

A Personal God

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[0 : 0 0] get your Bibles out, find Genesis 31. Genesis 31. And so here we find ourselves in the life of Jacob. And he gets a message, a dream from the Lord, a message where he gets something that we're going to study tonight or this morning here. And I want to say before we even get into this, that the most important thing in your life, I don't care who you are, it doesn't matter who you are. The most important thing in your life is your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can't, you can try to think and you can make a list and you could add five things together and they're not going to be more important than that one right there. And if you don't think it is, that's because something's in your heart that doesn't belong there. But I promise you, I can assure you that one day you'll see it clearly and you'll see, yeah, that is and was and should have been the most important thing in my life. Now, it's not your health. That's the most important thing. Although that's pretty important to you. It's not your family. That's pretty important to you, probably your children, your home, your mortgage, your retirement, your job. But the most important thing without a doubt is your relationship to the one that saved you. And if you don't have one, one, then you don't even probably understand how important it is that you get one.

God is a personal God, as in you can have a personal one-on-one fellowship with him. He's not some mystical being. He's not some entity that's outside of this realm that we can't touch or feel or hear.

He's personal. He's closer than you know. And he's available. And I want that to be, before I even get into the Bible here, I want to point out to you that, to that this morning, that God's a personal God. And that nothing is more important than your personal walk with him.

And it's something that you as an individual need to cultivate. You need to learn to seek him and to approach him and obey him and serve him. In Acts chapter 17, the apostle Paul said that they should seek the Lord, if happily they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. He's not far away at all. He's closer than you think. And a relationship with him is easier than it may seem. And let me say this before we go any further. The only thing that hinders the relationship with him is you. Think about it. Your personal relationship with him, if there's anything that's hindering it, it's not him. It's you. And so your relationship to him is as much as you want it to be.

[3 : 1 8] Right now, today, it's as strong as you want it to be. It's as real as you want it to be. You're the one that decides. Now, that in mind, let's go to Genesis 31. I want to read three verses, starting in verse 11.

And I want to show you from this passage three things that God says to Jacob here that reveal that he is, in fact, a personal God. Verse 11, the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob, and I said, here am I. And he said, lift up now thine eyes and see all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ring straight, speckled, and gristled. For I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee.

In verse 13, I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointest the pillar, and where thou vowest a vow unto me. Now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred. Let's pray together. Father, please help us now. Help us to turn our thoughts and minds into the scriptures, and into this man's life, and to the happenings here in this passage. And Lord, draw out some truth to us, and reveal it to us, and embed it in us, and show us how personal and individual you are, and seek to be with every one of us. And Lord, I pray that at the end of this, we'd see our need to prioritize some things in our life to make our relationship with you the place that it ought to have, and give it first place. God, speak to hearts. Please use the preaching of your word now, and in Jesus' name I ask.

Amen. Three things that God says to Jacob here, it's in verse 13, that shows us that he's a personal, a real, a one-on-one God. In verse 13, he says to Jacob, I am the God of Bethel.

Bethel, Bethel, that's God's significance to Jacob. When God says, I'm the God of Bethel, immediately he knows what God's talking about. He's talking about a very specific location, a place, where it contains real significance to Jacob, and in his life. Turn back to chapter 28, and I'll show you what God's talking about. When he introduces himself to Jacob here in this passage, and in this dream, he introduces himself reminding Jacob of a place, a past experience.

[5 : 48] And it was at Bethel that something happened that changed Jacob's life forever. It was a night that he'll never forget. In chapter 28, we'll begin reading in verse 11, chapter 29, and he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night because the sun was set, and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and laid down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land, for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place. And I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillow, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place

Bethel. But the name of the city was called Luz at the first. He called the name of that place Bethel. I am the God of Bethel, was the introduction in chapter 31. He's reminding Jacob of an experience that he had. A personal experience, where he, for the first time in his life, met God Almighty.

It was in a dream. It was how God revealed himself in those days. Don't go out here looking for a dream or a vision. But that's how God dealt with men. And in Genesis 28, he showed up and revealed himself for the first time to Jacob. And it shows me something here. The first point in this outline is we're looking at Jacob's dream. And what this reveals is that God is a God of personal experience.

The first time he met God, had a personal and real interaction with Almighty God. He was the God of Abraham. He was the God of Isaac. And now in this weird and this scary night, he said in verse 17, he was afraid how dreadful is this place. In this scary moment, he now has an interaction with the same God himself. He didn't know it before, but he knows it now. Surely the Lord is in this place. This was the first time Jacob met God. He met him personally. This was an individual experience with Almighty God. And God is a personal God because he's a God of personal experiences.

And the first thing it takes to know God personally and to have a relationship with him is to have a personal experience with him. An encounter with the true God. Not just hear about him, not just know people that know him, but meet him. And I'm not talking about in a dream or some spooky experience. I recall as a young boy, fearing hell, believing the gospel, knowing that it was for my sins that Jesus Christ died, that I bowed my head. I knelt down at the side of a couch in my living room and prayed and asked the Lord Jesus Christ to be my savior. I remember that day barely, but I still recall it. I had a personal experience, a personal experience that changed my life forever. No lights flashed in the room. No, no, no smoke filled the room. No, nothing lifted me up and I floated around and saw my frame and none of that took place. But I had a real experience where God came inside of me and burst me spiritually into his family and gave me eternal life. And on top of that, he washed my sins away past, present, future, and gave me the righteousness of his son. And in that moment, he placed me into Jesus Christ and baptized me by the spirit of God into the body of Christ.

[10:14] I became a member of a living member of the living body of Christ. I had an experience and none of it took place physically. I didn't feel it. I didn't know it. I just, I just by faith believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for my salvation. It was my Bethel experience. It was where I met God for the first time personally. And just like he said to Jacob in verse 15, God promised that he'd never leave me too.

Amen. You ever had a personal experience with the Lord like that? You have a Bethel experience where you met Jesus Christ? If you have, it really wasn't Bethel at all. It was Calvary. It was the cross of Calvary where God reveals himself to lost sinners. That's the gate of heaven. When Jesus Christ, who calls himself the door in John chapter 10, was hung upon wood where he was hung there to open up a way to bring us to God. That's the true gate of heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ dying on the cross of Calvary.

He made a way for God to redeem our souls from hell. You ever been there? You ever, you ever lighted upon a certain place called Calvary as a sinner and said, God, I'm in need. I'm a sinner. And he met you there and he washed you of your sins. It's an experience. It's a personal experience. It's one that you just can't get from your family or from your church. It's got to be personal where you as a sinner, humble yourself and bow before the God of heaven and say, I'm a sinner and I need the salvation that Jesus Christ provided. And believing on him, you can enter into a personal relationship with a personal God.

He's a God of a personal experience. This experience in Jacob's life resulted in Jacob making a commitment to him. Now turn back to chapter 31 and see in verse 13, I am the God of Bethel, the God of a personal experience. And then he says, where thou anointest the pillar and where thou vowest a vow unto me.

So when God met Jacob and they had that first time interaction, that experience, Jacob responded by vowing a vow unto God, by anointing a pillar, consecrating and then vowing something to him.

[13:01] And I want to say here that this is Jacob's decision. And this reveals that God is a God of personal commitment. Now you'll have to hold your place. And I want to turn somewhere else to kind of draw something out about this in the Bible. Keep your place in Genesis, but go to first Samuel chapter one.

Need to lay a little groundwork that first for something that Jacob's decision here and help you to understand the significance of it. First Samuel chapter number two is where I'd like you to start. We see secondly, Jacob's decision. This is revealing to us that God is a God of personal commitment. In first Samuel chapter two, Eli is the priest in Shiloh. Hannah brings her boy that she begged God for. She brings her son Samuel and drops him off. And now he's growing up there as a child ministering before the Lord. But in chapter two in verse 12, it says, now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial. They knew not the Lord. Now your mind, oftentimes preachers will say they weren't saved.

That's not the phrase. That's not what it means. What does it mean though? Well, let's see. Take a look at chapter number three. The sons of Eli knew not the Lord. That means something specific. In chapter three in verse one, it says, the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days. There was no open vision. So God is not in those days revealing himself very frequently at all. Now come to verse number seven. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord. And what does that mean? Explained. Neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. So when God's calling Samuel in this passage, he thinks it's Eli because he's never heard the voice of God to date. He didn't know the Lord. And the word of the Lord in those days, it wasn't yet revealed to Samuel. Just like it wasn't revealed to these wicked sons of Eli. They didn't know the Lord either. God didn't speak to them. He just bypassed them from Eli to Samuel. All right. Look at a chap. Well, just to verify this a little bit more in verse number 21 of the same chapter, the Lord appeared again under shot in

Shiloh for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh. How by the word of the Lord. So Samuel knew the Lord now. This isn't Samuel believed on Jesus, none of that. This is just a personal relationship and speaking God the way he did in the old Testament with certain men. It's a very, very rare thing, but there it is in first Samuel. Now come back to Genesis into the life of Jacob and look at chapter 27.

Genesis 27. And I want you to notice a very specific thing that Jacob says to his father, Isaac.

[16 : 25] This is the chapter where he's deceiving his father and pretending to be his older brother. In chapter 27 and verse number 20, Isaac, who can't see his eyes are dim. He's very old.

Isaac said unto his son, how is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, because the Lord thy God brought it to me. Why would he say that? Because God was the God of Abraham and he was the God of Isaac and that's it. And Jacob says, because the Lord thy God hath brought it to me. Now come to chapter 28, where we read this Bethel experience.

And we read it in verse number 13 while he's dreaming the dream. This is his first experience with God. Verse 13. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac. He's introducing himself for the first time.

He didn't say, I am thy God. No, this is his first time. Okay, now skip down later to the end here to verse, look at verse 18. Jacob rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put for his pillows and set it up for a pillar and poured oil upon the top of it. Remember we read that I'm the God of Bethel where thou anointest the pillar. And verse 20, where thou vowest the vow. Look at the vow in verse number 20. And Jacob vowed a vow saying, if God will be with me and keep me in this way that I go and give me bread to eat and Raymond to put on so that I come again to my father's house in peace. Notice this verse 21. Then shall the Lord be my God, be my God. And this stone, which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house and all that shall, that thou shalt give me while surely give a tenth unto thee. Jacob's decision. Jacob's decision reveals to us that God's a God of personal commitment. The commitment here is Jacob says, God, you're going to be my God now.

This is for life. This is a decision to obey and to follow and to submit to this God that revealed himself to him for the first time. He made a personal decision to walk with the Lord.

[18 : 53] It's kind of like today. You might say surrendering your life to the Lord or singing the song. I have decided to follow Jesus. When God appears to Jacob in chapter 31, he reminds him of that decision and of that commitment that he made. I'm the God of Bethel. That experience where thou anointest the pillar, where thou vowest the vow unto me. That's a personal commitment there. Jacob's decision.

Did you ever make a decision in your life, a personal commitment to God? Just like Jacob, to make God your God for your life? Did you ever make that decision? Did you ever make that commitment? Did you ever vow a vow to God and say, Lord, I'm going to love you and serve you and obey you with my life? I'm yours. Take my life and let it be consecrated to thee.

Not just take Christ as your savior. That's a great experience, but that's just a get out of hell free pass for you. It goes beyond that. The experience is the first step. I'm the God of Bethel, but then there's a place where you need to vow a vow, make a decision, make a commitment to love and obey and to follow and to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, to give him the place that he deserves of God in your life and in your heart. Jesus Christ revealed it when he prayed in the garden, saying, not my will, but thine be done. The apostle Paul in his conversion in Acts 9 revealed it when he said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? The prophet Isaiah revealed it when he said, here am I, send me.

And there's many others, a personal commitment. He's a personal God. And I believe the Lord takes pleasure in our decisions for him. When we make decisions, say, for instance, to release some sin out of our flesh and to give it to God and to sacrifice it to him and say, I'm sick of it. I'm done with it. Take it from me. It doesn't please you. So I don't want it. That brings pleasure to God to make that kind of a decision. What about the decision in Romans 12 to offer our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God? That's kind of some criteria for that sacrifice if God's going to accept it. A commitment to God, a personal commitment. It can happen even as there's so many ways this can happen. It can happen from God dealing with you in church, from the preaching of his word and convicting you about something in your life. And you make a decision. You react, you respond to it. That pleases the Lord because he's a personal God and you can vow a vow to him.

You can make commitments to him. He'll hear them. He'll acknowledge them. It pleases him. It's part of having a personal relationship with him. I wonder if today, if you could put your finger on any that you have, any decisions you've ever made in your life that are made for the Lord, any commitments, any vows, anything, you got any, or you just saved and just taken and drinking of that cup. You ever give anything back? Have you decided to follow Jesus? No turning back. Lord, wherever you lead me. Lord, whatever it is, I'm yours. He's a personal God. And whether you've experienced this or not, he is interested in you making decisions for him. You making commitments to him. And we see that by Jacob's decision. First, we saw it as Jacob's dream. Now come back to chapter 31, we saw Jacob's dream revealing that God's a God of personal experience.

[22 : 51] And then there was mention of Jacob's decision revealing that God's a God of personal commitment, one-on-one. And then thirdly, we see Jacob's direction revealing that God is a God of personal instruction. In verse 13, I am the God of Bethel where thou anointest the pillar and where thou vowest a vow unto me. And now here comes the instruction. Now arise, get thee out from this land and return unto the land of thy kindred. This is appears 20 years after Bethel. 20 years later, God appears again to Jacob to give him some personal instruction on what he wants him to do. Jacob at this time, he's just taken life as it comes. He's been serving Laban. He's married two of his daughters. They've also had handmaids. He's, they've born him at least 11 sons up to this moment. He's growing his family.

He's working for a living. And like I said, just taking life as it comes. But he wasn't satisfied working for Laban either. And then the Lord showed up and God appeared to him and he said, now arise.

I'm the God of that personal experience. The one that you know, I'm the one that you committed to and vowed a vow to be. And now he says, now arise and get thee back. And what Jacob gets here is some personal instructions. It wasn't Isaac giving him instructions this time. It wasn't his mother, Rebecca, like she had earlier saying, go to, go to Laban, escape for thy life. No, this time it was God, almighty God, a personal God revealing his personal instructions to this man. Individually, one-on-one, no counsel from anybody, anywhere, just God and a man. And church, God doesn't save you and then just say, good luck with it. I hope it works out. I hope you figure it out. Because if you don't, I'll see you at the judgment. God doesn't come at you like that. God doesn't demand something so foolish of you. No, he's a personal God. And he will and desires to, I might say, reveal his will to you personally. You, not me, you. It happens a lot of times. And the more I'm around the ministry, there's people that are, they ask questions. They don't have understanding of what God wants. They have a heart for the Lord. They don't know. And so they seek advice or counsel from anybody, anywhere.

And there's times where I get phone calls and people ask me, run things by me. And the biggest thing, the ultimate thing I point them back to is get your answer from God. And, and you might, you know, they'll say some thoughts and they'll say some weird stuff. They'll say some things they've heard.

And I'll try to put my brakes on some of those things. If it sounds like it's not coming from the Lord, if it's coming from their own just anxiety, I have to do something or I need to figure this out or, or God has to show me and, and what should I do? And people get all worked up about things because it's scary. I had a phone call on Friday from a brother that he's, uh, had an opportunity to do something. He wasn't sure if it was right. And we just talked it out. And I said, I know it's scary stuff. He's like, brother, it's really scary. I said, I know, I know, I know.

[26 : 32] And he's got a family and he's got children and, and all of that stable job. And he's just not sure, but God's a personal God and he can, and he will instruct you. He'll instruct his children of what he wants from them and when he wants it from them and where he wants it from them. He is fully capable of communicating his will to you. I say it like this, and I don't mean this irreverent, but this is the truth. How I see it, it is God's job. If he is God, then it is his duty and job as God, to instruct, to reveal, to explain, to lead and to guide. It's not my job to guide you to where God wants you to be. If God's dealing with your heart about something, he's not going to reveal it to me to tell you. He's going to reveal it to you. Why? Because he's a personal God and he needs to be personal to you. Don't rely on another Christian. Counsel with other Christians, counsel with people that have gone through some things, but you better get your answer from God. If you're not certain that it's from him, then don't do it. If you're confused about it, well, God's not the author of confusion.

If you feel pressure, you feel anxiety, it's not from the Lord. Because when God gives his voice, when he gives instruction, a peace comes with it in the new man that this is the Lord.

And I know what I'm talking about. The Bible says in Proverbs 16, verse 3, commit thy works unto the Lord and thy thought shall be established. By doing what you know is right today, God can reveal his will for you tomorrow. And when he does, you'll know it.

You'll know it. So we see Jacob's dream revealing that God's a God of personal experience. We see Jacob's decision revealing that God's a God of personal commitment.

And then we see Jacob's direction that God's a God of personal instruction. I'm telling you, I hope you hear it. He's a personal, individual, one-on-one God.

[28 : 48] But everybody in this room needs to know his voice, hear his voice, seek his face, and have a personal relationship with him. I can't imagine my life without a personal relationship with the Lord. I mean it. I mean, I'd be in hell today or I headed there pretty soon if I didn't have a personal experience where I met Jesus Christ and he washed my sins away.

I think I'd probably be in a world of sin and misery had I not made the personal commitment to walk with God and to serve him with my life. I'm sure I'd be in a mess. I'm sure my family would be in a wreck. There's no way around that. But making those commitments and decisions with my God, it's been the best decisions I've made. And I wouldn't be where God wants me to be today where I can put all my trust in him with a clear conscience if I didn't hear his direction and know how to hear his voice and discern it as instruction for me. I trust him and I love him and I get back way more than I give him. And the best thing you can have in this life is a personal relationship with him. If your personal relationship with Jesus Christ isn't what it ought to be today, if it isn't the most important thing in your life, then two things, you're missing out.

And number two, you're messing up and you're going to regret it. You're putting another person in this world above him, you're messing up. You're messing up and that person is not going to lead you to a stronger relationship with him or to where you ought to be. Because you know what? There's decisions coming up in your life. And you may not realize it. They may be a few years out. They may be right around the corner. But you will be making decisions in your future that affect your life and affect others around you. You better know how to hear the voice of God personally.

You better know how to seek him. If you want to, you can chance it. A lot of people chance it. But if you want to know that it's going to work out right, and you want to know that the Lord Jesus Christ is in it, then you need to seek him in that personal relationship. The Lord loves you. The Lord knows what's right for you. He knows what's best for you and your future. And how badly you need a relationship with him. It's the most important thing. Do you see that this morning? Does that make sense to you? Jacob's just a little example of it here, an illustration for us to point to us, not to him, to us. Have you met Jesus Christ? Do you know him as your savior? Can you put your finger on a place and a time, a moment where God can remind you, say, hey, I'm the God of that place where you trusted me? And then the next question is, have you vowed anything to him? Have you received the conviction about things in your heart and life and realized I've got to make some changes here? I'm going to commit to him. This is what I want. You're going to be my God. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me. Why would I want anyone else? Have you made any personal commitments to him? Ones that you intend on keeping and following all the days of your life? And then finally, he's a God of personal instruction. I hope you know his voice. I'm not telling you he's calling all of you to mission fields and to cities and to churches and traveling. And I don't know what God would have for any single person in here. Not one. I don't know what he wants from you, but I know he knows what he wants from you. And I know that if you want what he wants, he'll get it to you.

But if you don't want what he wants and you don't care what he wants, you're on your own. Good luck with that. And I mean that. See you. See you later. See you at the judgment when you're screaming and crying, begging for mercy, wishing you did it right. It'll be too late. This is your life.

[33 : 05] And I'm telling you the truth. The most important thing in this life is your relationship with your God. Let's pray together. We'll be dismissed in a moment. Father, I ask that you will use this.