

The last couple of weeks, we have been talking about our vision statement. We have started off by realizing that everything that we do is for the glory of God. It doesn't matter where we are or what we are doing—as long as it is obviously not doing something wrong—than we can glorify God if we love God with our hearts. Everything that we do at Youth Group is for God's glory whether we are singing song or whether we are playing full contact pin the tail on the donkey. It doesn't matter.

Next, we moved on to talking about sharing the gospel. If we love God with all of our hearts and want to glorify him in all that we do, then we will want to share that love with others. It will be natural for us to want to share God's love with other people. It's not always easy to do because people might reject us or think that we are crazy or make fun of us or ask us a question that we can't answer, but God gives us the power to share his love by his Holy Spirit.

Last week, we talked about connecting with other believers and how important that is. If we have a good network of Christian friends, they will be there for us to support us when life really sucks, encourage us when we are down, teach us things we didn't know before, and help us to glorify God in all that we do. Who we hang around with greatly influences the things that we do. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't hang around people who aren't Christians. You certainly should. But what it means is that having a network of other Christians is extremely important.

This week, we're going to be talking about deepening a relationship with Him—meaning deepening a relationship with God. The relationships that we have with other Christians are really important, but the relationship that we have with God is the most important of all! Even though deepening a relationship with God is one of the most important things in the world to do, it is also one of the hardest and most frustrating things imaginable. It can be simply irritating sometimes.

### **One of the Toughest Things in the World**

Having a relationship with God is unlike any other relationship in the world. When you have a relationship with someone else, you do things together. You hang out. You go to the same school. You talk. You go to class together. You're on the same team. You play the Wii together. You go out and see a movie. You touch each other. You have a special handshake.

You can't do any of these things with God. You can't go and see a movie with God on a Saturday night. You don't have God on your cheerleading squad. You don't go to class and have God sitting next to you. You and God don't go out for coffee and talk. It just doesn't work that way.

Not only is it unlike any other relationship, but people all over the place are telling you that building a relationship with God is crazy. There are a lot of people out there who are going to tell you that God doesn't even exist. If that were the case, having a relationship with God is like having an imaginary friend. We all know what to think about people who have an imaginary friend.

### **How Do you Get It?**

Even though a relationship with God is different than every other relationship that you have, it is also very similar as well. How do you build any other relationship that you have with any other person? Most of the time, you don't tell yourself, "I want to be friends with so and

so.” Sometimes, that happens with someone that you have a crush on, but most of the time, relationships happen naturally. You become friends with people that you go to school with or play sports with or live close to or go to church with.

A relationship with God doesn't happen that naturally, unfortunately. I wish that it did, but that isn't the case. First of all, someone else needs to introduce you to God. Someone needs to tell you about him. You can tell that God exists by just looking around at creation, but in order to really know him, someone has to tell you about him. I have a relationship with God because my parents told me about him. I think that is really cool. As Elliot gets older, I 'm going to be telling him about God, and hopefully Elliot will have a really deep relationship with God as well. That would be really cool if that was the case. I hope it is.

So, once someone tells you about God and how cool he is, how does that relationship grow and deepen? Just like any other relationship, you have to talk to the other person, and usually you have to do it pretty often. How often do you talk to your best friend? Multiple times a day, right? You and I both know that the way that you talk to God is through prayer. So we should be praying a lot during the day if we want to build a deep relationship with God.

How does God speak to us? If you say that God speaks to us through the Bible, you're right. But that isn't the only way that he speaks to us. He speaks to us through our pastors, and our teachers, and our parents. He speaks to us through other people who give us good advice. He speaks to us through Christian books and through songs. He even speaks to us through nature.

You see, in order for a relationship to grow, you need to learn more about the other person and they need to learn more about you. The crazy thing is that God already knows all about you. Even though the Bible tells us that he already knows more about ourselves than we do, we need to tell him things because that means that we are willing to give that part of ourselves over to God.

For us to learn more about God, we need to read the Bible because the Bible teaches us about who God is and what he is like. We know what he is going to do or what he is like because of what he has done in the past. God doesn't change, so the way that he has been is the way that he will always be. It's pretty cool that all you have to do to learn about God is to read the Bible and it tells you all about what he is like.

The other things that you need to do to have a deep relationship with God is to surround yourself with other people who love God and who also want to have a really deep relationship with him. When you connect with other Christians in this way, it is really cool because they can help you and you can help them. You can share with others and they can share with you what they know about God and what he is like. Others can also encourage you when the going gets tough.

### **Once you Have it, It's Still Tough**

So let's say that you do have a great relationship with God. It is really deep and really cool. You feel like you and him just click, and you've got a really good support group of other Christians that are really cool as well. It sounds like life is going to be pretty good and pretty easy.

Let's face it, having relationships with powerful people does make life easier and gives us a lot of privileges. Imagine that you were the son or daughter, or even the really good friend of a movie producer. They would let you come on the set of the movie and watch it being filmed.

You could meet the actors and have a good old time. Not everyone gets to do that. Imagine you're friends with the President. You'll probably get invited to the White House. Maybe you'll go to a fancy dinner. Other people would never get to see and do the things that you do. Knowing people in power has some really good perks, doesn't it?

What about having a really good relationship with the most powerful person in the world? Having a good relationship with God has a ton of perks as well. First of all, you know that God always loves you no matter what you do. That's pretty cool if you think about it. You can talk to the most powerful person in the world whenever you want. That's pretty cool too. Then there is the ultimate perk: if you have faith in Jesus, then you will have eternal life. Nothing beats that.

Knowing God comes with a lot of other perks and privileges as well that are pretty cool. We get to go through trials and temptations. People will make fun of us, and most likely hate us. We have restrictions on what we can and can't do. We get to put others ahead of ourselves. We get to give stuff up, maybe even our lives. We get to lead a tough life. Sounds pretty cool, huh? Lots of good perks, right?

If you do have a deep relationship with God, life is far from easy because when we have a really good relationship with God, we realize that life is not all about us. We come to realize how selfish we really are and how much we care about ourselves more than we care about others. When we have a really good relationship with God, we care a lot more about God and others than we do about ourselves, and as hard as that is, it is a really good thing.

Paul, a guy who wrote most of the books of the New Testament in the Bible, had one of the best relationships with God of anyone that has ever lived. How cool is that? Wouldn't you love it if people could say that about you? Paul's life was even close to easy, though. It was really hard. It would have been really easy for Paul to brag about his relationship with God and how cool it was that he and God were so tight. He and God were seriously BFF's. But he didn't brag about it, partly because he couldn't. God gave him a 'thorn in the flesh' so that he wouldn't become too proud. God allowed something to happen to Paul so that he would realize that even though he and God were really tight, he was still a man and not God.

God allows that to happen to us as well. He gives us trials and temptations as Christians so that we realize who we are and we realize how much we need God. The more that we realize how much we need God, the deeper the relationship that we have with him will be. We talked in HS guys D-group this past week about trials. What do trials lead to? Wisdom. Wisdom leads to a deeper relationship with God.

How is your relationship with God? Ok? Good but not Great? Who is God? As Christians, we are told to do two things over and over and over. Read your Bible and Pray. Read your Bible and Pray. Read your Bible and Pray. It's so true. If you don't have a good relationship with God, read your Bible and pray. That's where you got to start.