



## Session 3

# Getting to Know God

Being a successful Christian is all about developing a personal relationship with God.

We are not talking about religion here; religion is a system of rules and regulations that people follow, in the hope that they will be accepted by God. And this is not what the Bible teaches. It teaches that by faith we ARE accepted by God the moment we put our faith in Christ. From that point on, the Christian life is all about deepening our relationship with God and living in the light of that relationship.

### Relationships develop

All relationships develop by *spending time together*, and what is true of our human relationships is also true of our relationship with God.

Over time you get to know a person really well. You gradually get to know how they will respond in certain situations, you get to know their preferences, likes and dislikes, their favourite things and the things they hate.

Your relationship with God is just the same. As your relationship develops you get to know what God loves and what he hates; you discover how he will react in a given situation and his attitude to people, their actions and things that happen in the world. You gradually discover how to live in a way that pleases the Lord.

Being a Christian puts you in relationship with God. In fact, it places you in God's family. We read:

*'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ'.  
(Galatians 3:26-27)*

So, as someone who has repented, put their faith in Christ and been baptised, you are in God's family! You are in relationship with God, one of his children.

But just being in a relationship does not mean anything in real terms. Many family members have a very poor relationship with each other, and the same can be true of

Christians and their heavenly father. Our challenge is to develop a deep working relationship with God, to become his friend and well as his child. Someone of whom it can be said, *'they are just like their Dad!'*

In this lesson and the next, we will explore the *two* main ways we get to know God better:

- **By reading** the Bible, which tells us all about God and how he relates to people
- **By talking** with God and spending time with him – which is prayer

We will cover the first in this lesson:

## Getting to know God by reading the Bible

God makes himself known to people in a variety of ways. For example, through the creation, which speaks of his greatness and draws people towards him as a benevolent creator we should try to get to know. In fact the Bible indicates that the creation alone should be enough to attract people to God:

*'Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.'*

*(Romans 1:20) (also see Psalm 19:1-4)*

But God went further than that. He sent Jesus to deal with mankind's sin problem and he has given us the Bible as a written record of his dealings with humanity; it is essentially his story of wanting to restore relationship with us. So God has gone a long way to reach to people.

The Bible is an awesome book, unlike any other that exists. More than anything else, **it explains God to us**. So if you want to get to know God better you **MUST** read the Bible! Not because anyone says you should but because you want to. Bible reading must be driven by a desire to know God more and to deepen your relationship with him.

At first sight it is a big book! And it will take you a long time to fully understand. But that's not a problem. You have the rest of your life to explore it and to develop the adventure that is your relationship with God.

As Christians we believe that:

*'There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us'.*

*(2 Timothy 3:16-17 The Message).*

All of the Bible is useful for something! But some parts are more helpful than others in the early stages of your Christian life. That's why it is so important you are in a Church where older Christians can advise and help you in this regard.

## Demystifying the Bible

The Bible is seen by some as being just too thick! It's got too many words in it! And it is certainly too complicated for them to tackle. So they sit in church each week living off things other people teach them from the Bible... at least they hope it's from the Bible! And there lies the danger. Every Christian must be reading it for themselves, learning from it, deepening their understanding of God and his ways ... and what the preacher brings on a Sunday is the added bonus, not the main thing.

Let's explain a few things to help you get your head into the Bible:

- ❑ **The Bible is Unique:** The Bible is like no other book in the world. It is the vehicle of God's life to us. As we read it, the same Holy Spirit who lives in us and who directed the Bible writers, helps us to connect with the truth we are reading about God and how he wants us to live. So you will get something from it!
- ❑ **The Bible has two halves:** It is laid out in 2 sections we call the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament covers the period before Jesus came and the New Testament the period from Jesus onwards. There is clear progression between the two and an understanding of both is eventually needed to understand the full scheme of things.

Putting it simply, the Old Testament shows that people cannot successfully have a relationship with God because of their sin. They fail constantly. Sin separates us from God. So sin is the problem. But God wanted a relationship with people, so he sent Jesus to deal with the problem. This is anticipated in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. To use a picture from the Bible, the Old Testament was just a 'shadow' of the real thing - the 'substance' - which is Jesus and the teaching of the New Testament (*Hebrews 10:1*).

- ❑ **The Bible is 66 books:** Though presented as a single book, it is actually 66 pieces of writing collected together. Each has a contribution to make to the overall scheme of things. The books were written hundreds of years apart from each other by a range of human authors, yet they have a sense of unity and consistent themes from start to finish, which is part of the Bible's amazing uniqueness. It is either a massive coincidence or God was the real author of the books! And we believe the latter.

They different books also represent different types of literature. There are 3 main types:

- *History books* - The Story line which is contained in just 22 books.

- *Prophecy* books - These record what God was saying about events on earth at particular times in history: 18 books.
  - *Books of Experience* - Which teach us about the experience of individuals and the Church. These include books sometimes called the books of wisdom, poetry and the New Testament letters: 26 books.
- **The Bible is Food:** The Bible is more than words and teachings to apply. It is the ‘word of life’ to us who believe in God. Reading and thinking about the Bible is essential to good spiritual health and growth. In fact the Bible works in our life like:
- **Bread**  
*‘It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth’.*  
*(Matthew 4:4 The Message)*
  - **Milk**  
*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:2-3)*

Bread and milk are staple foods, everyday foods, not luxuries. By describing God’s word this way, he is teaching us that we need to read it daily to stay spiritually fed, strong and growing.

- **The Bible is a Teacher:** It teaches us about God; what God loves and hates; appropriate behaviour and attitudes for the Christian... and much more. Living a God-centred life involves getting to know what God likes and dislikes, and living accordingly. This takes time but will gradually influence how we think, feel and act in every situation life presents to us.

## The practicalities

- **Get yourself a Bible:**

They come in lots of versions simply because the original Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, so we are reading a translation into English. Get a version that is translated in modern readable English like the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT) or the Message (MSG). At Abundant Life Church we tend to use NIV when we are preaching.

- **Find your way around:**

Use the *index* to help you find your way around your Bible. It is also useful to get one with a *Concordance* at the back – this is an easy way to find verses with key words you may be looking for. Get a Christian friend to show you how to use it. Also, check out [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) which is a free web based bible study site. There you can read lots of versions, search for key words and themes and find reading plans to guide your personal study.

- **Read a little regularly:**

Make it your goal to read a section of your Bible regularly. Some people like to use one of the many daily reading plans. Check out 'Every Day With Jesus' or 'Word For Today'. Again, ASK your Christian friends for some guidance on this and you will soon be discovering that reading the Bible is great fun and deepens your relationship with God