

What it means to walk with God Pt I

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This morning we're kicking off a series that's been on my heart for the past few months as we've worked our way through our building program down at the Centre. To be honest it's a topic that's been close to my heart ever since I first became a Christian. I've always found myself drawn to the more mystical aspects of Christianity and if there's one thing that the Pentecostal movement has brought back to the mainstream Church, it's the understanding that we can experience God in a real and tangible way in the physical world. That said I also believe there's been quite a bit of misunderstanding in the church when it comes to what it means to have a relationship with Jesus.

[Slide] Scriptures such as **Daniel 11:32b** They that know their God shall be strong and do exploits and **Jeremiah 29:13** You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart, have shaped much of my pursuit of God with regard to my own personal relationship with Jesus and my goal for the type of Pastor I've wanted to be. I remember when I first came to Tassie back in 1989 to help plant Liberty AOG and start up a youth ministry, Daniel 11:32b was a driving force behind the vision I had for the young people that we started to gather. My thinking went, if I can just get our young people into a relationship with Jesus then everything else would take care of itself because the flow on effect of them knowing their God would be that they'd be strong and do exploits. That might sound a bit simplistic given everything that goes into looking after young people but surprisingly it worked, and worked better than I'd expected. For me, even today, it's the cornerstone of everything that I hope to achieve in and through my time at Grace.

But what does it mean to know God and how do you find Him?

During the last 35 years I've sat in countless meetings, read 100's of books and prayed 1000's of hours all with the same desire, to know God more and experience Him in my day to day life in real and tangible ways. During that time I've had moments where heaven has come near and I've experienced the supernatural presence of God in ways that were life changing and extraordinary. However they've been the exception to the rule and not the norm.

Choosing the title for our series, What does it mean to walk with God, is more about pulling back the curtain and answering the questions that often go unanswered with regard to our relationship with God, than a shortcut to supernatural power that makes you stand out from your peers. We'll be looking at supernatural power during our series but today I want to start where too many of us find ourselves when it comes to our life long journey with Jesus.

[Slide] In this series I'm wanting to answer the question, What does it mean to be a person who walks with God all the days of their life? Because make no mistake, this journey we're on includes every day you spend drawing breath here on earth. You'll either walk through life with yourself alone or if you choose to, you can walk this journey of life with God.

[Slide] In the book of Psalms, the Psalmist in Psalm 27:8 says
Lord, when you said to me, "Seek my face," my inner being responded, "I'm seeking your face with all my heart."

Right from the outset this sentence tells us two things about our relationship with God.

Firstly, God wants us to pursue Him. And secondly, that we can expect to have a reason to seek Him. That reason being that we will at times feel that He's not present or that our experience of Him is lacking. That's perfectly normal, and one of the challenges we face whilst living on planet earth. Some people have struggled with that reality and felt let down and given up on God whereas others have persisted and somehow landed in a place where they can say with an unshakeable belief, I know my Saviour lives and I am His.

If I was to ask you what's the starting point of a life spent walking with God, what would be your answer?

There are different entry points into this life that we're talking about and some are definitely better than others. I want to show you which one is the best and help you to readjust if you got off on the wrong foot. Because how you start something is critically important to the way you journey in life.

Lauren Daigle just recently released a song 'You Say' that I think captures the struggle we all have at times with our experience of God and our humanity. You'll notice in the words of her song, that she pinpoints where her struggle is and the solution. This is just an excerpt and not the full song. We'll have the full song playing during morning tea.

[Slide] Let's play it

[Slide] Laura Daigle - You say

You say I am Loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
You say I am held when I am falling short

When I don't belong You say I am Yours

And I believe

If you live out your relationship with God through your feelings you'll end up in all sorts of trouble. Feelings are great, don't get me wrong. But they're not always that smart. Feelings are transient, they come and they go. They're effected by external circumstance and internal chemistry that you have no control over. When they line up with the direction you're going in, they make the journey all that much better but when they don't they can become a handbrake on your ability to achieve your potential and can even derail your life's purpose.

Feelings are what they are - neither good nor bad. I consider them a bit like air temperature. I have very little control over the temperature of the air around me. Inside a building I can manage the temperature to a degree but as soon as I walk outside all bets are off. During winter I might whinge about the cold but it's par for the course when living where we live. During summer I enjoy being able to go outside at night and not get hypothermia. I don't sit around worrying about the air temperature and I most certainly don't make major decisions about my future dependent upon the current temperature of the air. I don't make assumptions about how much Debra loves me by how hot it is or how cold it is - with Debra it's always hot. And I definitely don't blame God when it snows. The temperature of the air doesn't impact at all on my job as a pastor here at Grace. Whether its hot or cold I still have a job to do.

Now everyone here I'm sure will agree with me, that temperature doesn't actually mean all that much with regard to the direction or purpose of our

lives. It does effect how much we might enjoy a particular day but it doesn't mean anything much more than that.

Feelings are the same. But this is where we get a bit confused at times. You see feelings are experienced within us and because they are we equate far more meaning to them than we should.

Notice what the Bible says or doesn't say about feelings. Jesus didn't say feel love toward your enemy. He said, love your enemy. When he said, If you love me, you'll obey my command and this is my command, love each other as I have loved you. He wasn't talking about feelings. He was talking about actions based on an understanding of truth. The truth being, this is what God sees as the optimal way for you and I to live our lives given that all of us have been created in the image of God. We will best fulfil our design parameters if we actively love others in the same way that Jesus loves us. And that has nothing to do with feelings but rather actions based on something we believe to be true. That Jesus knows what he's talking about.

What does this all have to do with our entry into a life where we walk with God? I'm glad you asked.

You can base your relationship with Jesus on feelings or fact and the one you choose to lock onto will determine how up and down your walk with Him will be.

Now you might have been thinking I'd say you can base your relationship with Jesus on feelings or faith and faith does come into the equation but its not the bedrock on which your relationship needs to stand.

I want you to stay with me here.

Did the early disciples base their belief in Jesus on feelings, faith or fact? Before his resurrection I'd say there were some feelings effecting their decision making process and probably a bit of faith. They were hoping he was who he was claiming to be. After Jesus was crucified their feelings plummeted and their faith shattered - it completely disappeared. But when Jesus came back from the dead everything changed because their understanding of who he was, was now firmly rooted in factual events that had taken place in front of their eyes.

How do we know that?

Because they were able to subjugate perfectly normal feelings of fear that they experienced when facing ridicule, imprisonment, and even death and stick to their message, that Jesus who was crucified came back from the dead. It was a fact for them not a question of faith or feeling.

[Slide] Faith is futuristic, feelings are current and facts are historical. Faith can at times be swayed by how I'm feeling today, facts can't. Regardless of how I'm feeling about the weather today, the sun is shining above the clouds. That's a fact. It rose this morning and I have faith it will rise again tomorrow because of the now historical fact that it did so this morning. I can choose to focus on the facts or my feelings, it's up to me.

If you're wanting to walk with God all the days of your life then your belief in him had better be based on facts before feelings.

And if you don't have all the facts, then may I suggest that you do everything you can to find them out.

If I was to ask you how do you know that the world is round how would you answer? If you didn't know how to answer that question you'd do some research and you'd base your answer on what you discovered to be true. If I asked you did the Romans invade England how would you answer that? You'd do some research and you'd check out the facts and then you'd give me your answer. Your answer wouldn't be dependent on whether you enjoyed doing the exercise, it would be based on the facts.

If I were to ask you, is Jesus the Son of God, and in your answer you told me that you'd had an experience with him that proved to you that he was real and then when I probed a bit deeper you said "I felt his presence one day when I was praying in my bedroom." I'd be happy for you but you still haven't answered the question correctly. In fact, you've chosen the shakiest of grounds to base your future belief in Jesus on, when you don't have to. There's a much better way.

You see you don't need faith or feelings to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, you need facts. Just like you need facts to know that Julius Caesar lived you need facts to know that Jesus lived, and died on a cross and rose again. My faith in the future goodness of God is built on the facts of the past.

Once you have those facts you're faced with a decision. Do you live according to that knowledge? And if you say yes then that becomes the starting point of a life of faith, a life spent walking with God.

You must first of all believe.

[Slide] Hebrews 11:6 says Those who come to God must believe that he exists. And they must believe that he rewards those who look to him.

There's nothing stopping you from having a belief based on a feeling but that's the most unstable belief system you can have. **[Slide]** Because if a feeling birthed your belief then a subsequent feeling can damage or kill your belief.

And remember what we've already said about feelings, they're like the air temperature. Imagine if you were to only go to work when the air temperature was at a certain level, you'd soon find yourself looking for a new job. Some people's relationship with God is like that.

[Slide] So our first lesson in this series is that to walk with God all the days of your life you need to base your belief about Jesus on facts not feelings and then allow that belief to determine your actions and direction in life, not your feelings or lack of them at any given time.

Then when bad things happen to you or you're feeling down, and even after prayer you still feel down, you'll continue walking with God because your belief in Him isn't dependent on the air temperature "feelings" but rather on something you know factually to be true.

Belief based on logical fact is far more resilient than belief based on feelings.

Here are some questions you could go and research and find factual answers to.

[Slide] Was Jesus a historical figure?

Where was he born?

When was he born?

Is he mentioned in any other texts other than the bible?

What did he do?

What did he say?

What proof did he give to back up his claims?

When did he die?

How did He die?

[Slide] Did he come back from the dead?

How did his resurrection effect his followers?

Did it change the trajectory of their lives?

Is there consistency in Jesus' teachings?

If you follow his teaching and believe what he said, will it change the way you live?

Is that a life worth living?

Is it a better life than any other?

One of the reasons that makes the Bible unique amongst all of the religious books that we have today is the total lack of editing that went into its writing. There's no inflation of anyone's importance, and there's no apparent urge by the writers to show anyone in a better light than what had actually occurred. It makes for amusing reading at times and it definitely helps us to identify with the major characters.

Look at this progression of disbelief to belief

[Slide] John 13:19

"I am telling you now, before it happens. So when it does happen, you will believe that I am who I am.

[Slide] Mark 16:11

They heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him. But they did not believe it.

[Slide] Luke 24:11

But the apostles did not believe the women. Their words didn't make any sense to them.

[Slide] Mark 16:12-13

After that, Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them. This happened while they were walking out in the country. The two returned and told the others about it. But the others did not believe them either.

[Slide] Mark 16:14

Later Jesus appeared to the 11 disciples as they were eating. He spoke firmly to them because they had no faith. They would not believe those who had seen him after he rose from the dead.

[Slide] John 20:24-29

Thomas was one of the 12 disciples. He was also called Didymus. He was not with the other disciples when Jesus came. So they told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "First I must see the nail marks in his hands. I must put my finger where the nails were. I must put my hand into his side. Only then will I believe."

A week later, Jesus' disciples were in the house again. Thomas was with them. **[Slide]** Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood among them. He said, "May peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me but still have believed."

[Slide] John 20:30, 31

Jesus performed many other signs in front of his disciples. They are not written down in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.