

Session 7: How Does a Relationship With God Begin? Revised 6.9.10

Introduction

Last session, we explored one of the **most frightening concepts ever**: That we could be separate from God, now, and forever, and not even be aware of it. We were face to face with God's X-ray of our situation. These invisible realities seem so hard to believe. According to Jesus, it is only when we grasp this worst possible diagnosis that we can appreciate God's best possible cure.

Today we explore the **greatest news ever**: God's most amazing cure for a situation we cannot fix ourselves. Like the diagnosis, this cure is obscured by our circumstances, emotions, and culture. It doesn't seem possible that something so amazing could be so simple, yet so profound. That something so huge could start so small at one point in time.



Jesus stunned one of the most religious people on earth when he said, "You must be born again."

He **shocked people into thinking about their need for a relationship with God** by using words like saved, rescued, born, adopted, family, wedding, banquet, citizen... He spoke of actually coming into people's lives, connecting them with God and other people, changing them from the inside out, transferring them into an entirely new kingdom. **His intentionally painted pictures of a profound starting point, a moment of huge impact, an amazing privilege, far beyond religious rituals and membership.**

He certainly taught about growth and process after we begin. But how does a relationship with God begin? Does it come from your parents? Does it happen when you become a good enough person? Do you just pray a prayer? He emphasized birth before growth, but what does "born again" really mean? If it's such a big deal, why is there so much confusion about it, and **why aren't the changes more obvious?**

It is crucial that you understand how a relationship with God begins. It is a life or death issue because life only comes from this relationship. If you are unclear about how to receive this life, you probably won't. And if you cannot explain it to others, chances are you will not be able to lead them to life either.

PREVIEW OF SESSION: CHART THE COURSE

Here is what to expect in this session:

1. **Connecting with others: Link up with a person and idea (pairs).**
2. **Reviewing past concepts: Where are we? (group)**
3. **Exploring the topic: How Does a Relationship With God Begin? (group and pairs)**
4. **Teamwork/Prayer Partner: How can this topic affect your life this week? (group and pairs)**
5. **Assignment for next week: Be ready to report on this.**

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: LINK UP WITH A PERSON AND IDEA

Before we begin, briefly discuss the following in pairs: see pgs 2,3

- Share one positive or negative experience from the past week (in any category).
- What was helpful from the last session? Review it on the next page, "Summary of Session #6"
- Any progress in understanding or applying it?

Reviewing last session: Rescued? Savior? Lost?

Exploring the Topic: Overview

In order to explore this concept we will look at six things:

Warm-up Questions:

1. Are there examples in my experience or in the natural world of **single moments of profound change**? Are there examples where someone thought they had this change but missed it somehow?
2. Are some profound changes in life **real even though they're not fully obvious right away**? Could this be true in the spiritual world as well?
3. **Where am I** in my journey? **How did I form my opinion** about starting a relationship with God? Am I **willing to let God** and his Word **reshape my view**?

Core Questions:

1. What does the **Bible** actually **say** about starting a relationship with God?
2. What **choice** is God *really* asking me to make?
3. How do I **begin** this relationship or **appreciate** it more fully?

Warm-Up #1: Examples From Our World: What Can We Learn Here?

Personal Experience: Give an example from your experience where a **person's situation changed profoundly in a moment**. Or where a person's situation could have changed but didn't. Here are two examples. Discuss them with your teammate. And think of other examples from your own experience, which may help someone else understand this concept better.

1. Birth: At the **moment** of birth, a baby receives a list of rights and privileges: name, citizenship, human rights, social security number, and a web of relationships. The baby has no awareness of these things, until **it grows**, but they are real.
2. Marriage: A lot happens the **moment** a couple is married. Their legal status, rights, responsibilities, and privileges all change. They're still the same people, and **need time to deepen their relationship**. But in the eyes of the state, their families, and God himself they are fundamentally changed.

Session Highlights

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1. **Key Questions:** How Does a Relationship With God Begin?
2. **Key Scripture:** Romans 10:10
3. **Key Illustration:** Moments of major life change (birth)
4. **Key Faith Prayer:** "Lord, I choose today to begin a new relationship with you through Jesus Christ. I believe that he died for me, and I want him to be my personal Lord and Savior. Thank you for saving me."
5. **Key Faith Step:** Tell someone about your new or renewed faith in Jesus.

The Natural World: Where in the natural world do you see **single moments of profound change**? Discuss this as a group. Your leader will help the group identify a few key examples.

1. Adoption: **The moment** final papers are signed, an adopted child receives all the rights of a naturally born child: a new family, new relationships, new citizenship, and new responsibilities. The child seems the same, and **will need to grow** in a lot of areas. But the rights are real.
2. New Citizenship: **The moment** the final papers are signed and a person receives US citizenship, he receives all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a US citizen. This is a **profound change** and opens doors to many opportunities that only moments earlier were unavailable. There will be **many cultural adjustments ahead**, but the citizenship is real.

Warm-Up #2: Transition to the Spiritual World: Do Profound Changes Really Happen in a Moment?

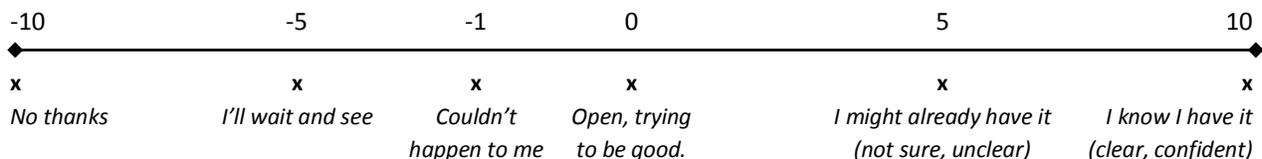
We have seen that in many situations a lot can happen in a moment. Regardless of how we feel at the time, the changes are real. **Could this be true in the spiritual world as well? Can something as profound as a new relationship with God really begin in a moment? Can something about us really change that much that fast?** If so, why are those changes not always obvious right away?

In session 6, we explored how God wants to have a relationship with us, but our sin separates us from him. We heard God’s diagnosis of all humans apart from Christ in words like *perish, lost, and condemned*. And we previewed the cure to our disease—a relationship with Jesus Christ. **It starts in moment and grows for a lifetime.** This relationship involves words like *life, saved, forgiven, born, adopted, new kingdom, and eternal joy*. Is this kind of radical change possible? How? Am I ready to embrace this cure?

Warm-Up #3: Inspecting My Foundations: Where Am I On My Journey?

The rest of this session will help you understand what the Bible says about starting a relationship with God and what happens when you do. But first, let’s look at your present opinion. What do you think about this?

Where are you on your spiritual journey? Has your relationship with God begun?



Why did you put your “X” there?

What would help you move toward +10?

Discuss this with your teammate:

In the next section, you will explore what the Bible says about how a relationship with God begins. But first, one more inspection: **How many examples from the Bible can you think of describing how someone's relationship with God began?** Write them here. (One example is provided...)

Examples of people starting a relationship with God

Saul

Did you struggle to think of examples from the scriptures? Is it possible that you may not be as clear on this as you think? This is not unusual. Many people do not realize how unclear they are until they are asked. Sometimes it is shocking to see how little we know about this subject compared to all the other topics we have learned about.

*What dangers result if we are **confused by assumptions and misinformation from your culture—even your family or church culture?***

Have you ever felt a longing for clarity about how to begin a relationship with God, for you, or for others?

When you hear it explained clearly, how it resonates!

How agonizing when it is not clear!

All eternity is at stake here, for you, and those you care about.

As you explore the next section you will gain further clarity and conviction.

And you will be able to appreciate it more fully...

The more clear we are about beginning, the more clear we can be about the growth process.

Core #1: Input From God’s Word: What Does the Bible Say About How a Relationship with God Begins?

In this section, you will explore the key verses that describe how a relationship with God begins. There are clear examples, explanations, and warnings. **God wants you to be crystal clear on how to come to him and receive life.** It’s like he’s saying,

“I want you to know me. I’ve written down how others began a relationship with me. I’ve explained it clearly. Come. Explore how you can know me, and open your heart.”

In the first column, describe your current view. In the other columns, explore what God’s Word says about how a relationship with him begins. Every time you have a question or objection, write it in the left column. Underline the statements that seem important to you.

Your Current Beliefs

What do you really think about beginning a relationship with God? How does it happen? How long does it take?

How have you formed your opinion (e.g., family, teachers, culture/society)?

Were they reliable sources of spiritual insight?

EXAMPLES of Real People

Explore the examples below. Ask yourself three questions:

- ✓ *What is different or unique about each example?*
- ✓ *What do they all have in common?*
- ✓ *What evidence of change do you see in the people?*

You will see the biblical pattern for beginning a relationship with God. (Pay special attention to numbers 3, 5, and 6.)

1.....T
Thief on the cross (Luke 23:43)

2.....A
3,000, cut to the heart, Acts 2: 36-41

3.....T
The Ethiopian (Acts 8:35-38)

4.....S
Saul, later named Paul (Acts 9:1-18)

5.....C
Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2, 24-48)

6.....L
Lydia (Acts 16:13-15)

7.....P
Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:27-34)

8.....B
Bereans (Acts 17:11-12)

The Biblical Pattern; (not a formula, but clear foundations)

What do all the examples have in common? These will help you see the biblical pattern—the dynamics and decisions that should take place in all people.

What was different in each example? These will help you see that despite the pattern above, every person is different. God works in individual lives in unique ways.

Response: From 0-10, how sure are you God has a pattern for beginning a relationship with him?

SEVEN AMAZING THINGS that happen the moment a relationship with God begins. **The more clear we are about the moment of beginning, the better we grow in the process of living.**

Explore the passages below. They explain how a relationship with God begins and what happens to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Underline the words and phrases that are most significant to you.

Amazing Thing #1: Your sins are FORGIVEN.

Colossians 1:13-14 – God rescues you from the reign of darkness and transfers you to his kingdom of light. You are in a new place spiritually.

*Amazing Thing #2: JESUS enters your life.
You have real hope for change.*

Revelation 3:20, Colossians 1:27 – When you open your heart to Jesus, he comes in to be with you.

*Amazing Thing #3: Jesus' SPIRIT lives in you,
actively working to change you.*

John 3:3-8, 16:5-13, Titus 3:1-7 – Jesus sends his Spirit to dwell in you. The Spirit then gives you new life (you are **born again**), and he continues to guide and empower you in living the new life.

*Amazing Thing #4: You are free from the grip of sin.
You have NEW POWER to live for God.*

Romans 6:5-11, Galatians 2:20 – The Spirit's new life breaks the power of your old sin patterns. You are free to begin the process of moving away from sin and allowing Christ to live his life through you.

*Amazing Thing #5: You have a NEW, GOOD HEART.
You are changed at your core.*

Ezekiel 36:26 – God removes your hard, unresponsive heart and gives you a new heart that is soft and responsive to him.

*Amazing Thing #6: You have a NEW IDENTITY:
Child of God, New Creation.*

John 1:12, 2 Corinthians 5:17 – Because of Jesus' Spirit, his new life in you, and your new heart, you are a **new person**.

*Amazing Thing #7: You have begun the GREAT ADVENTURE of
the abundant, ETERNAL LIFE*

John 10:10, John 5:24, 1 John 5:11-13 – Jesus offers full, abundant, eternal life, regardless of life's challenges. It starts the moment your relationship with God begins, keeps growing, and *it will never end*.

The more we understand and trust these 7 amazing things, the faster and deeper we grow.

Response: From 0-10,

How certain are you that these things happen when you believe in Jesus Christ?

If you have trusted Jesus for spiritual rescue, to what extent are they evident in your life?

WARNINGS against being deceived or discouraged

God looks at our hearts. He is not looking for a reason to disqualify us because of some technical mistake or fake formula. But as we saw in session #6, **He knows we can miss eternal life or be discouraged because we are confused, deceived.**

Each passage below is a **warning to beware of counterfeit or confusions.** They show how **we can be deceived** or discouraged. Explore each passage and underline what is significant to you.

1. Knowledge (John 5:39-40) – It is possible to diligently study the Bible and yet reject Jesus.

Warning #1: Knowing a lot of the Bible is not spiritual rescue.

2. Service (Matthew 7:21-23) – It is possible to think you are following Jesus because of the way you serve others but still not know him or be saved.

Warning #2: Working for Jesus or simply trying to be like him is not spiritual rescue.

3. Passion (Romans 10:2-3) – It is possible to be enthusiastic about God and still not experience true spiritual rescue.

Warning #3: Zeal for God is not spiritual rescue.

4. Unrealistic Expectations (Ephesians 1:18) – Paul prayed that Christians in Ephesus would come to **know the riches they already had**, so they would not be discouraged. **God knows that it takes time to grow**, to experience and understand the seven amazing things (above).

Warning #4: Spiritual rescue is not always immediately obvious. Growth only occurs with practical steps (see session 8).

Which of these warnings most relates to you and why?

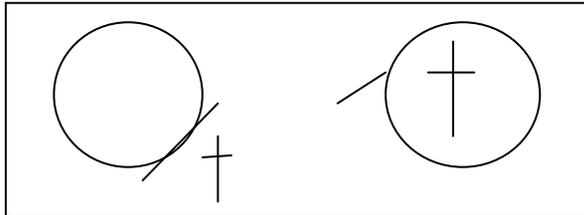
Which seem most likely for others you know?

Response: From 0-10, how certain are you that you have, in fact, experienced spiritual rescue through Jesus?

Core #2: What choice is God really asking me to make?

*God is inviting you to begin your relationship with him. Explore each passage below. **Hear each one in your heart as God speaking to you individually.** Write down how you want to respond.*

1. **Repent;** this word means; to change your thinking, to reverse any thinking that contradicts God’s word, to make a decisive commitment that leads to public demonstrations of change. Acts 2:37
2. **Agree with God;** that Jesus is Lord (or Master), and believe what the Bible says about him (Romans 10:9-10, 13).
3. **Open the door of your heart and life to Jesus,** and he will come in (Revelation 3:20).



4. God is urging you to **be reconciled to him through faith in Jesus.** When you respond, you become a new creature. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)!

Response: What is your “left hand” saying about this choice? What does the Bible say (“right hand”)?

| <i>Emotions, Circumstances, Cultural trends</i> | <i>The Bible</i> |
|---|------------------|
| | |

Core #3: How can this be real in my life?

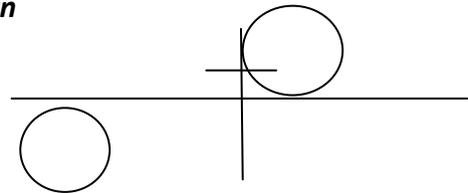
Many people make the mistake of trying to live the life of a Christian without making sure they are one. **But a relationship with God begins with a first step that must precede all others.** If you are unclear about this first step—or if you skip it—you will miss Jesus in the process of trying to please him. You will try to live for him without having him. This reduces Jesus to a role model, friend, helper, but not Savior.

These verses capture the heart of the first step (illustrated in the diagram below):

*“If you **confess** with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your **heart** that you believe and are justified, and it is with your **mouth** that you confess and are saved... ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 10:9-10, 13).*

Faith Response: Responding according to the Biblical Pattern

1. **Step 1: Accept God’s Diagnosis.**
2. **Step 2: Trust God to rescue you and give new life.**
3. **Step 3: Trust God to live that life through you.**



As the diagram shows, your relationship with God begins when you cross the line from death to life, from Jesus outside to inside your life, from having a hard heart to a transplanted, soft heart.

Response: Where are you in all of this? From 0-10, how certain are you that you want your relationship with God to begin?

What motivates you?

What hinders you?

Faith Response

You may be responding in one of several ways listed below. **Circle the response you relate to most.**

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. “No thanks. I don’t need Jesus in my life.” | 5. “I am thankful for my relationship with God, but I have never been baptized. I want to take steps to publicly declare my faith. ” |
| 2. “I want to explore this more.” | 6. “I am thankful for my relationship with God. I want to take steps to grow and see the seven amazing things become obvious in my life.” |
| 3. “I want my relationship with God to begin for the first time. ” | 7. “I am thankful for my relationship with God. I want to commit to share this good news with others.” |
| 4. “I want my relationship with God to begin for the last time. I choose today to take God at his word and believe he will never leave me nor forsake me. I never have to do this again!” (See Hebrews 13:5) | |

Interaction: Discuss your response with your teammate, and determine your next concrete step.

TEAMWORK/PRAYER PARTNER: HOW CAN THIS TOPIC AFFECT YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK?

Discuss the following with your partner. Start now, and check in with each other through the week.

1. *General*: What is most helpful from this session? What is difficult? How clear am I?
2. *Specific*: How does this affect specific areas of my life?
3. *Faith steps*: How much do I live as though this is true? What practical steps do I need to take in order to live according to reality? Who else can I share this with?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: BE READY TO REPORT ON THIS.

Before next week's meeting, do the following to help you further understand and apply this session.

1. **Keep Your Eyes Open**: Look for other moments in your life or the natural world around you that involve profound changes. Write down any examples you see.
2. **Reinforce Your Learning: Review the key scriptures** and the **seven amazing things**. You know you understand them if you can explain them to a 10 year old. Can you?
3. **Apply the Reality Principle**: What are your emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends saying about beginning a relationship with God? How do those things stand up to the claims of Scripture? Write your thoughts and observations below.

What my emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends say:
(my family, friends, church, media...)

What the Bible says:

4. **Share With Someone Else**: If you are convinced of the reality of salvation and your need for it, *share this with someone else*. If you are not, *ask someone else what they think*. It will help you to talk this out with others who are interested in the topic.

Forecasting Session 8: How Does My Relationship With God Grow?

Is it possible to start a relationship with God and fizzle into a mediocre life? Yes, it is possible.

Kind of like putting all the emphasis on the wedding, and ignoring the marriage...

Like being a newborn baby and then left on the porch to fend for yourself...

Like going up like a rocket and coming down like a rock...

But if you regularly take **five steps** in your daily life, God will continuously reveal himself to you.

Your relationship with him will grow, you will see obvious change.

In the next session, we will explore these five steps.

In preparation, **bring examples** which illustrate how **little steps towards growth lead to BIG results...**

and , **consider these questions:**

1. How do you think one grows spiritually? What keeps your life from fizzling?
What practical things bring real, lasting change into your life?

2. How did you form your beliefs?

3. Do your actions reflect these beliefs?