

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 22 November 2020**

# Children's Talk: Come and See for Yourself

- We're talking today about having a relationship with the Lord.
  - A relationship means the way that we're connected with another person.
    - You have a relationship with your mom;
    - you can have a relationship with your brother or sister;
    - a relationship with your friend, *etc.*
  - How do we have a relationship with the Lord when we can't see Him or touch Him in the same way that we can with other people?
    - Let's read about how the Lord's disciples first starting having their relationships with the Lord and see what we can learn from that.
  
- First, there's John the Baptist's.
  - John had been given a message that he would see the Spirit coming down on someone and that he should tell people that that person is the Son of God.
  - When he baptised Jesus he saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and remaining upon Jesus.
  - And so John told people, "This is the Son of God" (John 1:34).
  - Then we read this:
    - John 1:35-36 (NKJV)
      - <sup>35</sup> Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"
  
- John had an amazing experience of Jesus and so He points Jesus out to other people, including two of the people who had been following John.
  - And so those disciples go and have their own experience with Jesus:
    - John 1:37-39 (NKJV)
      - <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?"
      - They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?"
      - <sup>39</sup> He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).
  
- So those disciples go and spend time with Jesus for themselves and then listen what one of them says to his brother:
  - John 1:40-42 (NKJV)
    - <sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup> He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). <sup>42</sup> And he brought him to Jesus.
  
- So then Simon has his own experience of Jesus.
- The next day even more people do.
  - John 1:43-49 (NKJV)
    - <sup>43</sup> The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." .... <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found

Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

<sup>46</sup> And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

<sup>47</sup> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!”

<sup>48</sup> Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

<sup>49</sup> Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

- Nathaniel had doubts.
  - He wasn't sure whether to believe what other people told him about Jesus.
    - You might have doubts too.
    - You might not be sure how you're supposed to have a relationship with the Lord when you can't see Him.
  - But what did Philip tell Nathaniel to do when he had doubts?
    - “Come and see.”
    - Come and see for yourself.
      - It's harder for us because we can't go and see the Lord physically but
        - we can pray to Him,
        - we can ask Him for help,
        - we can talk to Him about what we're struggling with and think about what He would do if He were in our situation.
- The point is to work on your own relationship with the Lord.
  - Each disciple had a different experience.
  - Your experience will be different from your parents' or friend's or anyone else's experience.
  - The first step is to try to come and see the Lord for yourself.
- *Amen.*

# Building Relationships, Part 1: An Active Relationship with the Lord

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
22 November 2020

## Intro

- Last Sunday, as part of the Semi-AGM, I was talking about the vision of New Church Westville which is to be a community that builds relationships—with the Lord, with each other, within marriage, with children, and with the broader community.
  - I find that vision to be quite powerful, particularly when you get into the details of what that means.
  - And so, in the two weeks before we get into Christmas topics in church, I wanted to have us flesh out this vision of being a community that builds relationships.
    - Today, I'm going to talk about building an active relationship with the Lord; and next week Joel will talk about building relationships with other people.
- The vision statement, which is included in its entirety in the readings handout, has more specifics about how we build relationships with the Lord and those different groups.
  - Here's the vision it describes of the kind of relationship we are striving to have with the Lord:
    - "We each have an active relationship with the Lord – walking with Him, learning from Him and asking what He wants us to do, turning to Him in times of need and joy, and getting His help in turning away from what is harmful."
- We're going to go through this, phrase by phrase, and talk about a little bit of what's contained in it.

## Each

- The first thing it says is that we *each* have a relationship with the Lord.
- This is a really important thing to remember.
  - We each have an individual relationships with our Creator and Heavenly Father.
    - Like in the story for the Children's Talk, Peter's experience and relationship with the Lord was different from Nathaniel's at the beginning and all the way through their lives too.
- It can be very useful to have the influence of people around you, in your family or church community who have a relationship with the Lord, but that is no substitute for your own, individual relationship.
  - Just because your sister has a good relationship with your dad and you hang out with your sister doesn't actually mean that *you* have a good relationship with your dad.
    - It's the same with the Lord; we *each* need to have a relationship with Him.
- That being said, I was reflecting on my own relationship with the Lord and what has helped it develop and grow and I realised that a significant factor has been hearing about other people's relationships with the Lord.
  - I was thinking along these lines yesterday and so decided to contact two people in the church community about what having an active relationship with the Lord means to them.

- It was really enriching and inspiring and beautiful to see the ways in which what they each said was very similar and at the same time unique to them and their individual relationships with the Lord.
  - I'll share a few things from those conversations in this sermon but one of the main things that I hope that you'll do after this sermon is to find someone to talk to about their relationship with the Lord.
    - Ask them, "What does it mean to you to have an active relationship with the Lord?"
    - And also try to answer it for yourself.
- Part of what I found—particularly in one of the conversations—is that we were both figuring out useful things about our relationships with the Lord in the work of attempting to put words around it and talk about it.
  - There are things that you do and know on some level but haven't fully thought through and talking about them can bring a lot more definition and clarity.
  - So talk to someone about their relationship with the Lord and your relationship with the Lord and you may find that you know more than you thought you did.
    - And you may also find—like I did—that you also have more clarity than you thought you did about what you might do to build your relationship with the Lord.

## An Active Relationship

- We're doing well—we've covered one word so far: each.
  - The next word from the vision statement I want to talk about is active.
    - "We each have an *active* relationship with the Lord."
- What's the opposite of an *active* relationship with the Lord?
  - Maybe a *passive* relationship with the Lord?
- We all have passive relationships.
  - Where one person in the relationship does the majority of the work to reach out and maintain contact and find times and ways to hang out and do things together and the other person in the relationship just manages to sometimes respond to some of the reaching out from the other person.
    - I've been in both sides of relationships like this.
  - So the question here is, is your relationship with the Lord passive?
    - The Lord says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:20).
      - Will we hear His voice and open the door so that He can come in and dine with us or are we too busy doing other things to even notice that He's at the door?
- You might be wondering, "What does it mean to have an active relationship with the Lord?"
  - And that's a good question and we'll get into that as we look at the other phrases in the vision statement.
  - But, at a very basic level, I think this is a good place to start in evaluating our relationship with the Lord and in trying to figure out how to improve it.
    - How active is it and how could I make it a *more* active relationship?
    - Because a relationship with no activity, no interactivity, no reciprocity is not a relationship at all.
- The Lord will do the vast majority of the work in the relationship—in fact He already is—but whether we have an active relationship with Him comes down to our decisions.

- It's not His call.
- It's up to us.
- And it will continue to be up to us whether we continue to have an active relationship with Him.
  - The work we've done in the past on a relationship can go a really long way to having a good active relationship in the present but that only works if we stay active.
    - A marriage where both people worked hard on it for ten years will have a lot of strengths to it but, if one person suddenly stops putting any effort into the relationship in the present, the relationship will go down quickly.
      - One of the people I spoke to said, "I have always thought that at least a daily conversation is essential to maintain a relationship."
- I don't know exactly what an active relationship with the Lord will look like for you but I do think it will involve daily choices.
  - Let's get into more of the specifics of what those daily choices might look like.

## **Walking With Him**

- The vision statement says, "We each have an active relationship with the Lord – walking with Him,...."
- Walking reminds me of the Lord telling the disciples, "Follow Me," or telling a paralysed man, "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (John 5:8; Matthew 9:5; Mark 2:9; Luke 5:23).
  - It's a command from the Lord to use what we have—to go somewhere, to accomplish something, to try to get from point A to point B.
  - That was a striking similarity between what both people I spoke to said: they both talked about their relationship with the Lord in terms of how He helps them to navigate daily interactions and decisions.
    - They are interacting with the Lord as they move through their lives, as they work on what they're working on.
- Somehow we can get trapped in thinking that belief in the Lord or faith in the Lord is just about the thoughts and feelings that we have about the Lord.
  - And those are important but people can beat themselves up feeling like, "I've got so many doubts. I feel so far away from the Lord. I don't know how other people can have such faith in Him when it's so hard for me."
    - I don't want to say that those thoughts and feelings are unimportant or act as though they aren't really challenging to deal with—because they are.
    - But the solution to these sorts of thoughts and feelings is *not* to try to think your way out of it or somehow pull yourself up by your own bootstraps by just deciding to believe harder.
- The solution is to humble yourself to walk with your God (Micah 6:8).
  - To try to follow Him.
  - To follow His example in how He loved and served other people (John 13:15).
  - To follow His teachings as best we can.
    - Because it's in the living out of those things that we will experience the truth of them.

- It will be in trying to do things His way, with His help, that we will come to have more faith and confidence in Him and more belief and that His way of doing things is good and right.
- The Lord says,
  - Matthew 11:28-29 (NKJV)
    - <sup>28</sup> “Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”
- If we take on His yoke—doing things His way, according to His teachings and commandments—then we will experience rest for our souls and a real relationship with our God.
- Of course, to be able to follow what the Lord teaches, we do also need to learn from Him to *know* what He teaches, which leads us to the next phrase:
  - “We each have an active relationship with the Lord – walking with Him, learning from Him and asking what He wants us to do,....”

## **Learning from Him and Asking What He Wants Us To Do**

- This was a really interesting phrase for me to reflect on because I’m all about religious knowledge.
  - I love reading lots in the teachings of the New Church and the Bible and trying to understand it better and put all the different pieces together.
    - It can be really challenging but also beautiful and exciting when something clicks or makes sense in a way that it didn’t before.
  - And all of that is very valuable and worth doing, if people are looking towards *using* it.
    - If people are just looking to store up more knowledge, then suddenly it is no longer useful.
    - Think about a huge warehouse full of grain and how many thousands of people it could feed.
      - So useful!
    - Then think about a huge warehouse that keeps on having more grain put into it but no grain comes out of it to feed anyone.
      - Instead of being useful it’s a colossal and almost criminal waste.
- We aren’t always going to be able to use everything we learn from the Lord’s Word right away.
  - There is a value in storing things up for later use but we need to be aiming towards use in the long run.
  - One of the people I was talking to was saying that, to them, “Knowledge without application is the single biggest danger to the believer. Having the knowledge makes zero difference in and of itself—absolutely none.”
- He then talked about how he uses the knowledge of the Lord and what He teaches and it was mostly in terms of having a conscience.
  - He said that he’s not great about praying regularly or reading the Bible, though he does do those things to some degree.
  - But he said that the one thing that he’s not bad at—the one thing gives him some claim of having a relationship with God—is having an awareness of God’s presence, having a Godly conscience.

- Experiencing guilt when he's done something wrong.
- Not justifying his flaws but rather squirming inwardly.
- Looking at himself honestly in an unflattering mirror.
- He also said that the measure of his relationship with God is being able to look back on his life and see some amount of change in a positive and more loving direction.
  - He also commented that he is profoundly dissatisfied with the lack of change that he sees in himself and how slow it is but also recognises that that's par for the course because of how big the change is that the Lord is trying to accomplish in him and in everyone.
- He also talked about how this also comes into the conversations that he has with his wife and family.
  - What behaviours are not good because they will take them away from the Lord.
  - Using God as the yardstick—allowing Him to determine what's important and what's not and even what is reality.
- There's a lot of knowledge that's required to have a developed, accurate, and active conscience but do you see how all of this knowledge is knowledge that is being applied and used?
- The other person I spoke to described a different experience of learn from the Lord and ask Him what He wants them to do.
  - They described talking to the Lord daily—an ongoing conversation that was necessary for getting through life with its hardships.
  - This person describes how their more intentional prayer time was often at night before sleeping and usually they would have a clear answer to their questions around 3 a.m., on which decision to make, or the way forward.
  - They spoke of relying on “that gentle, quiet, internal voice to help [them] make decisions.”
  - And they said that they also rely on specific scriptural passages that they receive from different sources which usually coincide.
    - Again, knowledge of the Lord and what He teaches plays a very important role but it is knowledge that is being used to figure out how to go forward in walking with the Lord.

## **Turning to Him in Times of Need and Joy**

- “We each have an active relationship with the Lord – walking with Him, learning from Him and asking what He wants us to do, turning to Him in times of need and joy,....”

### ***Times of Need***

- Times of need can sometimes be what wakes us up to the fact that we need to have a relationship with the Lord.
  - Kind of like only calling up a family member when we need something from them.
    - Not a stellar moment but maybe it can be the beginning of putting work into the relationship again.
  - And it's an important step in our relationship with the Lord to realise that we need Him.
    - As long as we're thinking that we're honestly just fine without an active relationship with the Lord, we're rather unlikely to put much work into it.
    - So times of need can be a blessing in that way.

- However, times of need can also be a barrier in our relationship with the Lord.
  - If tragic or terrible things have happened to us or the people that we care about, it can feel an awful lot like God did it to us or to them.
  - And it can be hard to trust that it could be good to have a relationship with Him when it feels like He's broken our trust that He's going to look after us.
    - One of the people I spoke to said that they had a bleak patch after a significant person in their life passed away and, for a while, they were less connected with the Lord and felt more distant from Him.
- If you've had an experience like this, it might be that the first thing you need to do to build your relationship with the Lord is to talk to Him about your pain and all that happened and how you wish He had made something else happen.
  - Pray to Him to help you see the situation from a different perspective and ask Him to help you get through your current time of need.

### ***Times of Joy***

- Times of joy are great but it is very easy to forget all about the Lord when things are good.
- We can get into a habit of praying regularly when going through a crisis but then, once it's over, that habit can easily fall away again.
- So it's good to develop habits to remember to thank the Lord.
  - Singing worship songs that resonate with us can be a great way to do that.
  - Or keeping a simple gratitude journal where we record things we are grateful for can also be surprisingly powerful.
  - Or just remembering to thank the Lord and mean it in the morning or the evening or at meal times.
    - A number of people in the New Church say these words at meal times, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy is forever" (Psalm 106:1).
      - If you say those words, try to think of something specific from that day that you are giving thanks to the Lord for.

### **Getting His Help in Turning Away from What is Harmful**

- Let's talk about the last part of the statement:
  - "We each have an active relationship with the Lord – walking with Him, learning from Him and asking what He wants us to do, turning to Him in times of need and joy, and getting His help in turning away from what is harmful."
- This last phrase is perhaps the most important.
- Certainly, if we are not getting the Lord's help in turning away from what is harmful, then we don't actually have much of a relationship with Him.
  - That might sound odd.
    - Isn't the Lord supposed to love us no matter what?
    - Yes, but it goes back to the question of whether we're willing to open the door when He knocks or not.
      - The biggest thing that slams the door in the Lord's face is when we insist on doing and loving hellish things.
  - Another way of understanding this reality is to think of the Lord as the parent of all the other human beings on the planet.

- If we are trying to have a relationship with the Lord but also not willing to turn away from what's harmful then it's like we're saying to the Lord, "I want to have a relationship with you and I also want you to be OK with me mistreating and hurting your children. Cool? Cool!"
  - That wouldn't work in a relationship with another normal human being and it certainly doesn't work in our relationship with the Lord.
- Instead, time and time again, the Lord calls us to turn to Him and get His help in fighting and getting away from our evil inclinations.
  - For example, in Isaiah we read:
    - Isaiah 55:6-7 (NKJV)
      - <sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while He may be found,  
Call upon Him while He is near.
      - <sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake his way,  
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
Let him return to the LORD,  
And He will have mercy on him;  
And to our God,  
For He will abundantly pardon.
- There is nothing that the Lord can't help us work through, if we have an active relationship with Him, in which we're willing to look at ourselves honestly and fight our hardest to do what's right, with His help.
  - He will have mercy on us and pardon us for our wrongdoing.
  - And He can and He will help us to forsake wickedness and return to Him.
  - And this will help us to have faith in Him and an active relationship with Him like nothing else.
    - *Doctrine of Faith* §12
      - If someone thinks to himself or says to another, "Who is capable of an internal acknowledgment of truth so as to have faith in it? I am not," I say to him, "This is how: refrain from evils as being sins and turn to the Lord, and you will have as much as you desire."

## Conclusion

- We all fall short of this vision of an active relationship with the Lord in one way or another.
- And yet that's all the more reason to pursue a good and active relationship with Him with all our hearts, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength.
  - And the more we gain a good relationship with the Lord, the more we will see just how much we need it.
- So my hope and my prayer is that each of you will grow in your relationship with the Lord by working on it actively each day from now till eternity.
- *Amen.*