

Introduction:

Everywhere I go, the conversation usually gets around to a question of acquaintances. "Do you know so and so?" I am sure the same thing happens to you. Consider the answers you give to this question. They range anywhere from, "I'm sorry, I've never heard of them" to "Are you kidding? They're my best friends." Knowing someone is a graded process. That is, there are levels. I can know someone and at the same time not know someone. For instance, I know President George W. Bush, Queen Elizabeth and even Oprah Winfrey. However, at the same time, I don't know any of them. This same thing can be said of God. Most of us know God. But how many of us know God? How many of us have a relationship with God? If we were out and about and someone said, "Hey, do you know Jehovah God?" How would we respond?

We start our Fall Focus with this lesson, focusing on our relationship with God, getting to know Him better and walking with Him day by day. Every family attending is offered a free copy of our Fall Focus book *Walks with God*. It contains five weeks worth of weekday readings with application questions as well as five group study guides to go over weekly (even if you are not in a small group, I encourage you to work through the discussion guide questions on your own or with your family).

As we begin our Focus, let's examine our relationship with God. How well do we know Him? What kind of relationship do we have? We are going to briefly examine six levels of knowledge. As we do, please don't think of these as right or wrong. Though we will recognize levels of relationship that are not beneficial, the purpose of this lesson is not to decide whether our relationship with God is bad or not. Rather, we want simply to honestly assess what level of knowledge we have of God and then push ourselves to grow deeper whatever answer we find.

With that in mind, let's consider the answers someone might give if asked, "Hey, do you know Jehovah God?"

Discussion:

- I. "No, I've never heard of Him."
 - A. I don't need to say much here in our 21st Century American culture. No doubt, when Paul traveled to Athens in **Acts 17** he had to introduce people to the unknown God. I can hardly imagine that being the case for any of us today. We have at least heard of God.
 - B. I can't imagine how you would end up here, listening to a sermon without at least having heard of God. However, if for some strange reason that is the case. May I invite you to get a Bible and open to the very first page. It starts with the words, "In the beginning, God..." Read from there and be introduced to the Creator of the world and your life.

- II. "Yeah, I've heard of Him."
 - A. When someone asks me if I know somebody who lives near me or used to live in a town in which I used to live, the answer is often, "I've heard of him, but I don't know him." Sadly, in our society, this describes a lot of people. They have heard of God. They know some things about Him. They have probably even developed an image of what God is based on their incomplete knowledge. However, they really don't know Him.
 - B. Paul mentions this relationship in **Romans 1:19-23**. These Gentiles knew about God. The world around them declared some of the aspects of God. They knew God, yet, they didn't. That is, they had heard of Him, knew some things about Him, but they had no relationship with Him. They developed images of God based on the created animals around them. Another example of this relationship is in **Romans 10:16-19**. This time speaking of Jews, who knew a lot about God and yet their knowledge was incomplete. Because of that, though they had heard of God, they did not know or understand God. Their image of God was mistaken and distorted.

C. **I Corinthians 2:10-13** explains that we cannot have any great knowledge of God than this unless God Himself reveals it to us. He has done this through the Holy Spirit and His prophets and apostles. If we want to move beyond this level of knowledge, we must spend time in the Word He has revealed. That is the only way.

III. "Yeah, I've met Him."

- A. There are some folks who are acquaintances. We have met them, shook hands perhaps. However, we have little to no relationship with them. We especially like to display these kinds of non-relationships if they are with important or famous people. I love to tell people about the time I rode on a plane with the lead singer of the 70s and 80s band, *Blondie*. I get a kick out of telling people about the time Marita sat next to the lead singer of the 80s hair band, *Slaughter*, on a fair ride. I like to show people my signed copies of John Maxwell books and my signed book by Kenneth Starr as well as the picture taken of both of us. However, it would be ridiculous for me to claim to have any kind of relationship with any of these people.
- B. Sadly, this kind of relationship with God is far too common. Jesus talked about this kind of relationship in the Parable of the Sower of **Matthew 13**. The rocky ground received the seed of the word with joy but developed no roots. They met God, but they didn't spend the time to get to know God. They developed no relationship. When times got rough, they fell away. Sadly, some people rest on the fact that they once met God. But this is not a saving relationship. Frankly, this is the same kind of relationship the demons of **James 2:19**. They know God. They've met God. However, they have never developed a positive relationship with Him. They cannot take any comfort in their knowledge of God; they can only shudder in fear.
- C. If you once met God, but have not developed a relationship with Him, let me encourage you to start today. Like the prodigal son of **Luke 15:11-32**, you abandoned the greatest relationship of your life, but the Father is looking for you, waiting for you to return. Why not come to your senses and come back to Him today?

IV. "Yeah, I know Him. He's an associate/co-worker of mine."

- A. Sometimes, when someone asks us about a person, we really do know them. We even know them well because we see them frequently. However, we are not extremely close to them. They are associates or co-workers. We would never describe them this way if through our work we had become close friends. We have a working relationship with them and that's all. We have a 9 to 5 relationship. We may spend time with them away from the plant or the office, but usually because it is work related. We do what we have to with them because it is required for the job, but we don't do much else.
- B. Sadly, there a great number of Christians who have this relationship with God. Their relationship with Him is not so much a friend or family relationship, but a work relationship. This relationship is filled with checklists and minimum or maximum requirements. "What is the requirement for being saved? Hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized? I've done that; I'm good." "How many times do I really have to go to the assembly in order to be saved?" These Christians often think about their relationship with God as based on their relationship with the local church, instead of seeing their relationship with the local congregation as merely being a part of their relationship with God and His children. They often think being in a congregation and making it to the assemblies means they have a great relationship with God. However, don't let the local church ask anymore of them than that. After all, they have other aspects of their lives and the local church shouldn't try to take over their entire lives. They rarely think in terms of having a relationship with God that has taken over their lives and He does have that right.
- C. We see a pointed example of this in **Luke 10:38-42**. Martha had a relationship with Jesus. However, she had not let it completely permeate her life. She was worried and distracted by so many things that she allowed the one necessary thing to go by the wayside. No doubt, she thought her relationship with Jesus was great. So great, in fact, she thought she could get Him to rebuke Mary for not being like her. However, she was not so close to Jesus to know what really mattered to Him.
- D. If you have this kind of relationship with God, you need to realize that "going to church" doesn't equal having a good relationship with God. Christianity is not a Sunday activity, with some

Wednesdays thrown in. Christianity is an every minute of the day relationship with God. You can't get into heaven by marking off your checklists or meeting your minimum number of required assemblies, prayers and Bible readings. We develop a heaven-bound relationship with God by letting Him take over our lives. **Galatians 2:20** describes that relationship as having crucified ourselves and letting our lives be run by Christ's will every step of the way.

- V. "Oh yeah, I knew Him. What a great friend. Haven't talked to Him in a long time though."
- A. I can look back over my life at a series of great friends. I have kept up my relationship with some of them even though I have moved and we parted ways. Other relationships have gone by the wayside. Every once in a while, someone will say, "Hey did you know so and so when you were in such and such a place?" "Oh yeah, I knew them. We were really good friends. I need to call them. I haven't talked to them in forever."
 - B. How many Christians have this relationship with God? We see an example of it in **Revelation 2:4**. The Ephesians were moving along in their religion, but not their relationship with God. They knew all the right doctrines and stood up for the truth, not allowing error to stand. They even endured persecution without breaking. However, the initial relationship they had with God had grown cold. We see a similar picture in **Jeremiah 2:2-3**. God spoke of Israel who once had the devotion of a young bride just following her marriage. They would follow God anywhere and everywhere out of their love for Him. The Ephesians had been like that. Now, they had become a group of rule followers. Their outward actions may not have changed a great deal, but their motivation had changed. Now they were protecting the forms and rules they had developed instead of pursuing a closer relationship with God. When this happens, apostasy is inevitable. Eventually, to protect our rules and forms we change God's pattern. However, when we are pursuing a relationship of love and friendship with God, then we never let our rules and forms take precedence over God's revelation. When friendship with and love of God is our paramount concern, then all our rules and forms, whether they ever change or not, will be from God and will glorify Him.
 - C. Jesus told the Ephesians to do the works they did at first (**Revelation 2:5**). Have you let your love for God grow cold? The best way to rekindle that love and devotion is to remember how you behaved when you had it and do those things again. The emotional side of your relationship will return if you rebuild the action side. Do you remember your prayers, studies, evangelistic efforts, discussions with people, assembly and class attendance when you were on fire with love for God? You didn't do any of those things to meet requirements; you did them because you wanted to get closer to God. Remember that relationship, realize you have done wrong by losing your love motivation, repent and start doing those actions again. The love you had will reignite.
- VI. "Oh yes, I know Him, we're good friends."
- A. In **James 2:23**, James said Abraham was called God's friend (cf. **II Chronicles 20:7**; **Isaiah 41:8**). What a great relationship to have with God. How would you like to be called the friend of God? Have you ever heard the dictum, "To have friends, you must be a friend"? For God to call us His friends, we have to be a friend to God.
 - B. Consider what **Proverbs 17:17** and **18:24** say about friendship. Friendship is about loving, trusting and sticking with someone through good and bad times. Consider the relationship Paul had with God according to **II Timothy 4:16-17**. His earthly friends, even brethren abandoned him. However, God stood by Him. This was because when things got rough, God didn't have to chase Paul down. Rather, Paul stood by God. Paul is talking about a time when he was being persecuted for his faith, facing possible execution. Did he abandon God when the times got rough? No, he stood by God. Therefore, God stood by him.
 - C. We have already read **Galatians 2:20**. Paul had sacrificed his own will in order to accomplish the will of God, no matter how rough it got. Abraham had been called the friend of God, because he believed God and obeyed Him even to the point of being willing to sacrifice his very own son (**James 2:21-23**). Being friends with God means trusting Him with our very lives and even with the lives of those about whom we care. It means surrendering our will to His. It means believing His will is best for us and following it.

- D. Of course, to have this relationship with Him, we have to know His will. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (**Romans 10:17**). But hearing is not the end. Hearing is only the beginning. We must stand by God, doing what He says even through adversity. Then He will stand near us even in adversity. Being a friend of God doesn't mean always walking the garden path; it means God will carry us through our adversities sticking closer than a brother. Consider God's friends throughout history. Think of Abraham whom God kept on his journeys; Moses through whom God freed His people with the plagues; David who became king; Daniel who was saved from the lions' mouths; Hananiah, Meshael and Azariah who were saved from the fiery furnace and others. All of these were God's friends because they trusted God and stood by Him at all times.
- E. No doubt, the friend relationship is not a static one. It is a growing relationship. Just being God's friend doesn't mean we are done with our growth. Rather, as we continue to study and continue to obey and continue to stick with God through thick and thin, our relationship will grow. If you can say you are God's friend, that is awesome. But don't be satisfied with your relationship. Let it continue to grow, increasing your faith, virtue, knowledge and love (**II Peter 1:5-8**).

Conclusion:

If someone asked you, "Hey, do you know Jehovah God?" what would you have to say. What kind of relationship do you have with God? No doubt, most of these relationships aren't that good. However, our lesson today is not to see whether our relationship is good or bad, but to see where it needs to improve. No matter what kind of relationship you have with God right now, why not commit yourself to make it better? How can we help?