

## How is your Relationship with God?

Let me ask you a question -- How is your relationship with God?

Do you ever think about that? To an extent, our relationships define us; they reflect on our character. Many people, and all Christians, acknowledge that God exists, but how many of us know God personally? If we claim to know God personally, just how well do we know Him? What kind of relationship do you have with God?

As Christians, we certainly acknowledge Jesus Christ, and many of us claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus, but perhaps we should also ask just how meaningful is that relationship? In one of his books (1) Lee Strobel says this: "Being an authentic follower of Jesus Christ means having a close, honest, vulnerable, dependent, and transparent relationship with Him and increasingly with His other followers..." No personal relationship can exist without some type of communication, and the quality and depth of the relationship depends on the effectiveness and honesty of that communication. The communication we have with Jesus and God the Father is called prayer. Many people narrowly view prayer as vocal communication with God or Jesus, but prayer is much more than that. I like to say that our primary means of communication with God is through mental telepathy. We share our thoughts with God, and he responds by impressing His Word on our minds. When we read the Bible, God's words speak to our minds. We say that this mental communication is the Holy Spirit speaking to us. As the Holy Spirit interacts with us, we may hear words, have thoughts, or sense some type of emotion. So it's crucial for us to be open to the Holy Spirit if we are to have a meaningful relationship with God.

Communication with God originated with Him. We can see this in Genesis, where God spoke our universe into existence, where His Spirit was moving over the face of the earth. God initiated the conversation with Adam. God initiates any relationship we might have with Him. See Isaiah 55:8 (NIV) "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*" declares the LORD. This verse tells us that we can not know God's thoughts unless He somehow reveals those thoughts to us. Also consider John 6:44 - *No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him.* Jesus tells us that unless God, through the Holy Spirit, somehow woos us, we can not know Jesus personally. Oh, yes, we can read about Jesus; history tells us that He once lived on earth; but to know Jesus personally, the Holy Spirit must lead us into the relationship. Why? Simply stated, the relationship is too deep for our minds to grasp. One example of how the Holy Spirit helps us communicate with God is given in

**Romans 8:26 (NIV)** ... *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*

So the Holy Spirit is there to help us communicate our deepest thoughts to God. The Scriptures tell us that God knows our thoughts. For example, **Psalm 94:11 (NIV)** *The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.*

Mt. 9:4 and 12:25 say that Jesus knew the thoughts of His adversaries. So our primary communication with God is through our mind, but He also knows our feelings. The Scriptures use the heart to speak about feelings.

**Psalm 62:8 (NIV)** Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

**Psalm 119:10-11 (NIV)** *I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. <sup>11</sup> I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

So God knows our true feelings, and if our heart is not right, our communication with God is hampered. **Psalm 66:18 (NIV)** If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;

Once God has our attention, the depth of the relationship we have with Him depends on our response. The Psalms give us some wonderful examples of deep communication with God. One of my favorites is Psalm 42:1-2 (NASB) *As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;*

But the Psalm I want us to focus on today is Psalm 139 (NASB)

**Psalm 139:1-12 (NIV)**

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.
- <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- <sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.
- <sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.
- <sup>5</sup> You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.
- <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Isn't that wonderful? Is your relationship with God such that the words of that Psalm apply to you? Let's look at it a bit more closely. Verses 1 - 4 tell us that God has examined our heart and knows everything about us - He knows our every thought. He knows our plans for each day - where we are going and what we are doing. He knows what we say before we speak a word. What does that tell you about God? Several things - He is omniscient - he knows everything; He is omnipresent - He is everywhere at all times. The psalmist realizes this when he says in verse 6 - This is too glorious, too wonderful to believe! It also tells us that God cares about us.

One of the most thrilling verses in the Old Testament is **Isaiah 49:15-16 (NIV)** *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!*

<sup>16</sup> *See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;*

That is a wonderful expression of God's concern for His people. It's even more meaningful when we realize that the hands of Jesus now bear the scars of crucifixion because He died so that our sins would be covered. The amazing thing about that event is that it was God Himself who made that sacrifice, and He did it so that we would know how much He loves us.

The psalmist continues: **Psalm 139:7-12 (NIV)**

- <sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
- <sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- <sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- <sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.
- <sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"
- <sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Can you sense just how much joy and wonder the psalmist feels as he voices these words? "God, you are awesome!" he exclaims. "No matter where I am, you are always with me."

Psalm 23 expresses similar thoughts: **Psalm 23:1-6 (NIV)**

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
- <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,
- <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

But in Psalm 139, the psalmist goes even deeper: **Psalm 139:13-18 (NIV)**

<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

<sup>16</sup> your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

Now that is some one who realizes the depth of God's love. He feels like God personally nurtured him as his embryo was being formed, as his organs took shape, and as his bones went into their proper places. He feels that God knows his destiny. Is that the kind of relationship you have with God?

Once we realize that God loves each of us personally, the only proper response we can make to God is faith - we place our trust in Him with our whole being. Once we do that with sincerity - and He knows whether we are sincere or not - God adopts us into His family. We have the blessing and privilege of knowing Jesus Christ, and we respond in faith to Jesus. But make no mistake, even before Jesus came to earth in human form, He has always been with the Father, so that people of old who responded to God in faith without knowing about the ministry of Jesus still are saved through Jesus' sacrifice, because God ordained that this would be so. There are indications of this throughout the Old Testament. The sacrifices in the tabernacle and later in the temple, prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus. When Abraham took Isaac up to Mount Moriah, willing to offer him as a sacrifice to God, God instead provided a ram for the sacrifice.

"Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" Isaac asked. "Do not fear, my son," Abraham said. "God will provide the lamb." And indeed, God did just that. He did it for Abraham, and He did it for you and for me. You see, you have been carved on the palms of His hands.

So God wants each of us to be a member of His family. How do we become a member of God's family? Once we respond in faith to God's entreaties, He adopts us into His family. **Romans 8:14-17 (NIV) ... those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.** <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Now adoption means that we are brothers and sisters of Jesus, and we share in everything that God offers to Jesus. Can you believe that? It's really is too wonderful to comprehend. We can call God "Abba," or as we would say, "Daddy," a very intimate, personal title. Most of us don't use that term, do we? Instead, we call God, Father. Could this indicate that our relationship with God is not as personal as we like to think?

Well, even though we are sinners, spiritually poor and needy, selfish and childish in our behavior, uncaring and often

mean toward others, God still accepts us as members of His family, once we place our faith in Him through Jesus Christ. Becoming a member of God's family is a gift from God that we call "grace". God knows our beginning and our destiny.

When we read Psalm 139, we can sense the true feelings of someone who is close to God. The writer concludes this way: **Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV)** <sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

I hope that is your prayer today. If you do not know Jesus personally, I hope that you will decide today to respond to God's offer of love and place your faith in Christ. It only takes a small step, but you must take it -- God will not force Himself upon you. Maybe you have already made a profession of faith, perhaps many years ago. If your relationship with God is not what it could be, I hope you will decide today to step out more boldly in your walk of faith. That comes through study of His word, deeper fellowship with other believers, and by service, using your spiritual gifts to help others. If you wish to make a public commitment today, please come forward as we sing our closing hymn,

Notes:

1. Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, Zondervon, 1993, p.110.