

## "How To Establish A Relationship With God"

by Bob Johnson, Pastor of Grace Point Church

In the years that I have been a pastor, I have talked and counseled with many people. The more I talk to people in San Diego County and around the country, the more I am motivated to share with people what God is really like and what Christianity is all about. Sadly, there are a lot of folks that have formed their conclusions from watching so called "evangelists" on television yell, cry and ask for more money or from recollections of sitting in a church while growing up and more enduring the time rather than getting anything out of it. I guess, one way to put it is that I found that most people that I have met are not "anti-God", it seems that they are just burned out on organized religion. If this more or less describes you, I understand how you feel! After graduating from high school, I decided that although church was good for some people, it just didn't meet my needs. Based on what I observed going to church almost every Sunday for seventeen years, I concluded that church (organized religion) had some B.I.G. problems. To me, it was **B**oring, **I**rrelevant and **G**loomy. The more religious people seemed to get, the bigger frown they seemed to have. Consequently, when I drove away from home to go to college, I felt that I was also driving away from my parent's religion. Although I kept a Bible, along with other philosophical books, I never intended to make church a regular part of my life. I might go on Christmas and Easter, maybe.

One Sunday night, about halfway through my freshman year at college, the girl I was presently dating told me she recently visited a church and asked if I would go with her. Reluctantly, I decided to go and that night was the beginning of a turning point for my life. The church met on the second floor of a YMCA building (which at first made me really nervous), but the people were friendly and more importantly, while visiting that church, I discovered that the Bible really did have some things to say that I could relate to. Along with hearing some Biblical principles that actually related to everyday life, I guess the biggest factor to my rising curiosity level was meeting some people who seemed to really have a personal relationship with God and not just "go through the religious motions". After awhile, it became clear to me that a church was not a building with a steeple, but a group of people that have discovered the joy of Christian living. In the next couple of months, I also discovered the difference between merely being religious and having a personal relationship with God. I used to think that to be a Christian, all that it took was to do the best you can to be the best person you can be and go to church every once in awhile. Through some careful study of the Bible, I began to understand that although Christianity is based on truths, it takes more than merely understanding these truths to become a Christian. Very simply, Christianity is not learning about God, but having a relationship with God and allowing God to lead and direct your life. In the following paragraphs, let me explain more about what the Bible says about how to know God in a personal way.

Most people live their entire lives without ever knowing "WHY?" They exist year after year with little idea of why they live or God's purposes for their lives. The most basic and foundational question a person can ask is, "What is the meaning of my life?" The reason why it is such an important question is that everyone wants to be fulfilled.

In our society, people try many ways to make their life "work". The three most common strategies for finding fulfillment is: acquiring as many possessions as one can, experiencing as much pleasure as one can and by gaining as much power (prestige) as one can. Although, there is nothing wrong with acquiring possessions, experiencing pleasure and gaining prestige, these will not satisfy our deepest needs. Real fulfillment comes from understanding who God has made you to be. When a person comes to know and love God and live in harmony with his purpose for their life, he or she will begin to experience the life that God wants all people to experience. The following is just a few of the benefits listed in the Bible that God makes available to us: clear conscience (Romans 8:1), help with weaknesses (Romans 8:26), growing confidence (Romans 8:31), life and peace (Romans 8:6), security (Romans 8:39) and fulfillment (Philippians 4:19).

The above is the kind of life-style that God intends for us to experience. The question then is "Why aren't most people really fulfilled?" or "Why are most people unaware of God's plan for their life?" The problem has a lot to do with the fact that mankind has a natural desire to be "boss" of their own lives and to basically ignore God's principles for living. The Bible calls this attitude of being your own boss "sin". Surprising to most, sin is not a mere action of doing something that you know is wrong, but according to the Bible, it is more an attitude that you want to stay in the "driver seat" of your life. Isaiah 53:6 says, *"All of us like sheep have gone astray, and each of us has turned to his own way."* All of us, at one time, have turned away from God's plan for our lives and are "doing our own thing" with our hands firmly grasped on the steering wheel of our life. A person can be the most religious person that he or she could possibly be, but the issue is not how religious or nice a person is, rather, whose hands are on the steering wheel. Let me explain ...

As a pastor, I talk and counsel with lots of people. One of the biggest misunderstandings about Christianity is that there is a difference between asking God for help and becoming a Christian. Imagine that your life is like a car and you are driving through your normal routine. All of a sudden you get a flat tire (you lose your job, a relationship ends, you get into financial difficulty etc.) and you ask God for help. God answers your prayers and helps you out of the situation. You are thankful for God's help and go on your way driving down the road of life. Notice, that although God has helped you with your situation, your hands are still on the steering wheel (you are still 'boss'). This goes on for a couple of days, weeks ... years .... asking God to help give you strength direction and support whenever the flat tires crash into your life.

Finally, after another flat tire, and after God helps you with the present crisis, God says, "Bob, instead of driving alone and calling out for my help when you get in trouble, why don't you let me drive. I know what is around the next corner and I would like to steer you away from some obstacles that would not be best for you." You see, the difference is not how nice or knowledgeable a person is, the issue is who is in the back seat and who is in the front seat. On February 17, 1980, I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life. Instead of merely asking God for help with my immediate situations, I chose to get in the back seat and let God begin steering (leading, managing) my life.

Since then, there have been some times that I wanted to jump back into the driver seat and "look out for #1" (namely me) thinking that I can manage my life better than God can. But, through the years, my confidence and security in God has been growing as I have gotten to know God through reading the Bible and experiencing his power in my life. You see, although I had grown up going to church, I still needed to come to the point of inviting Jesus Christ to come into my life, not as a mere helper of my immediate situation but as my boss or manager. Jesus said in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me."* Paul writes in Romans 5:8, *"God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still separated from God by sin, Christ died for us."*

In February of 1980, I came to finally realize that God has already done his part to restore my relationship with him. He took the initiative by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sins. Jesus Christ was the bridge that God built from me to Him. Although the bridge was there, I still had to walk across. If you would like to become a Christian, (no matter how religious you may or may not have been in the past), let me guide you through several steps to invite Jesus Christ to come into your life.

1. First, admit that God has not been first place in your life up until now. You might have sung a lot of songs, prayed a lot of prayers etc. but to be honest, there have been some areas in your life that you have kept locked up.
2. Second, believe that Jesus died to pay for your (and my) sins and is alive today.
3. Thirdly, accept God's free gift of a new life by inviting Jesus Christ to come into your life and be the manager (boss) of your life.

It is important that you don't try to earn your way to God. That is like trying to swim from San Diego to Hawaii. You might be a lot stronger than most, but even the strongest person alive could not make the distance. That is why God took the initiative with you. His offer of a new life is a free gift. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For it is by grace you are saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no can boast."*

You can take these steps by praying a simple prayer of commitment to God like the following:

*"Jesus, thank-you for making me and loving me. I realize I need you in my life. I ask you to forgive me for going my own way. Thank-you for dying on the cross for me. Please help me to understand it more. As much as I know how, I want to follow you from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I accept your gift of a brand-new life. Please help me to grow now as a Christian."*

If you have prayed this prayer, please let us know about it at Grace Point Church! We would like to give you some more material to help you grow as a new Christian. If you are still in the process of thinking things through, let me know how I can help. If you would like to talk about any issues regarding Christianity or anything else, please don't hesitate to give me a call anytime.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is a promise that I keep close to my heart. In Jeremiah 17:9, God says, "*For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*" The reason that I became a Christian back in 1980 was not that I was afraid that I might die that night. I became a Christian because I thought that I would probably be alive the next day and I wanted to live with God's resources available to me to meet this world head on with hope and security.

Although there are a lot of twisted pictures of God in our society, my prayer is that you will discover who God really is and that God will give you the courage to be honest with Him.