

Friendship with God

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome back or welcome if you're joining us for Church Online this morning.

As it happens, this is the last time we will be coming from my house. Next week, we look forward to being back in the building for some of us, live streaming the service all being well.

Today, we're going to begin a new series about thinking about spirituality in the Psalms, how to live as the people of God, how to grow in our love and our obedience, how to respond to God in our Christian lives.

And then in the evening and for the next six weeks, we're doing a thing called Questioning Christianity, where we're tackling or at least beginning to tackle some of the big questions about the Christian faith that you or perhaps some of your friends might have tonight thinking about the question, can I trust the Bible?

So it's great to be able to share with you again. I hope that God will speak to each one of us as we hear from him and his word today.

[1 : 23] I'm going to begin with some words from Jesus. Today, we're setting the scene for a Christian spirituality by reminding ourselves from the word of God that the goal of life and the Christian life is to enjoy friendship with God.

So here in John chapter 14, as Jesus is anticipating the cross, he says this to his disciples, do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.

My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.

So there's that great promise. Jesus has come to make peace between sinful people like ourselves and a holy God so that one day he'll come back and take us to be with him forever.

That's our hope. Now let's sing as we begin our time together the hymn Across the Lands and then after that we'll pray. God bless you.

[2 : 40] God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. You're the word of God the Father from before the world began. Every star and every planet has been fashioned by your hand.

All creation holds together by the power of your voice. Let the skies declare your glory.

Let the land that sea rejoice. You're the author of creation. You're the Lord of every man.

And your cry of love rings out across the land. Yet you left the gaze of angels, came to seek and save the lost, and exchanged the joy of heaven for the anguish of a cross.

With the prayer you fed the hungry. With the word you calmed the sea. Yet how silently you suffered that the guilty may go free.

[4 : 05] You're the author of creation. You're the Lord of every man. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

And your cry of love rings out across the land. With the sound of creation. You're the Lord of every man. You're the Lord of every man.

You're the Lord of every man. You're the Lord of every man. You're the Lord of every man. Now you stand before the Father.

Interceding for your own From each tribe and tongue and nation You are leading sinners home

You're the author of creation You're the Lord of every man And your cry of love rings out across the land You're the author of creation You're the Lord of every man And your cry of love rings out across the land

Let's pray together Lord God we thank you that we come before you

As Father, Son and Holy Spirit Thank you for the privilege of calling you our Father in Heaven For being able to pray in the name of Jesus Our Saviour and the one who mediates for us And who

prays for us Thank you for the help of your Holy Spirit As we seek to pray Lord we thank you for inviting us to know and enjoy your love We recognise that you are an eternal fellowship of perfect love And we thank you that you have made us as people in your image To enjoy the overflow of that love you have eternally shared Lord thank you for what we heard from the words of Jesus A reminder of the journey that he went on

[6 : 48] Believing the glory of Heaven In order to become one of us To perfectly represent us To perfectly obey the law that each one of us has broken And then to go to the cross In the place of sinners In order to take the punishment that we deserve So that by faith in Jesus We might be reconciled and have peace With our God We might enjoy friendship with God So that in the end We can look forward to eternity With our Saviour In a world made new and perfect Lord we thank you For the grace That you have shown to us In our lives as your people Thank you for the grace That we have enjoyed in this past week For all your goodness and kindness And preserving and caring of us And we pray that you'd help us to be a people

Who would learn more and more to trust you As we find you to be faithful As we recognise your love Both in your word and in our experience May you help us to trust you To trust your promises So that for today and tomorrow And for whatever this week holds We would know that you will be with us And you will supply what we need In ways that will be for our good And for your glory Thank you that we have a chance together To read the Bible Thank you for the Bible as the word of God Thank you that it is your wisdom for us That when there are so many voices Competing for our attention Thank you that we have revelation From the true and the living God And so we pray that your spirit Would help us to hear To understand To obey To respond Towards you

From what we hear In your word today And we pray it in Jesus' name Amen So we are going to Read together From Psalm 25 And we are going to think in particular About verse 14 So that is Psalm 25 And I will read The whole Psalm for us In you Lord my God I put my trust I trust in you Do not let me be put to shame Nor let my enemies triumph over me No one who hopes in you Will ever be put to shame But shame will come on those Who are treacherous without cause Show me your ways Lord Teach me your paths Guide me in your truth And teach me For you are God my Saviour And my hope is in you all day long Remember Lord

Your great mercy and love For they are from of old Do not remember the sins of my youth And my rebellious ways According to your love remember me For you Lord are good Good and upright is the Lord Therefore he instructs sinners in his ways He guides the humble in what is right And teaches them his way All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful Towards those who keep the demands of his covenant For the sake of your name Lord Forgive my iniquity Though it is great Who then are those who fear the Lord He will instruct them in the ways they should choose They will spend their days in prosperity And their descendants will inherit the land The Lord confides in those who fear him He makes his covenant known to them My eyes are ever on the Lord For only he will release my feet from the snare Turn to me and be gracious to me For I am lonely and afflicted

Relieve the troubles of my heart And free me from my anguish Look on my affliction and my distress And take away all my sins See how numerous are my enemies And how fiercely they hate me Guard my life and rescue me Do not let me be put to shame For I take refuge in you May integrity and uprightness protect me Because my hope Lord is in you Deliver Israel O God From all their troubles So as I said earlier We're going to use the book of Psalms To explore together Christian spirituality What does it look like to live in relationship With the living God And how do we develop and grow In that relationship But today Almost by way of introduction I want to remind us of the goal Which is friendship with God But I guess we're maybe aware of

[11 : 56] The rise, the growing interest In spirituality in our days You know, the growing number of people Who identify themselves as spiritual But not religious People who want to connect with the other Recognize that there is something more And they're trying to find various ways To make that connection Well, the God of the Bible Very directly and personally Answers that longing We're going to see in this psalm That the Lord offers friendship But there are also And maybe this is especially true In the church People who are Perhaps religious But not spiritual In the sense that maybe There's a going through the motions Where perhaps Christianity can feel fairly Lifeless and flat

And perhaps in that case It's because we've lost sight of the centre Which is to know and enjoy God himself But then I imagine there are others Who are listening And you're exploring Christianity

Wondering what's it about Is this something that I really need?

Is it an optional extra? Is it something that's fundamental? And the message of the Bible Is that we are made for God We're made in the image of God To know and enjoy him And that through Jesus Sort of the barrier of sin is broken down So that friendship Relationship with God Is now possible And that stands at the heart Of the Christian message And the longing of every heart Others of us I know Are growing Christians And again for us to persevere with joy To have hope for the journey of life With all its highs and lows What we need is to cultivate And to enjoy that friendship with our God So I hope this will be helpful for you Whoever you are today And that over the course of these next eight weeks We'll see the Psalms as a really useful guide For our spiritual life

Spiritual wisdom for how to relate to our God So over the weeks we'll think about Praise and thanksgiving And confession And honest lament And a variety of different things But here I want us to focus on the goal of all Which is friendship with God Enjoyment of the God who made us So we're going to focus our time On Psalm 25 verse 14 Asking three very basic questions First of all What is friendship with God?

Who gets it? And how do we get it? So first of all What is it? Well I read from the NIV So let me read it again Verse 14 says The Lord confides In those who fear him He makes his covenant known to them Now another English translation The ESV says this The friendship of the Lord Is for those who fear him And he makes known to them his covenant Now can we see how those two things are related The Lord confides in And the friendship of the Lord is for Think about your own experience Who is it that we share our secrets with?

[15 : 35] Who is it that we confide in? Who is it that we as it were let all the way in? Well it's not just anybody is it? We don't just walk up to strangers And share our secrets No it's with our close friends Those that we have an intimate connection with Those are the ones that we choose to confide in Friendship and confidence Derek Kidner An Old Testament commentator Who's got really helpful books on the Psalms Talks about God's counsel As his circle of close associates But also God's counsel God's counsel Those matters that get discussed With close associates What is Psalm 25 verse 14 reminding us of?

Well it's this remarkable truth That the Lord of the universe Invites you and me Into his circle That by faith in the Lord Jesus We're called all the way in To share intimate loving friendship That's been God's intention God's heart from the beginning When you read the story of Adam and Eve In the Garden of Eden We discover that God walked and talked with them In the garden That as image bearers of God It stands to reason That we are made for friendship We are made with witness Because God isn't solitary God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit This eternal friendship God is friendship And so we are made for friendship And especially friendship with God So that we are truly ourselves When we come to know him

And we grow to be more like Jesus So spirituality and connecting with the divine In Christianity becomes really personal Because we are invited into friendship With our God Now what does this say about God?

What does this say then about our spiritual lives? Well first of all it reminds us That God is a personal relating God Who draws near He's not distant He's not unconcerned and uninvolved In the world that he made In fact the whole history of redemption And salvation that we find in the Bible We can describe as God's great act of friendship Having made people for relationship To glorify him, to enjoy him Adam and Eve and everybody since We have rebelled against God We have turned our backs on God We have rejected friendship with God In favour of setting our own course That is sin But in response to our sin What has God done?

God in love has pursued his people He has established covenants Covenants of grace with people And ultimately he would send his own son Jesus In order to save us In order to restore us To peace To reconcile us To give us friendship with God And to provide for us the hope Not just for this life But for all eternity Of being united With God Of being made like Jesus And being with Jesus In a world made new So the whole of history of redemption Is God's act of friendship Secondly it reminds us That God offers us What our hearts long for Who doesn't want to know love?

[19 : 23] Who doesn't want to have Close friendships? People that will receive us And love us And welcome us And be with us And for us And the Bible says God offers a real connection With the divine Something that's personal Not vague That the God of the Bible Offers secure And lasting friendship That God in covenant Actually chooses to bind himself To us So here is the friendship That you're looking for From God It also reminds us too That knowing And enjoying God Is the goal

Of our faith Sometimes we can lose sight of that But it's so important For us to remember When we read our Bibles It's not just so we can Tick a box and say I've performed my religious duty

No we read the Bible To hear from God He wants to speak to us And relate to us Who he is And how we should live In response to him So every time we read We're being invited Into friendship And likewise To pray Is for us to respond God speaks as we read the Bible And we respond as we pray There's no higher privilege Than this relationship This friendship with God That as we come To church As we think about Meeting together Physically as we used to In the past Some of us will do next week God says he is Particularly present To bless his people As we gather together To remind us once again Of his goodness His love His faithfulness His gospel So the goal of our faith Is God himself The greatest gift God could give us

Is himself He wants to relate to us He wants us to grow In our friendship And so we have the Bible We have prayer We have church We have other things To help us In that So that's just a little bit On friendship with God Now the next question To think about Is who gets That friendship And again We turn to Psalm 25 Verse 14 To help us here So it says The Lord confides in Those who fear him So there is that condition Attached to friendship Those who fear him Now what does that mean?

I was listening to a talk From a pastor in the States Tim Keller Many of you will perhaps Have heard of him And he reminded me there That with true friendship There is always transparency By which we mean Each friend is allowed to be Who they truly are That the other is accepted On their own terms It's true friendship isn't it?

Well with God To accept God on his terms Means that we live In relationship to him Acknowledging that he is Our creator He is our king He is our judge He is our lord And saviour So to allow him To be who he truly is Therefore is to fear him In the sense of honouring And respecting Of showing him awe Of showing obedience To what he commands Now psalm 25 Now psalm 25 gives us Some helpful pointers To flesh out What it means To fear God One aspect that comes out here Is it involves trust So the psalm begins In you lord God I put my trust I trust in you Do not let me Be put to shame There is

[23 : 33] There is Aseem■■■■ fundamentally relying on God, making him the foundation upon which your life is built, allowing God to set the direction that your life will follow. So when the Bible sets the pattern for the people of God that there is suffering first with glory to follow, that the cross comes before the crown, we're willing to receive that and we will trust God in that. So there is trust as part of fearing God. There is also teaching. There's an emphasis on teaching in this psalm, by which we mean letting God be our teacher and guide. So verses four and five, show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me for you are God, my saviour.

Then verse 12, who then are those who fear the Lord? He will instruct them in the ways that they should choose. So to fear the Lord is to receive his teaching, to be instructed by it, to allow God's teaching to guide us. Which means for us we need to be immersed in the word of God, to recognise it as ultimate truth. One of the reasons our series this evening begins with, can I trust the Bible, is because the Bible is so foundational to our faith.

That to fear the Lord is to be guided by the Bible for right thinking, to recognise the Bible as a reliable guide for us as to what God's will is for our lives, for how we are to obey, for the ethics and the morality that we are to follow, to allow it to govern our speech and our actions and for the word of God to reveal to us the way of salvation. Not through our own efforts at getting up to God, but recognising that God has sent Jesus to come down to us so that through his grace we might be saved, and not by our works, but by trusting in Jesus and the forgiveness and the new life that he secures. Fundamentally then, we want God to be the one voice we choose to listen to. When we hear so many different alternatives for how we are to live and how we are to direct our lives, we want to be guided by God's teaching if we are to fear the Lord. So there is trust and there is teaching and there's also a turning that we find here in Psalm 25, turning from sin to God. So verses 6 and 7, remember Lord your great mercy and love for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth in my rebellious ways. According to your love remember me, for you Lord are good. The psalmist has a healthy spiritual life where he is honest about his sin. And what does he do with the sin? He confesses it to his God. He has that humility that recognises his own moral and spiritual failure that comes confessing his need before his holy God.

Notice too that the psalmist David here was quick to acknowledge when he has broken friendship with God, when he has broken trust with God and he contrasts that with God's steadfast love.

We let our friends down and we have to deal with the pain and the guilt that we feel because of that. God never lets his friends down. So David prays for forgiveness and a restored sense of fellowship asking God to not remember his sin but to remember his love and his mercy. To fear the Lord is to recognise our sin and our need of his mercy and forgiveness and to ask for it. So when it comes to the question, do I fear the Lord? Ask yourself questions like this. In my day-to-day life, who do I trust in?

[28 : 33] Really? Am I trusting in God or am I trusting in myself, my resources and my abilities? Who do I listen to?

Am I being guided daily by the word of God or is it the voices of my friends or my family or my culture?

What moral standard do I live by? Is it what God teaches in his word or is it the wisdom of the age in which we live?

As we think about the fear of the Lord, it's really important that we see Jesus as the perfect example of what it looks like to live with the fear of the Lord. You can go to the point in Jesus' life at the beginning of his public ministry where he's being tempted by the devil and Jesus will say, man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus' intention was to live in perfect obedience to God's word. And again as he was tempted, he said, worship the Lord and serve him only.

[29 : 56] God is foundation. God is guide. God is Lord and King. God is the one he would live to please. God is the one he would live to please.

God is the one he would live to live to live to live to live to live to live to live to live. And yet Jesus was willing to die in our place for our sins to experience in his physical body a sense of abandonment so that he would cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? as he lost a sense of the Father's love for him as he took on himself for us. The Father's just and holy anger against sin.

As we look at the cross, we see that the Father did not spare him, did not spare Jesus so that he might save us. Making that choice so that, by faith in Jesus, we might enjoy the Father's love and the Father's friendship.

He supplies grace to help so that we can live with the fear of the Lord.

[31 : 43] Now, the last thing for us to think about is this. How do we get it? How do we get to enjoy friendship with God?

And again, verse 14 helps supply the answer. The Lord confides in those who fear him. He makes his covenant known to them.

So covenant, God's covenant with his people, is the basis for us receiving friendship with God. God, out of sheer grace in response to our sin, God, in his great mercy in response to the human misery caused by sin, established a covenant with his people.

The theme of the covenant is everywhere in the Bible and it's closely tied up with the theme of friendship. That here is the God of the universe and he chooses to establish these covenant relationships.

So he binds himself to individuals and he binds himself to families and then he commits himself to the nation of Israel and ultimately he commits himself in loving relationship to the church through Jesus, committed to loving, saving, blessing, protecting, guiding them.

[33 : 08] And as you look in the Bible, you think about each stage of the covenant that you see, especially in the Old Testament, all the key figures, what we see is they enjoy a special relationship, a special friendship with God.

So we thought about Adam, Adam and Eve, walking and talking with God in the garden and from the beginning established in friendship and even when they fell into sin and everything was broken, God still came, where are you, Adam?

And he established that promise that one of their seed would crush the serpent and that the forces of evil would be destroyed ultimately by Jesus.

Then we think about Noah, at a time in the world when the whole world was full of evil, what happens in the story of Noah is that Noah finds favour, Noah finds grace, Noah enjoys friendship with God.

Abraham, likewise, when the whole world it seems is filled with the worship of idols, what happens? Abraham is called by God by grace. God reveals his plans and his heart to Abraham.

[34 : 15] What about Moses? We're told that Moses spoke to God face to face, just like a man talks with his friend. Or David, God's chosen king, he was the man after God's own heart.

And then we see Jesus, the last great, the ultimate covenant figure. He is the one who establishes the new covenant. He is the son of God who represents, reflects the glory of God, who enjoys eternal friendship with God and he becomes the way for us to know that friendship ourselves. His body is broken, his blood is shed, as we remember when we share the Lord's Supper, as our substitute, as our sacrifice, to satisfy God's justice, to show God's love, to bring us back into that friendship with God that was lost in the Garden of Eden, that through Jesus we are reconciled, through Jesus we have peace.

Jesus, shortly before going to the cross, said to his disciples, greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends.

And that's exactly what Jesus would do for his disciples and for the church. And here is the goal for our lives.

[35 : 42] Friendship with God through Jesus. Here is the heart of true spirituality. Not to know a vague sense of the other, but to know God as our Father, to know Jesus as our Saviour, to know the Spirit living in us, to enjoy friendship with God.

And Jesus, the Son of God, opens up the way for us to enjoy friendship with God. So for the next seven weeks after this, we're going to think about how do I respond to that?

How can we grow in that friendship? But today, are you enjoying a living and a growing friendship with God?

That's what God, through Jesus, graciously offers to each one of us. Now let's pray together in response.

Lord, as we think about your great offer of friendship, we pray that you would help us to set the course of our lives towards pursuing friendship with you.

[36 : 50] Thank you for all the means that you have given to us to enable us to develop that friendship, to have the Bible that we can read, to have the gift of prayer, to have fellowship, and to have a church to belong to so that we might grow in our relationship.

Give us that desire to meet with you, to grow. For those of us who aren't Christians, help us to see how fundamental to our true self it is to be in relationship with the God who made us.

To be so thankful to Jesus for coming to deal with the sin that separates and spoils that relationship so that we might all be trusting and believing.

Lord, we thank you that one of the ways that we can grow in our friendship is through church. We thank you for the church that you've purchased with your blood.

Thank you for the precious privilege of being able to gather to worship. We felt it as we've not been able to meet together. Thank you that at least some of us will be able to do that again as of next week.

[38 : 04] Lord, we pray that you'd give us wisdom and all the arrangements that need to be made. We pray your mercy that you'd keep us safe. We pray that we'd be sensitive towards one another, knowing that some people will be anxious and will not be keen for health reasons and other reasons not to meet just yet.

Lord, we pray it'd be a time of unity and peace and of knowing much of your blessing. Lord, we also are aware that there are so many around us who are suffering.

There's so many who are anxious, so many who are grieving. We pray that for your people, they would know your friendship in a special way, that they would appreciate your love and your peace being poured out on them.

Lord, we think about suffering that we see all around the world. Lord, we pray thinking about the tragic accident outside of Stonehaven.

We pray for the different families who have been affected, who have lost loved ones, who are grieving. Lord, we pray for your comfort and healing.

[39 : 18] Lord, we pray for Beirut and the nation of Lebanon with the various problems that it is facing. We think of Belarus. We think of nations like India.

We pray for Myanmar with internal fighting and the impact on the Chin people and Christians there. Lord, we recognise so much suffering and we pray for your comfort and your mercy.

And ultimately, we pray for the hope of the gospel, the light of Jesus to break through, that people in darkness and in desperation and in danger would turn to Jesus and find life in him.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, we'll sing together. We'll sing, first of all, a section of Psalm 16 and then we'll sing the hymn Yet Not I, But Through Christ in Me. I'll praise the Lord my God Whose counsel guides my choice And even in the night My heart recalls instructions voice Before me constantly I set the Lord alone Because He is at my right hand I'll not be overthrown

[41 : 31] Therefore my heart is glad My tongue with joy will sing My body too will rest secure In hope unwavering For you will not allow My soul in death to stay Nor will you leave Your Holy One To see the tombs decay You have made known to me The path of life divine

Bliss shall I know At your right hand Joy from your face Will shine What gift of grace Is Jesus my Redeemer There is no more For heaven now to give He is my joy My righteousness and freedom My steadfast love My deep and boundless peace To this I hold

My hope is only Jesus For my life is wholly bound to His Oh how strange and divine I can sing All is mine Yet not I But through Christ in me The night is dark But I am not forsaken For by my side The Savior He will stay I labor on In weakness and rejoicing For in my need

His power is displayed To this I hold My shepherd will defend me Through the deepest valley He will lead All the night has been won And I shall overcome Yet not I But through Christ in me No fate I dread I know I am forgiven The future sure The price it has been paid For Jesus bled For Jesus bled

And suffered for my pardon And He was raised To overthrow the grave To this I hold My sin has been defeated Jesus now and ever is my plea O'er the chains are released I can sing I am free Yet not I But through Christ in me With every breath With every breath I long to follow Jesus For He has said That He will bring me home

[46 : 37] And day by day And day by day I know He will renew me Until I stand With joy before the throne To this I hold My hope is only Jesus All the glory All the glory Evermore Evermore To Him When the race is complete Still my lips Shall repeat Yet not I But through Christ in me When the race is complete Still my lips Shall repeat Yet not I But through Christ in me And let's close

Praying Using words Of Jesus' prayer For His church That we find In John chapter 17 Jesus prayed Father I want those You have given me To be with me Where I am And to see my glory The glory You have given me Because you loved me Before the creation Of the world I have made you known To them And will continue To make you known In order that the love You have for me May be in them And that I myself May be in them Lord God We thank you That Jesus came To offer this Richest of relationships To see His glory To know your love To know your presence In our lives Not just for today And tomorrow But for all eternity Lord we pray That you would Strengthen our hope Strengthen our joy

And we pray That the grace And the mercy And the peace From our God Who is Father, Son And Holy Spirit Would rest on And be with each one of us Amen Now just a reminder again That Digital Tea and Coffee Will be on at 12 As usual And then we're back Tonight at 5.30 And just to say If you have people Who you know Who maybe have a lot Of questions about the Christian faith It might be helpful To invite them To listen in And then The one other thing Is that we have A time of prayer Still on Wednesday At 8pm With a special focus On returning to church Praying for ourselves As a church As well as Some other things So again It was good to share And really looking forward To seeing some of you In person In church Next week

But for all of us May we know God's love And God's care In this coming week Okay bye for now