so much more I could say, but I just want to get your mind going in this direction.

### **c) How does the Holy Spirit remind us of the truth?**

Have you been reading through the Gospels and wondered how did the disciples remember all of these details to put into writing? Maybe you thought to yourself, this is a lot of information to remember. The truth is that it is a lot of information, but if God himself was reminding them, then it is easy to see how they got the words right.

Think about the temptation of Jesus that occurs, for example, in Matthew chapter 4. In each case for Jesus is tempted, he responds by quoting the Bible. Jesus was in the desert, and he was not carrying scrolls of parchment around with him. First, I believe that he had committed the Bible to memory as best as he could. If Jesus, the son of God, found it helpful to memorize Scripture, what should we do? I believe that if we are people who are constantly reading, studying, and memorizing the Scriptures of God, then we will be reminded by the Holy Spirit in the times that we need it. And I just think through these three things that he is the Spirit of truth, that he is the Holy Spirit who teaches his people, and that he is the Spirit who is reminding us of all of Jesus’s words.

Here’s an opportunity for you if you have been a Christian for many years. Are you paying close attention that the Bible is saying that the Holy Spirit does? Many of you in this room are uncomfortable with the Holy Spirit, because of all of the excesses that tend to go with his name and ministry. But what I am telling you is that if you throw the Holy Spirit away, you were throwing away the one who was intended to be your teacher and Helper. We need him desperately. The ministry of the Holy Spirit will lead us to love and obey Jesus. Loving and obeying Jesus will lead us to a greater experience of God in our lives. We are not orphans. Our Heavenly Father sent his son Jesus, and through the presence and ministry of His Holy Spirit, we will experience a renewed relationship with God.

### Discussion questions:

1. What is God saying to you today?
2. Why should you love God because of what you heard today?
3. Will you obey whatever God is asking of you today?
4. Do you believe the extravagant promises of Jesus that he will be with you forever, that he will manifest himself to you, and that he and God the Father will make their home in you through the ministry of the Holy Spirit?
5. Do you want peace in the middle of the storm? What does it take to have the peace of Jesus?