

It's About The Relationship

What's the most important relationship in your life? I would imagine that a person of strong faith would want God to be their most meaningful connection. For those of the Christian faith, Jesus wants to be our center of attention and our most significant relationship. I'm learning that the more I nurture my relationship with Jesus, the more my deepest needs for acceptance, to feel loved and to be cared about are met. In turn, I am empowered to better care for myself and all areas of my life are affected, including the lifestyle choices I make that affect my health.

What the Research Says: Jeff Levin, PhD, conducted a study to examine the association between a self-reported loving relationship with God and the presence of depression. His findings appeared in the *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* (Vol. 32, 2002). He writes "These findings raise the possibility that a loving relationship with God may exert a protective effect on psychological distress. One's relationship with God thus may represent an important personal resource for mitigating the emotional consequences of poor health and other deleterious life circumstances, as well as a marker for successful religious coping."

What the Bible Says:

"The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'"

Jesus in Mark 12:29-30

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."

Jesus in John 15:5

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Jeremiah 29:13

What You Can Do: Just as you would nurture any important relationship, Jesus wants you to regularly slow down and spend quality one-on-one time with Him. Two key ways to know Him are through the spiritual exercises of prayer and reading the Bible. When we bring to these times an attitude of openness, humbleness and a surrendered heart an environment is created where the relationship can deepen. Before you read scripture, prayerfully ask Jesus to show you more about His nature. Also ask Him to reveal to you aspects of your character and behavior that He wants to change. The relationship is developed deep in your heart more so than in your mind. Yes, you use your mind to read the Bible, but it's vital that you allow the truth of His nature to sink into your heart and spirit to really know Him.

Prayer is another way to draw close to Jesus. Open and honest conversation with Him is a great way to develop your relationship. He wants us to talk openly with Him just as we would with our closest friend. He also wants us to sit quietly and listen for His soft voice. Most importantly, He wants us to spend time alone with Him.

Getting to know Jesus and staying connected to Him requires intentionality. We must consciously make it a priority to protect the time we spend with Him. Sometimes I get so busy doing things that I sense God wants me to do that I lose sight of an even more important aspect of my faith, spending quality time with my Savior. What about you? Are you so busy that you tend to give Jesus breadcrumbs in terms of your time? If deep down you desire to change how you're connecting with Jesus, I urge you to set aside some time to reflect on your values and on how you're using your time. Consider how you could modify your schedule to make spending frequent and meaningful time with Him a reality. For example, if you find that the requirements of your job or other personal commitments leave you no regular quality time with Jesus, it may mean that you'll need to make some tough choices about your vocation and lifestyle. It will take courage to make some difficult and significant changes, but God will help you with the process.

The Benefits: Jesus tells us in *John 15:5* that if we "remain in Him" we will produce much fruit. Fruit might be aspects of our character like patience, kindness and peace as mentioned in *Galatians 5:22-23*, or it might be the good deeds we do like giving to the poor or serving others. Another type of fruit could be emotional and physical health and wellbeing. These are all aspects of the abundant life Jesus wants for each of us.

The more time you spend with Jesus, the more you'll understand and appreciate His qualities. This will help your love for Him to grow. In turn, you'll desire to spend even more time with Him. Almost without fail, it seems that the more frequent and richer my time with Jesus is, the more I'm able to be as He would want me to be. Deep down I feel truly loved and special. I feel free of my past. My trust in God grows deeper. I have more hope about the future. I have a greater desire to serve others and to use the special gifts God has given me. I also have deeper motivation to care for my body and feel empowered to make health-related choices that are good for me. Staying more closely connected to Jesus will better enable you to be the kind of man or woman He wants you to be and your life will become more full and meaningful. When this happens, God will be glorified.

A Recommended Resource: *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer

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