

A Deeper Relationship

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A "relationship with God" sounds like a lovely thought. But what does it look like? Has anyone defined it for you? How does one have a relationship with a being whom we can't see or touch? Seems ridiculous, doesn't it?

A healthy relationship is interactive. Giving and receiving must be present. So what do we give to God? What do we receive from God? I will answer these questions by the end of this article. First, I plan to describe one's relationship with God by defining stages of increasing depth.

Trust

In my book, *Four in the Garden*, Cherished asks, "Why should I trust Creator if I don't know Him?" The answer given him is, "You come to know Him by trusting in Him." This is a paradox, yet we start the journey toward God by trusting Him. We trust in something we can't see in the hope that the invisible will make itself known. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." So we start with a simple belief in God, even though we don't know or understand God.

Humility

Humility is the first step in one's relationship with God. We set aside our ego and our ego's demands when we approach God. We acknowledge that we aren't as smart or powerful as God. In truth, we know little when it comes to God's inscrutable ways, and what we think we know may be inaccurate. Humility requires a willingness to be wrong and an openness to correction. A relationship with God is not based on doctrinal certainty, but a readiness to engage mystery as this relationship is mutable and dynamic. No real relationship starts with certainty or expects fixed responses. James 4:6 says that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Humility opens the door to relationship, but if we are proud before God, the door remains closed.

Authenticity

When we approach God, the masks must come off. We can't have lasting relationship with anyone if we pretend to be something we are not. Authenticity means we are honest with God about who we are, how we think, and what we do. No excuses, but brutal honesty. I think God can handle it. We come as we are, not hiding anything or making ourselves more presentable. We bring everything into God's light: our shame, guilt, despair, self-hatred, and doubt. The important thing is that we come, regardless, instead of staying away because we have judged ourselves unworthy. If we have soiled our diapers, then we come to God with stinky diapers believing He will clean us up as any loving parent would.

The goal here is to be real and authentic before God. We are not putting our best face forward, but putting our real face forward, warts and all. When we are real before God, then God makes Himself real to us. Said another way: if you want God to be real to you, then strive to be as real as possible with God. As we drop our masks and defenses, then we remove one more barrier between God and us.

Mutuality

Psalm 18:25-26 says this about God, "With the kind You show Yourself kind; With the blameless You show Yourself blameless; With the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself contrary." This suggests a mutuality that describes our relationship with God. This same mutuality is reflected in the verse (James 4:8) that says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." This is a dynamic relational dance with God. We bow and He bows in return. We approach and He approaches. We withdraw and He withdraws. He meets us according to our invitation and posture, reflecting back to us a corresponding posture and spirit in response. So it's up to us how we want to dance with God, but realize that you lead and He follows. God waits for us to make the first move, to draw near before He draws near.

Transparency

Transparency is similar to authenticity, but it goes further. Transparency is more than dropping our masks and defenses; it is an intentional disclosure of our secret selves. It's noble to be honest in a relationship. It's far harder and riskier to divulge our deeper selves. We're bringing out the monsters from our basement, the critters we don't want others to see or know about. Of course, God knows all about them, but He waits for us to be ready to bring them out into His presence. He waits for us to trust Him with our secret shadow selves. In essence, our relationship with God is all about stripping away the layers that exist between God and us. God doesn't do it. It is our task. I liken transparency to nakedness before God. Even though God can see us, we invite Him to do so. We invite Him to peer as deep as we can tolerate. When we allow ourselves to be seen, we also allow ourselves to be loved at a deeper level.

When I invite God to see me, I feel exposed and naked. It takes effort to stay still and not retreat. In some ways, I feel like a vampire being burned by the sunlight. But I know if I stay put, then what can't be burned away will remain. So I allow God to burn off my shame, guilt, and self-judgment. After the ashes, I find my heart malleable again and a renewed tenderness in my relationship with God.

Intimacy

Mutual self-disclosure is the definition of intimacy. When we disclose ourselves to God, God does the same with us. This sharing of selves creates closeness, trust, and affection. God discloses His nature or character to us, some aspect of Himself we can lay hold of. He chooses how and when. His disclosure usually reveals an aspect of Himself that will enable us to become closer to him and to trust Him more. God doesn't rely on formulas and no two people have identical experiences of God. So be open to anything and everything in your interactions with God. I see no limits in our relationship

with God as Christ has removed any barriers on God's side. The only barriers are on our side. So, we can draw as near to God as we dare. Ephesians 3:11-12 says, "In Christ and through faith in Christ, we may enter God's presence with boldness and confidence."

Self-Relating

Our relationship with ourselves has much to do with how we relate to God. If we don't know how to relate to our inner selves, it will be hard to relate to God. If we don't know how to nurture our inner selves, then it will be difficult for us to receive nurture from God. It's within our interior space that God interacts with us. This inner realm serves as a landing pad for God. If we have cultivated an inner life, then we give God an ample place to land. Take time to discover and explore your inner person and learn how to relate to, listen to, and love that person. As you do so, you will develop the capacity to receive those same things from God. Refer to my article on [Cultivating an Inner Life](#).

Deep Calls to Deep

In Psalm 42:6, David says, "Deep calls to deep in the roar of Your waterfalls, all Your waves and breakers have swept over me." David is downcast and disturbed in this psalm, yet he expresses his earnest desire and thirst for God by beginning with, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God." He feels overwhelmed as if about to drown in the waters that inundate him, yet he calls out to God from the deepest place of his soul. In another illustration of mutuality, he expects that by offering his deepest self, he will be met by God's deepest self. This is an accurate description of our relationship with God: we give ourselves to God and God gives Himself to us. We give our very being to God as a gift, a love offering, a willing sacrifice. In return, God gives us His being, His presence, His manifest love. God's love is often preemptive and always unearned, but in a show of intimacy when we drop our guard, He sometimes embraces us with a palpable expression of His tenderness. We give God our lives, our spirits, our bodies, our love, our

everything. In response, God gives as much to us, if not more.

Some of you are looking for guidance, assurance, security, or comfort. These things may result from a relationship with God, but aren't the basis of a relationship, even human relationships. Relationship is based on the sharing of selves, mutual disclosure and commitment, and quality time spent together. When a vibrant relationship exists, then these other things often flow out of that. So, we seek relationship as the priority, not these other things that will elude us, otherwise.

The only thing that will last forever is your relationship with God. Everything else will fade away. The best description of eternal life was given by Jesus who prayed, "Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." Eternal life isn't living forever, but having a relationship with God, a personal experience of knowing God (not just knowing about God). This life is eternal because God is eternal and in knowing Him, there is no end.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is your greatest barrier in your present relationship with God? Why do you think it continues to be a barrier for you? What might it take to dismantle it?

2. Describe your relational position with God. How does this position enhance or hinder God's ability to relate to you? What new position would you like to try?

3. How does your relationship with God compare to what you imagine it could be? Describe one particular way in which it falls short. Name one strategy you can try to fix that shortfall.

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