

Your God is Too Distant (Part 2)

How to Connect With God

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September 12-13, 2015

Your God is Too...Series

Psalm 19

I want you to imagine that you are in an airport in some strange city late at night, or you are in a large gallery in a museum just before closing time, or you are sitting in the waiting room of a hospital after all the patients are asleep. Just one of those big public places where the light is dim, the air is still, and the room is empty except for you and one other person, who is seated 10 feet away from you. You're both just sitting passing the time. You are on one side of a row of seats in the airport and not too far away, facing in your direction, on the other side of the row of seats is this other person. The silence in the room is so deep that you could almost hear it.

There is no demand that you speak to one another. Neither of you are obligated to say something. This other person is a total stranger to you. They may be much older than you, or younger than you. They may be a different nationality and have a completely different history.

There you are, just the two of you in this room sitting, waiting. Everything you are, the whole mystery of your person – your fears, your thoughts, your loves, your dreams, and your relationships – everything about is you totally hidden from this stranger. And everything about the stranger is totally hidden from you.

But on impulse, you decide to say something. Just a little thing. "I take this plane all the time back to Columbus. I hope it is not delayed again. I really want to get home." Or, "I always liked that painting that you're looking at. I really love that artist." Or, "it's too bad the cafeteria isn't open. They've really improved the food with that new food service." Something, some impulse inside of you causes you to break the silence with some little statement, some silly thing that you say.

Why do you speak? Was it because you suddenly felt lonely? You talk just to hear the sound of your own voice?

Maybe there is this impulse in us to connect to someone else, to disclose a little bit of ourselves and to not be a complete mystery to others and to not have them be a complete mystery to us. If the stranger hears you, a little bridge is built between you and them, a point of connection, an opening of a window.

This human longing to connect extends to the extremely common desire that we find all over the world, in all different kinds of cultures, all different sorts of people. This desire to connect

extends to the extremely common desire to connect with God. There is something in us that wants to connect with whatever or whoever is out there.

But how do we do that? How do we connect? How do we build a little bridge, or open a window to God? Is there just one prescribed method for connecting with God? Do this, say that? Or are there multiple ways, multiple paths? Even for followers of Christ, who say the way we connect with God is through Jesus, the question still remains: how do we followers of Christ connect with Jesus? Is it one method? One way? One path? Or are there multiple paths? Are there different ways to open the window to Christ, to build a little bridge to Christ?

So often when people talk about connecting with God, we talk about it as if it doesn't matter who the person is who wants to connect. That we're all the same and it doesn't matter how you're wired or what your interests are, or how you think. Sometimes in church it is absolutely the case that we communicate that there is really one ideal way, one true method for connecting with Christ, no matter who you are, no matter how you're wired.

Anyone who has ever worked on a team in an office, or been on one of those team building retreats anywhere in America, you've probably taken one of those temperament tests – a Myers-Briggs test, a DISC test, or more recently a test that's become very popular among Christians, the Enneagram Test. Certainly, if you've ever been on one of those dating sites – e-Harmony, or Match.com, or Christian Mingle – you've had to take some sort of test regarding your interests, your values, and your personality. Are you an extrovert or an introvert? Are you energized around people, or are you drained? Do you connect with the world through your five senses, or through your imagination? Are you, according to the Meyers-Briggs test, a sensor or an intuitor?

How do you process the data you've taken in – with your head or with your heart? Are you a thinker or a feeler? Do you mainly use logic and intellect, or do you mainly consider how things will affect other people? Once you've taken in all of this information, how do you arrange the world that you interact with – in an orderly, managing, more controlling way, or are you super-flexible, spontaneous, always open to new possibilities all of the time?

Personality tests have shown us that we're all different in the way we do relationships, what we need from other people. Do we need lots of space to wind around and tell a story, painting the whole picture before we get to the point? Or do we like to bottom line it? We sit tapping our fingers while the person talks about anything and everything before they make their simple point.

In the same way that we have different personalities and different emotional temperaments, we also have different spiritual temperaments – different main ways based on our wiring that we find it easy or hard to connect with God. An author, Gary Thomas, wrote a book several years ago titled Sacred Pathways to describe 9 different ways people connect with God.

Cover Photo of Sacred Pathways by Gary Thomas

We have copies of this book at our Cooper Road Bookstore.

Last week I started a series titled “Your God is Too...” During this series I plan to talk about all the reduced and distorted views we have of God that keep us from experiencing God, that keep us from believing that God really wants to bring his presence to us so that we could know him better, love him more, really enjoy our relationship with God. Today, in week 2 of this series, I want to talk about some of the very different ways that different ones of us can discover a path that will work for us in connecting with God. I’ve called today’s talk, “Your God is Too Distant: How to Connect With God.”

I said in my opening talk that it has always been the purpose of God to share his presence with people, who could enjoy him, connect with him, and disclose themselves to him as he discloses himself to us. The reason why there is something rather than nothing, the reason why God created the world in the beginning, was to share his presence with living beings who could experience him and be in a love relationship with him. The Christian idea of God is that God is not this solitary, lonely being. The Christian idea of God is that God is eternally a Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That God, from all eternity is a community of love – love flowing back and forth between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this community of love is like a fountain overflowing, or a vortex wanting to pull other beings into love. To be saved is to be pulled into the love of God, to be drawn into this eternal community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To be lost is to be permanently excluded from this community of love.

If that is God’s purpose, then why don’t we connect with him? Why do we often feel like God is a million miles away? That if there is a God, maybe he lives on Mars, or beyond Pluto somewhere outside of our solar system, outside of our galaxy. Lots of us say “I believe in God,” but we never feel pulled into this community of love. Lots of us believe that there may be a God, but as a practical matter it doesn’t make any difference in our daily lives whether God exists or not. We’re not aware of him. We don’t feel his presence. We don’t feel connected to him.

Why is that?

I suggested last week a couple of negative reasons that keep us from connecting with God. One reason is that we run from God. We hide from God. We don’t want to come out into the bright light of God’s truth, into the bright light of God’s reality. We would rather weave together a fantasy world of our own making, cover ourselves with our own illusion about what life is all about and how we might find fulfillment in life. Sometimes we run from God because we don’t like God poking around in our lives.

And sometimes we don’t connect with God because we don’t recognize his presence even when he is there. Like a seed growing beneath the ground, we say nothing is happening when something is really happening.

Today I want to speak more positively about not what keeps us from connecting with God, but what are some of the paths we might walk on to connect with God based upon our wiring, our spiritual temperaments? How can you, being who you are, build a little bridge, or open a window to connect in a more personal, a more tangible way to this incredible being we call God? I'm going to suggest today six pathways to connect with God.

We can connect to God through nature

We can connect to God through other people

We can connect to God through service

We can connect to God through study

We can connect to God through prayer

We can connect to God through worship

Typically, we will gravitate to one or two of these things based upon our temperaments. But I want to suggest to you that as we grow in our relationship with God, we ought to have all six ways of connecting somewhere at work in our lives. We're not only opening one window to God, we want all the windows in the house opened. We don't want just one little footbridge built to God, we want to build a six-lane highway to God.

I've arranged these things in increasing levels of intimacy. To use a picture from the Old Testament and the Old Testament Temple, we can move from the outer court

Picture of the Outer Court

enjoying nature, to the inner court,

Picture of the Inner Court

Connecting through others or through service to the Holy Place,

Picture of the Holy Place

Connecting through study and prayer; and then inside the Holy of Holies

Photo of Holy of Holies

where God was. Connecting through worship. Left foot, right foot, left foot...step by step into increasing intimacy. So let's begin. How do we connect with God?

We can connect with God through nature

Psalm 19:1–4 (NIV)

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
- 2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
- 3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
- 4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

Have you ever stood next to something that is really big and have been awed by its size? I don't mean standing next to a Big Mac, or a Whopper. Have you ever stood next to a Redwood tree and realized that this tree is also a living thing and it is so much more massive than you are? Or have you stood under a model of a blue whale in a natural history museum? Have you ever been forced to be silent by the magnitude, the grandeur of something you were standing next to? Maybe you've stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon, or you've stood at the bottom of Pike's Peak, or Mt. Kilimanjaro, or one of the Himalayas. Or maybe you've been out in the desert or on a cruise somewhere away from all the light pollution from the city and you've looked out at the vastness of the Milky Way, looking at stars that are millions of light years away. How do you feel when you look at something that is really big?

Of course, we're shrunk down to size. We feel small. But more than that sometimes what I feel is awe. And what I'm near doesn't have to be really big for me to feel awe. I remember holding my two children right after they were born. I looked down at this little baby boy and this little baby girl and I thought, "Goodness, Marlene's and my body produced this other beautiful living person." Psalm 19 tells us that God uses the natural world to speak to us and to connect us with God.

The songwriter, Bob Dylan, said

*I can see the Master's hand
In every leaf that trembles,
In every grain of sand.*

The more we delve into the beauty of nature, the more it speaks about the wonder of God. Psalm 148:3 says this:

Psalm 148:3 (NIV)

- 3 Praise him, sun and moon;

praise him, all you shining stars.

Do you know that every second our sun burns up 4 million tons of its own mass? Every second the sun releases the equivalent of a 1.8 billion hydrogen bombs. To get a feel for how massive the sun is, it's losing 4 million tons of mass every second and it won't burn out for 6 billion years. Psalm 148.3 says:

Psalm 148:3 (NIV)

3 Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.

Our sun is enormous. But in the wider scheme of things, it is just an average size star, one of about 200 billion in our Milky Way galaxy. It is not just the big things, but the really little things that you can only see under a microscope that connect us with the infinite creativity of God.

I don't know how many of you are familiar with the name Wilson Bentley. He was born at the end of the 19th century. He is called the "snowflake man." It is from William Bentley that we get the phrase,

No two snowflakes are the same.

William Bentley spent 50 years studying and photographing these fragile jewels. He was fascinated scientifically and artistically with snow crystals. He took 5000 different photos of snow crystals. Here is what William Bentley said:

Under the microscope I found that snowflakes were miracles of beauty...every crystal was a masterpiece of design, and no one design was ever repeated.

That's just one snowflake that will melt on your tongue. Nature points to the infinite creativity of God. How many of you would say, "I connect with God best through nature when I'm outside, or when I walk in a park, or when I walk in the woods, or when I sit by a lake. I connect with God best through nature."

I grew up in the city, but many mornings I get up and take a walk along the bike trail behind my home. As I feel the sun on my face, as I watch the wind blowing through the leaves of the trees, as I listen to the birds, and as I look at the sky, I feel more alive. I feel like I'm throwing windows open to God. I love to walk and talk with God outside. I'm not cramped up in a little space with some neon light vibrating over my head.

How else can we connect with God?

We can connect with God through other people

Many of you have heard this story. A man was stuck on his rooftop during a flood. He was praying to God for help. Soon someone came up in a rowboat and shouted the man on the roof, “Jump in! I will save you.” The man on the roof shouted back, “No. I’m praying to God. He’s going to save me.” So the man in the rowboat rowed away.

Then a motorboat came by and the sailor in the motorboat shouted, “Jump in. I will save you.” But the stranded man said, “No. I’m praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith.” So the motorboat took off.

A helicopter came by and the pilot shouted down, “Grab this rope. I will lift you to safety.” The stranded man said, “No. I’m praying to God. He’s going to save me. I have faith.” So the helicopter flew away.

Soon the water rose above the rooftop. The man drowned and he went to heaven. He finally got the chance to discuss this whole situation with God. He said to the Lord, “I had faith in you, but you didn’t save me. Why did you let me drown? I don’t understand.”

God replied, “I sent you a rowboat, a motorboat, and a helicopter. What more did you want from me?”

God uses people to connect with us. I think of folks struggling with depression and praying to God that God would heal their depression. On occasion, God instantaneously touches people’s brains and releases them from long-term depression. But most often God uses people to lift us up when we’ve fallen into the pit.

A follower of Jesus named Peter wrote these words:

1 Peter 4:10–11 (NIV)

10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

It is the case that God sometimes completely heals cancer without chemo, or headaches without an aspirin, or a broken leg without having to get a cast. But most often, God uses people to heal us.

I did a funeral a few weeks ago for a faithful church member. One woman gave a eulogy in which she said, “So and so had a lot of problems in her life. She lived a really hard life. But one thing she did right; she got in the boat called ‘the church’ and she never got out.” People who get in the boat and never get out connect with people in the church will find themselves connecting with God. So many people get in and out of the boat. That’s why we continually urge you here

to not do the Christian life alone. Get in the boat and stay there. Yes, become a member of the church through our Membership 101 Class, but then take the next step and get into a small group, a women's group, or a men's group.

This week at our Cooper Road campus we're starting two larger fellowships – one for women and one for men on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m.

Men's Ministry offering Authentic Manhood series, "A Man & His Traps", being led by Charles Montgomery

Women's Ministry offering Beth Moore series, "When Godly People do Ungodly Things," also being offered Thursday mornings at 9:30 AM by Women's Ministry

God connects with us through other people. I want to share with you a testimony from the leader of one of our addiction recovery groups.

A Lone Sheep is a Dead Sheep

I manage an office in Columbus, but on Monday nights I get together with about 70 men who are trying to recover from sexual addictions.

For these men, sex has become not some incredible physical, emotional and even spiritual pleasure, but something that's destroyed trust, broken vows and left families in shambles. Just last night on my local news I saw a story about a man being tried for 42 counts of abusing elementary school children. Stories like that.

For many it started out easily enough when, as a kid, we saw our father's magazines. For others it was something forced upon us by an abusive parent, sibling or someone from the neighborhood or school.

Today, of course, the internet has amplified the access and stakes for the men I work with. It can be pretty dark. My friends on Monday nights are drawn in, but left empty. And it's my story too. For almost 10 years, I've been recovering. For me it was like falling off a cliff and landing at the bottom ... which happens to be quicksand. It softens the blow, but the harder you struggle to get out the deeper you sink in. Eventually you lose hope and strength. The recovery statistics are grim for addicts of any kind.

That said, I read about one group of addicts who are having a remarkable rate of recovery. In her great book [It Takes a Family: A Cooperative Approach to Lasting Sobriety](#), Debra Jay writes:

But what if I told you there was a group of addicted people who almost never relapse in the years following treatment? As a matter of fact, 78 percent never have a single relapse. Less than 15 percent have one relapse but not a second. And those with more than one relapse? A whopping 7 percent.

This amazing, non-relapsing group of addicts are all doctors in a program with tremendous love, support and daily accountability. They sign on to calling a number every day for 5 years to find out if they have to go in and be tested.

You can't shame an addict to stop using—shame being what drove them to addiction in the first place. But, if they want to get better, you can develop a support system that offers them meaningful positive rewards and negative consequences in which there's a clear understanding of what they need to do.

For years I told myself I could stop, that I was smart enough and strong enough. Those daily messages turned out to be lies that empowered me to keep using. As I approach my 10 year point in recovery and as I work with my Monday night group, a few wall-plaque sentiments strike me as the truth about our addictions.

A Lone Sheep is a Dead Sheep. Isolation dooms us.

Recovery Happens in Community. It only works with clear accountability and support.

This month is National Recovery Month. Vineyard Columbus hosts every Friday evening something called “Celebrate Recovery.” It is not just for those who are struggling with what we consider addiction. There are open share groups for addictions – men’s sexual addiction, women’s sexual addiction, alcohol, chemical dependency, gambling, and so on. But there are also groups for folks struggling with codependency, compulsive eating, and mental health challenges, anything that is tying you up. And you say, “How do I connect with God when I have this in my life?”

If you want to find out more information about Celebrate Recovery or any of our programs, you can contact:

debra.johnson@vineyardcolumbus.org or by calling 614.259.5289

We do it by connecting with other people. How do we connect with God?

We can connect with God through service

Jesus said:

Matthew 25:35–40 (NIV)

35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

So often as we go through our lives we say, “I’m not feeling Christ’s presence in the way that it seems like he promised when he said, ‘I will be with you always even to the end of the age.’ I’m not experiencing Christ. I believe in him. I invited Christ to live in my life by his Spirit. But I don’t feel him. How can I experience more of Christ?”

Here is part of the answer. Be where Christ is. In Matthew 25 Jesus tells us where he is. He is with the poor. He is with the hungry. He is with the immigrant. He is with the prisoner and the sick. He is with the woman who is being trafficked. He is with the pregnant single girl thinking about getting an abortion. He is with a homeless man sleeping out in the cold.

Here is my experience as a follower of Jesus Christ for over 40 years, whenever I put myself in the position of being with the people that Jesus talked about in Matthew 25 – the hungry, the immigrant (that’s what “I was a stranger” means. It doesn’t just mean someone new to the city, someone new to the country; someone who is a foreigner), when I go to a hospital and am with the sick, whenever I put myself in a position to be with these folks, to serve them, or to pray for them, I experience Jesus.

I’ve had this experience when I’ve volunteered at our food pantry. Did you know, by the way, that Vineyard Columbus has two food pantries?

181 E. 5th Avenue

That’s right between Summit and 4th. And the other is located at

4664 Cleveland Avenue

...which is located just north of Morse Road on the eastside of the street. You can show up any Saturday morning to help out.

Here is my experience. I’ve started off at 8:30 on Saturday morning. I’m a little tired. I don’t know if I’m really into it. But then I pack some groceries for a person who is hungry and carry the groceries out to their car. I simply ask, “What can I pray for you for? If you could have God do one thing, what would you ask God to do?” The person says, “I need God to heal me.” “I need God to find me a place to live.” “I need God’s help with my son.”

I tell you, I always come away from volunteering at our food pantry, or visiting someone in a

nursing home, or visiting someone in the hospital not feeling like “WOW, aren’t I a wonderful person, such a great servant.” I never feel like that. But I often feel like I’ve experienced Christ. If you are not experiencing Christ, put yourself where Christ is. It is great to write a check, to put some money in the poor boxes that we have at all of our campuses. But if you take the next step of being personally engaged with someone who is in need, you may meet Christ there.

How can we connect with God? Through nature, through people, through service and fourth:

We can connect with God through study

Now this one really speaks to people like me. One of the main ways that I’ve connected with God over the years is by studying his Word contained in this book called the Bible. The reason I said study and not read is because studying speaks to me of sustained effort, not just a casual surface glance at a passage of scripture, but really digging in, concentrating your mind, chewing on the text, ruminating on it like one of those cows with the huge stomachs, at least four compartments in its stomach, taking God’s Word in and chewing it up until you feel like, “Yes, I understand it. I know what’s going on here. I have this message now deep inside of me. It’s incorporated into me.”

2 Timothy 2.15 says this:

2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

I like the way that the Message version of the Bible puts it:

SLIDE

Concentrate on doing your best for God, work you won’t have to be ashamed of, laying out the truth plain and simple.

There are various words that are used to describe how we’re to approach the Bible. Sometimes we read the word “search,” “meditate”; sometimes we read “examine.” The authors are calling for profound effort in order to get maximum benefit. Concentrate. As I’ve read the Bible over the past 41 ½ years I have felt over and over again that as I was reading this book, the book was reading me. This book spoke to me about my situation when I began my journey as a Christ-follower at age 18. It spoke to me as a new dad when I was 24. It read my heart. It told me how to move forward when I was a new pastor at age 31. And it continues to speak to me now that I’m a granddad.

Studying the Bible is one of the main ways that you will be able to connect with God. Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation, said:

Just as a mother goes to the cradle only to find the baby, we go to the Bible only to find Christ.

The Bible is there to bring people to Christ, as an initial matter. It explains to us how we can meet Jesus. But the Bible is there to grow us up in Jesus. Here is what we read in 1 Peter 2.2

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

And once we're beyond baby food, we need solid food. The Bible has solid food to help us in our walk with God.

If you are asking, "Rich, how do I start studying the Bible, not just glancing over it, not flipping open a page and reading whatever is on that page, but really digging in? How can I do that better?" Let me suggest one book that I used for several years that helped me understand the Bible. It is titled Search the Scriptures.

Cover Photo of Search the Scriptures

Search the Scriptures will take you through the Bible in 3 years, if you do one of the studies every day. You can read the entire Bible in 3 years. I'm not recommending something I haven't done. I used Search the Scriptures for years to make my way through the Bible. We have copies of it in our Cooper Road Bookstore.

We can connect with God through nature. We connect with God through other people. We connect with God through service. We connect with God through study. Here is the fifth way:

We can connect with God through prayer

Revelation 3.20 says this:

Revelation 3:20 (NIV)

20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

There is an old book by a Norwegian pastor named Ole Hallesby simply titled Prayer.

COVER Photo of Prayer by Ole Hallesby

Hallesby says:

To pray is nothing more involved than to open the door, giving Jesus access to our needs and permitting him to exercise his own power in dealing with them. To pray is to open the door to Jesus.

Now I love this. See, the Christian life begins when a person responds to Jesus' knock on the door of their hearts. Maybe you meet a Christian friend, or listens to a sermon or a parent. Who explains to you that God loves you, that God loves you so much that he sent Jesus into the world to die for your sins. If you trust him, and invite him into our life, you will come into a personal relationship with God that will change your life forever. Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart, invite him in. The Christian life begins when a person opens the door of their hearts to Christ.

As I always tell people who are seeking a personal relationship with God, no one is born a Christian. To be a Christian is simply to be a follower of Messiah Jesus. You are born as a Gentile, you are born as a Jew, but you choose to be a follower of Jesus. You're either a Messianic Gentile, or a Messianic Jew and you become a Messianic that is a Christian, which is just the Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messianic." You become that by opening your heart to Christ.

Well, just as you begin the Christian life by opening the door to Christ, so you move on in the Christian life by continually opening the door to Christ in prayer. The way in is the way on.

How does this work? Whatever your emotions, whatever you're feeling, whatever your mood, invite Jesus into that. When you are angry, or have been offended by someone, instead of trying to work out your anger on your own, or pretending you are OK, be emotionally honest with Christ and invite him into your anger to help you sort it out. When you are discouraged, be emotionally honest with Jesus. Tell him, "I'm disappointed. I thought things were going to turn out differently." Instead of stuffing it, let the circumstances of your disappointment be the knock of Jesus and invite him in. "Jesus, this is how I feel. I tried so hard. I thought it was going to work out differently. Fill my heart again with hope."

Don't let doubt cause you to keep Jesus at arm's length. Invite Jesus into the doubt. Be honest with Jesus. "I'm really struggling with God's goodness, with God's existence, with God's concern for someone as small as me. Step into my doubt!" When you are tempted, don't let the feeling of temptation create so much shame in you that you hide from God. Invite the Lord into the temptation. "Lord, here is how I'm feeling right now. Here is the thought that just came across my mind. Here's the desire." God knows it anyway. You are not going to say something to God where he slaps his head and says, "Oh myself (he doesn't say 'OMG'), I didn't know that." Invite him into your temptation. Invite him into your tough circumstance, when you are at odds with someone else. Invite Christ into the conflict.

If you want to connect with God, you've got to constantly open the door to him. Throw open the windows. Invite him in. Not just in the morning, during a time of devotions – although having a time of concentrated focus on God is important, but throughout the day. I'm stressed out right

now, I'm just going to pause and open the door to you, Jesus, and invite you into my stress. I just got some bad news; I'm not going to keep you at arm's length. I know I need to connect with you, God. So I'm going to open the door and invite you to come in to my sadness, to my disappointment, to my worries.

We connect with God through prayer. And finally,

We can connect with God through worship

Worship is the final step into great intimacy with God. If it is not enough for you to enjoy God through his creation, or feel God indirectly through other people and what they do and say, or meet him in service, or study or even prayer, the final step into intimacy in moving from the outer court into the inner court and finally right into the Holy of Holies, the place of God's presence is worship.

Friends, if you want to take the final step of connection with God, you've got to learn to worship God. I say this without any desire to create guilt, or any sense of shame, but the reality is that many of us come to the weekend services late, just in time to catch the teaching, or just in time to take communion. But there is something about opening our souls to God as we praise him, as we thank him, not just for blessings in our lives, but for who he is - as we meditate just on him in worship that gives us the greatest connection with God.

The Vineyard movement which now involves over 2000 churches in 75 different countries was born as our founder, John Wimber's wife Carol, learned how to worship with a group of people. John and Carol Wimber were living in Anaheim, California back in 1977. Carol said,

We began worship with nothing but a sense of calling from the Lord to a deeper relationship with him. Before we started meeting in a small home church setting in 1977, the Holy Spirit had been working in my heart, creating a tremendous hunger for God. One day as I was praying, the word worship appeared in my mind like a newspaper headline. I had never thought that much about that word before. As a Christian I had always assumed the entire Sunday morning gathering was "worship" – and, in a sense, I was correct. But in a different sense there were particular elements of the service that were especially devoted to worship and not to teaching, announcements, music and all the other activities that are part of a typical Sunday morning gathering. I had to admit that I wasn't sure which part of the service was supposed to be worship.

But after we started meeting in our home gathering, I noticed times during the meeting – usually when we sang – in which I experienced God deeply. We sang many songs, but mostly songs about worship, or testimonies from one Christian to another. But occasionally we sang a song personally and intimately to Jesus, with words like "Jesus I love you." These types of songs both stirred and fed the hunger for God within me.

About this time I began asking our music leader why some songs seemed to spark something in us and others didn't. As we talked about worship, we realized that often we would sing about worship, yet we never actually worshipped – except when we accidentally stumbled onto intimate lyrics like “I love you, Lord, and I live my voice.” So we began to see a difference between songs about Jesus and songs to Jesus.

Worship is not primarily for our benefit. We worship God because God is of infinite worth, because he deserves our worship. We worship God because God demands our worship. He tells us in the Bible to worship him.

But the amazing, ironic thing is that when we worship God, God comes. Psalm 22.3 says this:

Psalm 22:3 (NASB)
3 Yet you are holy,
O you who are enthroned
Upon the praises of Israel

Psalm 22.3 (KJV)
But thou art holy,
O thou that inhabitest
The praises of Israel

Whenever God's people come together to worship, we become a living Temple for God's presence. God comes and inhabits or dwells in our praise. God's purpose from all eternity was to bring his presence to people who could enjoy him. God comes to dwell wherever his people worship. And when that happens, sometimes his glory comes, sometimes his kingdom comes. In this atmosphere where worship is happening, it's really happening, I've seen several things take place. Faith stops just being an intellectual exercise. Instead, faith becomes real for people as God becomes real. And as God becomes real and brings his presence, people get healed and other people get to know the Lord.

James 4.8 says:

James 4:8 (NIV)
8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Do you want to connect with God? I'm sure there are some ways, based on your temperament, your wiring that you may connect with God through nature, through other people, through service, through study, through prayer and through worship. Or there may be other paths that I haven't mentioned that connect you with God. But don't just stay there in whatever your particular niche is. Take the next step. Try some of the other paths. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Let's pray.

Your God is Too Distant (Part 2)
How to Connect With God

Rich Nathan
September 12-13, 2015
Your God is Too...Series
Psalm 19

- I. We can connect with God through nature
- II. We can connect with God through other people
- III. We can connect with God through service
- IV. We can connect with God through study
- V. We can connect with God through prayer
- VI. We can connect with God through worship