

Revelation 2-3 “Why Relationship?”

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- I can't hear that song without thinking of Delilah Harris. Many of you won't know Delilah. She's been with Jesus for several years now.
- She was a special part of this church family. And she would light up when she talked to you about walking with Jesus and talking with Jesus.
- And she'd love to talk about their especially close relationship the last several years of her life that she lived alone as a widow. And she talked about that a lot.
- And this rock actually belonged to Delilah and Jack, her husband. When this church was built here, they got to pick something to write on a rock that they were so thankful that the foundation of this church was built on.
- [1 : 0 9] And they wrote, God's saving grace. The grace of the Savior that Delilah loved and loved walking with.
- This was her favorite hymn. The one that reminded her of how Jesus walked with her. Walking with Jesus.
- Talking with Jesus. Hearing him constantly shape who we are as he calls us his own.
- That's the kind of relationship I want us to talk about for a few weeks this summer. We have been marveling these past few months at the historical, real Jesus of the Gospel of John.
- Watching him work wonders. Learning who he is. Hearing him invite us to find life by believing in him.
- [2 : 1 7] To find life in him. Not just life one day, someday, but life today with him. That we would have relationship with the living Jesus.
- The walking and the talking. So I want to slow down this summer as I told you last week. Take a break from John. To ask, what does that actually look like?
- What does it look like for us to enjoy that moment by moment, day by day relationship with God?
- That relationship with God is the most important of our three key relationships here. It's where it all starts. What do we mean when we talk about walking with Jesus?
- See, I think while some of us would say with Delilah, oh, I know exactly what you mean. Relationship with Jesus. That is the joy of my life.
- [3 : 1 8] It's why I've loved being a part of this church family. Because it was here that I first was told I could actually have a relationship with God. And it's been life changing for me.
- It feels like this beautiful picture of walking with Jesus in the pathways of grace. Yes. And I know some of us feel that way.
- I also know that many others of us have a more difficult time with that whole idea of relationship with God. We struggle to understand or to experience that relationship.

Some of us would say things like, I mean, I say Jesus is the most important thing in the world to me. I really do believe that I need him and I depend on his grace.

But honestly, just practically in life, I'm really busy with work like all day, every day. Or I'm just trying to keep up with the kids these days.

[4 : 21] I don't know what you mean about relationship. I've kind of figured out how to manage and get by, get through life without some active relationship with God.

Others might add, I've managed to go quite a while without really knowing about relationship with God. Jesus or Christianity is just an appendage, as Bill prayed earlier, an accessory to my life.

If I'm honest, I mean, it's something I do from time to time. But I've never felt it as more than that. I mean, come on, pastor. I come to church most Sundays.

I try to be nice. I give roughly 10%. After all, isn't that what God really wants? What else do I need? Quit all this mushy-gushy relationship talk.

I got this figured out. I'm okay. Whether you've always delighted in relationship with God, whether you've always had a difficult time with relationship with God, or whether you have never thought relationship with God was even a real thing, that's where I want us to start this morning.

[5 : 34] Before jumping into ways that we experience that relationship this summer, we'll talk about how God meets us in his word, how to hear and talk with God in prayer, those kinds of things.

But I want us to start with why relationship? Why is that even important? Well, it's really important to God.

The Bible says it is fundamental to why he made us, how he made us to work, and to have this relationship with him and with others the way Father and Son and Holy Spirit have always enjoyed this special relationship.

So many passages all the way through the Bible highlight this. So this morning I considered staying in John one more week and talking about abiding in Christ like a branch connected to the vine.

It's this beautiful image of that relationship God made us for, right? Or Psalm 23, where day by day our shepherd leads us and feeds us and provides all we need and makes us lie down and gives us peace and restores our souls.

[6 : 57] I consider reflecting on Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, right? Just as he tabernacled with his people for generations and generations, then in the flesh he walks among us and he dwells with us forever.

Or the fact that when he walked here, when he was living on this earth, he was known as friend of sinners. What good news that is for people like me and you, that Jesus is friend of sinners.

I considered Colossians 2, where Paul tells us to walk day by day in Jesus. That special daily relationship where we're so united to him that our relationship guides our daily lives, our highest praise, the things that are most worthy.

Or Philippians 3, where Paul longs to know Christ. It's the greatest treasure he can imagine. To experience the actual fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, of having that relationship with Jesus that would be better than any other spiritual achievement or experience that he could imagine.

See, this is at the heart of the Bible story about God and us, this is this relationship. But I decided to focus briefly this morning on a bit more direct challenge to God's people about their struggles in relationship with him.

[8 : 33] We're going to look at letters to the churches in the book of Revelation that are about what's really important, how they've missed it, and what needs to change.

And then I realized this week that those chapters were in our Bible reading plan just this week. So many of you have already read them. God's timing is perfect. He wants us to study this. So, let's stop and pray that God will show us his heart, grow each of our relationships with him, wherever they are right now, to be more real and deeper and more delightful to our souls.

Let's pray. God, we do ask for that. But our hope in this is that we know that is more important to you than it is to us.

That you want us to know you. Us to walk with you and talk with you. Us to know because of Jesus that we're yours, that you love us and have brought us into your family.

So, would you use your word this morning not just to teach our heads, but to direct our hearts to love you and walk with you. We ask it in Jesus' name.

[9 : 53] Amen. Friday mornings, you can find Christy and me almost without fail at Latoile.

It's this wonderful local French bakery. We'll be sipping a latte and a glass of ice water. Relaxing.

Talking about life, about our relationship. Plenty of people come in and out. Many of you have seen us there. We love getting to see you.

But for the better part of the morning, it is just the two of us. And let me be clear about this aspect of our relationship. Our relationship is a significant part of every day.

Of every single thing that I do. I am mindful of Christy throughout the day even when I'm with others, right? Even when we're going in different directions, each taking a kid to something else.

[10 : 53] When I'm grilling dinner and she's with a child, I care about her. Then my love for her never stops. And my knowing what she's feeling or at least wondering how she's doing is 24-7.

But there's something special, something important about Friday mornings at Latoile. Our 24-7 relationship needs those regular times where we can talk with one another about our relationship.

I get to learn some of what is on her heart. What she's excited about. What she's anxious about. How I am or am not communicating love to her.

How we together are going to approach parenting or friendship or the other times that week where a lot will be going on and it won't be just the two of us in those moments.

Sometimes our coffee date lasts longer than others. Sometimes the connection and conversation is better than others. Sometimes I just sit there and wonder how did you end up with me?

[12 : 12] And how are you still here? But it's a chance to be together and on our better days remember why we fell in love with one another once upon a time.

Back in the first place. We've been doing this only the past couple of years. I wish we had started sooner. I look forward to Friday mornings every week because I love being in relationship with Christ.

Do we have similar feelings and moments like that in our relationship with God? I think we should.

More importantly God wants us to. I want us to notice briefly three letters Jesus writes to churches in the book of Revelation that all highlight the significance of this relationship.

By so doing they point out how easily we neglect this relationship. Maybe because we've never known God at all. Or because we've been in a season of losing focus.

[13 : 26] Distraction. Listen first to his words to the church in Ephesus at the beginning of chapter 2. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your works your toil and your patient endurance how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary sounds pretty good right? What great encouragement they're doing so many good works holding so tightly to the truth right?

Enduring and suffering but but verse 4 I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first that honeymoon love deep fresh can feel it tangible remember remember therefore from where you have fallen repent and do the works you did at first if not I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent yet this you have you hate the works of the Nicolaitans which I also hate he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches to the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God this first warning is a heart check for God's people isn't it it's like getting a heart cath some of you have been there and you found out that there's a blockage in your heart that you didn't know about you're living well there's lots of good things going on you didn't know but there's a problem with your heart you've abandoned your first love

God is concerned first with who we are before what we do it's that first love love for Christ that drives then a love for a neighbor for other people and so the prescription given for the heart blockage is what repentance return to him come back to Jesus Jesus do you remember your early days with Jesus was it at a VBS maybe like Kathy described as a kid memorizing God's word and just eating it up was it at college telling everyone around you how awesome Jesus is maybe for you it's just been in the past couple of years that your heart found life in Jesus for the very first time in spite of yourself but now already you've moved on to a busy life of performance of doing things and you've forgotten how overjoyed you were to find

[16 : 45] God to see him love you at your worst when you've done nothing but give him reasons to turn away from you how much you treasured Jesus then remember remember those emotions those moments that love and repent God I'm so sorry after all my life and all my wanderings how are you still with me Jesus it's been so long since we've talked but you're calling me back to delight in you and then the fruit of love can grow from a renewed heart there's a warning here for us isn't there to be honest about your heart have you left your first love have you decided if you're honest that life is mostly okay with Jesus mostly on the shelf on the side more of a thing to do occasionally than a person to love

God is calling our hearts back to himself don't neglect relationship with me any longer use this summer I think he would say as a chance to see the love that you had at first rekindled that's what that's what I'm hoping we'll set it aside for wherever we are there pray for that right now pray pray that God would would do that in your heart today and through these next few weeks don't delay or ignore the results of the heart check any longer ask God to work there second warning to the church in Sardis of course all these letters were read to all the churches there's a lesson for us too Revelation 3 verse 1 to the angel of the church in Sardis write the words of him who has the seven spirits of God in the seven stars I know your works you have the reputation of being alive but you are dead wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my

God remember then what you received and heard keep it and repent if you will not wake up I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come against you yet you still have a few names in Sardis people who have not soiled their garments and they will walk with me in white for they are worthy the one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments and I will never blot his name out of the book of life I will confess his name before my father and before his angels he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches again a church that looks good on the outside but inside it's dead Jesus is very concerned he sets off the alarm wake up God is not done with you yet isn't that so hopeful God's not done with you even though you're dead no he's not cutting you loose to move on to someone better no so what's the call again it's the same call it's to remember what you received and heard a way of saying the gospel the good news of

Jesus the hope of the scriptures repent and come back to him in fact you can be like he's saying to those who have wandered who have soiled their garments you can be like those in your church who walk with Jesus clothed in his righteousness experiencing the joy of Jesus being with you and for you rather than against you that's the warning is that he'll come against you he could be with you walking with you and for you have you felt that sense of drifting spiritually just I'm just here I haven't changed anything I believe I just don't feel it anymore I'm checked out what's Jesus' heart for you if that's what you feel come back to me he's urging you toward revival towards new life with him don't keep drifting come walk with me draw on my strength find life not in other things but in me otherwise you're dead unless you find life in me one more warning with an invitation perhaps the most famous of these seven letters the final one to the church in Laodicea verse 14 to the angel of the church in Laodicea write the words of the amen the faithful and true witness the beginning of God's creation

I know your works you are neither cold nor hot would that you were either cold or hot so because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth for you say I am rich I have prospered and I need nothing not realizing that you are wretched pitiable poor blind and naked I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see wretched pitiable poor blind and naked even though you felt strong and rich even though you dress up really well even though you made budget last year even though you know theology watch out you're lukewarm milk toast

[23 : 12] Christians not offering refreshment or comfort and healing to anyone around you to the world God is threatening to spit you out then listen verse 19 because that's pretty tough you don't want God spitting you out those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and eat with him and he with me the one who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches another call to repentance isn't it with an incredible invitation here to the church goer who feels so far from God to the

Christian who feels exposed and exhausted to the person who feels utterly unworthy of any relationship with God what does Jesus say I will come in and eat with you the word used here is for the meal that was at the end of the day after all the day's work was done everything else had been set aside and people would linger together over conversation and friendship this is the Jesus then who is the bread of life the divine king of all glory the miracle working resurrection and the life saying to you offering to you to renew acquaintance fellowship friendship with you don't rush off to go do amazing things to impress him or get his attention no I'm right here knocking at the door it's what repentance means just the thing to do is to repent to restore fellowship with me to invite me back into the center of your life to linger with me in this relationship

Jesus says that's true riches buy that it's actually free for you buy it it'll last it's real clothes that'll actually cover you it's corrected vision to see the most glorious person the weightiest the most important relationship see me I'll do that for you just open the door I'm here to meet with you and to linger long with you Jesus says do you hear how important it is to Jesus that we individually and corporately as a church are nurturing relationship with him it's not it's not just a verse here or there this is his heart he warns us repeatedly because he knows how easy it is to neglect the heart is that easy that's very easy for us to get busy with all the things we're doing and miss the heart he knows how natural it is to drift spiritually drifting is very easy that's the definition of it he knows how comfortable it can feel to be a half-hearted nominal box-checking

Christian who thinks all God cares about is you're doing some things for him y'all that's religion Jesus is about relationship he's not trying to drive you away with these strong words he's wanting to sit down and eat to walk with you to renew your first love you'll notice in each of these letters there's a communal encouragement isn't there for the church that he's writing to my heart for Southwood is the same not just some of us walking with Jesus in the pathways of grace boy wouldn't it be great if there were just a few of us no not just some of us reading God's word not just some of our grace groups spurring one another on to love and good deeds not just some of us sharing the hope of Christ with our neighbors now don't you long for all of us together to be around the family dinner table because we've come with Jesus and we often do this on Sundays and we come and we linger together living with him loving him because Jesus has brought all of us into this special relationship don't you want to experience that

I want to invite all of us into this journey this summer I mean that wherever you are with Jesus that this is an invitation into revival renewal refreshing of that relationship I think that's his invitation to all of us we're going to be very practical this summer in the weeks ahead there will be age appropriate resources for all of us I'm told we are even going to use a QR code so that you can get it and when they tell me what that is I'll explain it to you but you'll be able to access resources young people and adults and no matter how long you've been walking with Jesus that will help you along the path of walking with him this morning I just want to give you one practical question just something to start thinking about we'll talk about it through the summer what's the one time that directs all your time in my relationship with Christy

[29 : 11] I told you about that Friday morning time that directs all our time for a 24-7 relationship Friday mornings are not the extent of our relationship that wouldn't work would it they're part of the rhythm like mornings and evenings Friday mornings together impact all the other time so then we think about how this one time directs all our other time I'm asking you that in your relationship with Jesus what's your one time that helps direct you to live all your time with him 24-7 what's that time on a daily basis a regular rhythm when you can remember your first love when he can tell you who you are to him in relationship with him and you can marvel that he's still with you when he can linger with you to hear your heart and what's going on there when he can direct your path

I trust with Jesus in that relationship that Sunday mornings are part of that weekly rhythm we'll talk about that later this summer but what's your daily rhythm like doesn't have to be the same time every day of course it doesn't have to be but for most of us schedules fill up pretty quickly and things that are priorities need to be set early is it first thing in the morning that's often best for me is it right after the kids go to bed is it right when you get to the office is it at the end of family dinner the Bible doesn't tell you when it has to be you don't have to have an answer to that this morning but I want to encourage you to be thinking about when that special time with Jesus could be for you it is so worth it we'll talk about what can happen there in that time but if you get some time alone with Jesus this week just the two of you will you text or email someone just one line this is my time will you share that with somebody share it with someone in your grace group text or email it to me yes

I would love to get hundreds of emails yes I would hundreds of short emails telling me it would let me know how to enter in and pray for you during that time to know what God is doing in your life but if you would just share that with someone when you share it might encourage someone else in considering what the time can be for them now as we finish I want to acknowledge that that can be pretty scary I remember how scared I was I was really worried a couple years ago when I went on sabbatical and I was sent to spend some time alone with Jesus and I only told a few of you this before I left but I was afraid honestly that I would get there and he wouldn't that I'd be stood up so to speak that I'd be sitting there in this awkward silence you ever felt the awkward silence am I the only one who has awkward

I know I'm socially awkward but come on somebody else has felt going somewhere and it's just you and I don't know what to do maybe you felt that maybe you fear that too you don't look forward to time just the two of you you and Jesus he doesn't talk much pastor it's kind of quiet start by just showing up for a few minutes and telling him that just being honest about that struggle that fear that you have repenting that he's been telling us about returning to him can be that simple it's not this complex spiritual thing it's coming back to him he describes it as opening the door he's knocking he's there I can tell you from personal experience God met me there in that time I so needed it that God delighted to meet me and continues to meet with me because I still need it and I am so thankful that he's there and that he delights to walk with us and talk with us and tell us who we are walking with

Jesus will change your life in a good way in the best way change all of your life it'll change every moment of every day that's what it did for Mary when she was in the garden right and she got to walk and talk with Jesus and when he told her now let go and here's what you'll go do he met her there and we so need that vital encouragement don't we the one who warns us is with us there is so much life and hope in that he is knocking at the door to come in and eat with us isn't he but even more than that look look where he is and what he's doing in this passage because I think we often picture God far off from us especially when we've been going in different directions with him wandering off perhaps for a long time and the picture we have of him is him way off in the distance crossing his arms tapping his foot shaking his head that's not what he tells us he's doing these words of warning are from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands might not mean much to you what revelation one has already told us is that is figurative language for Jesus walking among his churches his people holding them and their leaders and their angels in his hand he is with us already he gave his life to establish this relationship with us in the first place so when we open the door and make the time and turn to him he is there you can count on it to renew the relationship he started to walk with us to hold us every day hallelujah what a savior hallelujah what a friend let's pray

[35 : 44] Jesus we're gonna trust you for that we're gonna do what might feel awkward to many of us and trust you that you want a relationship with us more than we understand what that means we need your spirit to work in our hearts that we would feel your love for us that we would taste the riches and the sweetness of your grace that we would know that walking with you is the best place for us to be so many other things will scream at us before we walk out the back doors of this room this morning as more important and more worthy of our attention and our time Jesus would you continue to bring yourself before us help us to encourage one another in that that we might meet you and see our love for you grow and our lives changed thank you for promising to meet us thank you for continuing to pursue us thank you that you're already here with us we give you thanks in your name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host) you