



*To Know Christ . . .
and to Make Him Known*

Wilmington, North Carolina
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**Experiencing God:
Our Obedience, His Accomplishment
John 14:23-24; 15:1-17**

For nine Sundays spread out over the past three months now, we've been on a spiritual journey together through the themes of Henry Blackaby and Claude King's study, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*.¹

We've thought together about what it means to know God and about the relationship between knowing God's nature and doing God's will. One by one, we've considered what Blackaby calls the *Seven Realities of Experiencing God*. So far, we've examined the first six:

- *God is always at work around you.*
- *God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.*
- *God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.*
- *God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.*
- *God's invitation to work with Him always leads us to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.*
- *We must make major adjustments in our lives to join God in what He is doing.*

Now we come to focus on the last of the seven realities: *You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.*

We find our biblical text for this sermon in John 14:23-24 and 15:1-17. Listen carefully and follow along in your Bibles as we look at how *Jesus taught His disciples about the relationship between obedience and experiencing God's presence and power.*

Read text . . .

What Jesus said

Think for a moment about what Jesus was saying to His disciples here.

He had gathered them in the upper room the night before He was to die on the cross. In John 13 and 14, He began by washing their feet to show them that just as He had come as a servant, they were likewise to serve one another. Then He talked with them about what was about to happen and how the Father would send the Holy Spirit to comfort, help, and guide them into all truth.

In the midst of that conversation in 14:23-24, Jesus reminded His disciples that their obedience would be the evidence of their love for Him. That's still true for us today!

He also told them He and the Father would be present with the one who loved Him and obeyed Him.

When we think about what Jesus was saying, isn't the point simply this? *Obedience demonstrates our love for Christ and leads to the experience of God's presence in our lives.*

At the end of chapter 14, Jesus and His disciples left the upper room and started toward the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem. He was heading to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Along the way, He continued to teach them.

In 15:1-17, Jesus basically continued this theme of love demonstrated by obedience in His description of the vine and the branches. It's an image that the disciples and Jews in general would have been familiar with, since in the Old Testament, Israel was sometimes pictured as God's vine.

But here Jesus says that *He* is "the true vine," and that His followers are the branches through which His life flows like sap to produce much fruit.

Again, His point is that *obedience is a vital part of experiencing God's power and presence in our lives.* We can bear fruit only as we remain or abide in Him. As Jesus draws out the image, He says that to remain or abide in Him means that we obey Him. To obey Him means that we love Him and that we love one another. And when we love one another, we bear enduring fruit to God's glory. When we're bearing this kind of fruit, then the Father gives whatever we ask in Jesus' name—in other words, when we ask for what Jesus would ask for.

So we experience His purpose fulfilled in us as He (the vine) produces fruit through us (the branches) and answers our prayers that are guided and governed by our submission to Him, His character, and His will.

Now understand this—when Jesus knew He was going to die the very next day, *this* was what He taught His disciples about the relationship between obedience and experiencing God's presence and power! *This* is what He wanted them to know before He left them.

Obedience and accomplishment

Now the seventh reality of experiencing God, as Blackaby calls it, certainly lines up faithfully with what Jesus taught His disciples that evening: *We come to know God by experience as we obey Him and He accomplishes His work through us.* This reality is packed with eternal truth about our relationship with God. Let's unpack that truth a little.

The first thing we see is that *to experience God at work in and through us, we have to obey Him!* That may be difficult, and it may be costly to us and/or those around us.

Think about Moses, for instance. His first visit to Pharaoh didn't go very well. Pharaoh said that if the Hebrews had time to go out into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD, they must not be working hard enough. So he ordered that they would have to start collecting their own straw, yet still produce as many bricks. Needless to say, the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron. It was costly to *them* for Moses to obey God, and it was costly for Moses as well. But he continued to obey. He went back to the LORD and poured out his complaint to Him, and the LORD promised that He would rescue the people from slavery in Egypt, even as He would get glory over Pharaoh.

You see, here are the facts, the reality of our situation.

When we obey God, God will accomplish His work through us. Now it may seem as though everything is going wrong, but understand that God works through *all* the circumstances of our lives, just as He did with Moses. Through what may have *seemed* like wasted years to Moses,

God was preparing him for his task as he grew up and lived in Pharaoh's court for forty years, and then tended Jethro's flocks in the wilderness for forty years. Not only that; in the midst of delivering Israel from slavery, God also purposed to display His glory and power against a rebellious Pharaoh.

So whatever the circumstances, we must be obedient! God may sometimes use us in spite of ourselves, but to experience His working in us and through us, we must be living in loving obedience to Him.

To some, that might seem hard. But remember, we're not obeying some abstract principle. We're obeying *a person*—God, our loving heavenly Father!

Now it's important to remember a second aspect of this truth: *When God begins His work in us, we can trust Him to complete it, and thus obey Him.*

As Blackaby puts it: "The God who initiates His work in a relationship with you is the one Himself who guarantees to complete it."²

Paul put it even better in Philippians 1:6: ". . . **being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**"³

When we're in a trusting relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, we can take Him at His word that He will do what He says He'll do. Now He may not do it *when* we think He ought to, or *how* we think He ought to. After all, as the prophet said in Isaiah 55, His ways and thoughts are as much higher than our ways and thoughts as the heavens are above the earth!

But we can count on Him to do what He says, and so *we can obey Him confidently.*

Here's one other important aspect of this truth. *When God accomplishes His work through us, we come to know Him by experience.*

In our relationship with Him, God shows us what He's doing and invites us to be a part of it.

As we open ourselves to Him, He speaks to us by His Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and other believers, revealing Himself, His purposes, and His ways.

We experience a crisis of belief—that turning point of whether or not we'll trust God, take Him at His word and join Him.

We make those major adjustments that we have to make in our lives so we can move forward in obedience.

And then as we obey Him and He accomplishes His purpose in us and through us, we experience Him at work in and through our lives, and we get to know Him and His incredible love and power *firsthand*, rather than just knowing about Him. We know Him *by experience.*

You know the difference between knowing something as a concept and knowing it by experience, don't you?

In Romans 8:28-35, Paul talked about his confidence in Christ. The form of the Greek verb that he uses when he writes in 8:28 (NKJV), "**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose,**" indicates *experiential knowledge*. Paul had *experienced* God working all things together for good, and thus he knew! It wasn't just something he had learned or memorized. He had learned it by his experience with God!

You see, when we obey God and He accomplishes His purpose through us, He becomes so much more than a passing acquaintance to us! We really get to *know* Him!

The ongoing adventure

And so the adventure continues . . .

Just as Jesus taught His disciples that night before His death, *we come to know God by experience as we obey Him and He accomplishes His work through us.*

In the Old Testament, when God's people experienced God in a new way, they gave Him a new name, representing that aspect of His character that they had experienced. That experience would come as He showed them what He was doing, and they believed and obeyed Him.

So I return this morning to the questions that I asked you three months ago at the end of my first sermon on *Experiencing God*.

Do you *know* Him, *really* know Him?

Are you growing in your relationship with Him day by day?

Do you know Him as your loving heavenly Father and friend, or do you simply know *about* Him, like a character out of a history book?

Have you really *experienced* God at work in and through your life?

Well, if you haven't, you can begin to, as you open yourself up more fully to Him for Him to work in and through your life as He wants to work.

As He reveals Himself and what He's doing around you, He is pursuing a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal. He's speaking to you to invite you to become involved in what He's doing.

So believe Him, adjust your life to Him, and obey Him. Then *you* will come to know God by experience as He accomplishes His work in and through you.

Will you commit yourself to live this way today, and truly *experience God*?

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¹ In this sermon series, I am relying heavily on Blackaby's ideas as presented in Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

² Blackaby and King, 169.

³ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® (2011 edition).