

# The Highest Priority

by Bob Hoekstra

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*The highest priority in life is the knowledge of the Lord, which is the excellence of life and the ultimate goal of gaining Christ and experiencing His work in our lives.*

**Duration:** 1:02:04

**Scripture:** John 14:6, Acts 3:19, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Philippians 3:9-10, 1 John 1:5

**Topics:** "Knowing God", "Personal Repentance"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the transformative power of encountering Jesus Christ. He shares his personal experience of initially finding the idea of God boring and uninteresting. However, when he met his future wife and saw the light of God's glory in her, he realized the truth and reality of God's greatness. This led him to repentance and a desire to know Jesus Christ. The speaker highlights that Jesus came to reveal the Father and offers Himself as the way to know God. He encourages listeners to make knowing Jesus their highest priority and explains that this happens through experiencing life with Him, communicating with Him, and facing challenges together.

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## Transcript

Let's pray together, shall we? Lord, you are so wonderful and so good, so gracious. Lord, how we thank you for your grace. We glory in your grace.

We boast in your grace. We stand in your grace. We thank you for being willing to receive us.

We who were so far off from you deserve to never know you, let alone draw near to you. And by your grace in Jesus Christ, you've forgiven us, given us new life, made us one family, one Father, one Lord, one Spirit. Lord, thank you for your grace.

And we do want to be strong in your grace, Lord. There's no other strength for us, Lord, but the strength of your grace. And we ask you to build us up in your grace now.

Strengthen us in the things of Jesus Christ. Lord, we do come humbly before you. What an amazing thing, Lord, how easy to qualify for your grace, just to come humbly before you.

How foolish we've been so many times for so many years, Lord, to hesitate in humbling ourselves before you. We come this morning humbly, Lord. We confess gladly.

We need you every day, every step, every issue, in every way. Thank you for letting us come to the throne of grace. Pour out your Spirit upon us now, Lord, we pray.

Feed us, teach us, instruct us, enlighten us. Lord, we ask you not only to do a general, common work for all of us, but Lord, we ask you to work in each one of our lives right now. We thank you that as you minister to all of us, you can also tailor your message to each of us.

Do it, Lord, we pray. Give us ears to hear and hearts to respond by your Holy Spirit. Guide us now into the truth.

Set us free, sanctify us, build us up. Do things we couldn't even perhaps understand enough to ask you about. Show us, Lord, you're able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we ask or think.

Be glorified in our lives and build us up, Lord, and sharpen the priorities of our lives, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen. We're going to let the Lord, through the Word, build on something that Pastor Chuck spent a bit of time looking at last night. That is, developing our relationship with the Lord.

Developing our relationship with the Lord. The Scriptures actually call this the highest priority in life. And that's the topic of our study this morning, the highest priority in life.

In Philippians chapter 3, verses 7 and 8, we read there of the excellence of the knowledge of the Lord. But what things were gained to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. For indeed, I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord.

The excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. This word excellence is translated sometimes in the New Testament as higher or better or supreme. It speaks of something that stands out, that rises above.

It speaks of something that is superior in rank. It speaks of that which excels and surpasses. In the second half of verse 8 and the second half of 7, Paul counted the things that were gained as loss for Christ.

Then he said, verse 8, for whom I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ. Paul considered all things loss in regard to this issue. He talks about the excellence of knowing the Lord.

Then he says he counts everything else loss as he compares it to the excellence of knowing the Lord. So what we're looking at here is the highest priority in life. He calls one thing the excellence and everything else loss as compared to the excellence.

So we're looking at what the Scriptures define as the highest priority in life, the knowledge of the Lord. The knowledge of the Lord is the excellence, the most excellent thing in life. Remember in John 17.3, Jesus said, This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Knowing the Lord, getting acquainted with the Lord, growing in friendship with the Lord, or as Pastor Chuck was defining it, developing a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it is, according to these two verses, the surpassing value. There's no value higher. Or it could be translated, the most excellent treasure of life.

Or to put it in the context appropriately of our studies, it's the highest priority of life. In 1 Chronicles 28.9, when David was counseling his son, he said, And you, Solomon my son, you know the God of your Father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. For the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts.

If you seek Him, He will be found of you. But if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. Those who forsake the path of getting to know the Lord, they're forsaking God forever.

There's nothing left if we don't know the Lord. That's why David said to his son Solomon, Get to know the Lord God of your Father. You remember Jeremiah 9.23 and 24? Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man boast in his might.

Let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord which exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, says the Lord. Aren't those the things that people boast in? People boast in their wisdom, think they know how to put life together better than anyone else.

People like to boast in their might, whether it's their physical might or their positional might. Or riches, that's one of the real favorite boasting things for man. God says, That's not what you should get excited about.

You want to get excited about something and say, I have cause to glory, to rejoice in my life. God says, Let a man glory in this, that he understands and knows Me. To the degree that we understand and know the Lord, we have cause to glory, to exult, to rejoice.

I mean, that's something to get excited about. I spent 14 years in Dallas, Texas and ministered there and pastored, went to school there. Boy, was that a town for boasting in the might of your favorite team.

I mean, whoa. I know it's a minor side hobby to our brother here, but to some there in Dallas, it was a serious religion. I mean, they'd gather in that shrine with a hold to heaven, raise their arms to glory and dance in the aisles.

Praise be to the cowboys. They'd go berserk. They'd go nuts, glorying, boasting.

And yet, everything they did, and some still do, we should be doing toward the Lord. I mean, it's maybe exciting to see Tony Dorsett back in those days, you know, go 80 yards, touchdown. As Pastor Chuck was saying, that passes pretty quick.

But to any degree that we understand and know the Lord, there's something to get excited about for time and eternity. Now, we can't master the mind of God. It's so much higher than ours and His ways higher than ours as compared to the heaven and the earth.

But He does reveal Himself to those who seek Him. He lets us understand Him little by little and get to know Him. Boy, there's something to glory in.

That's something to get excited about. We ought to be the real fanatics of planet earth. What are you so excited about? I understand a little bit about God.

You're kidding. Or even a better one. I know God.

You know Him. What, did you meet Him or something? Yeah, I met Him. Getting to know Him.

Boy, that's something to get excited about. It's the most excellent treasure of life. And just to understand Him a little bit and know that He exercises loving kindness and judgment and righteousness in the earth.

To get to know God a bit, that He has a loyal, steadfast love for His people. That He always loves them. The loving kindness of the Lord is everlasting, the Psalms say.

Every day, every night, every second, every moment, the Lord is committed in loyal, steadfast love for His people. Boy, just to understand that a little bit. Something to get all excited about and glory in.

And that He exercises judgment in the world. That He decides what's to happen. And He'll take care of things.

And it looks like there is no justice or good judgment. But God isn't through yet. We can rest in that, know that, understand that.

And righteousness. That there's a right way to live and He has it for us. And there's a righteousness we can find and walk in.

He'll give it to us. Boy, just to understand that and know God that well, that's infinite treasure. Knowing the Lord.

That's what everlasting life is all about, Jesus said. To know the Father and to know the Son, that's eternal life. It's not just that we're going to exist forever, but it's we're going to live forever.

Every human being is going to exist forever, but that's not living. Some are going to die forever because they reject the knowledge of the Lord. We're going to live forever.

Boy, that is glorious. That is glorious. Remember 2 Corinthians 4.6 about the knowledge of the Lord.

For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Into our dark hearts. Remember how dark your heart was before the light of God was shining in there? We're talking Carlsbad Caverns with the lights out.

Dark hearts. Sinful, selfish, unreliable, dishonest, deceitful, self-centered, using people, abusing people, chasing everything God said leave alone. Leaving alone everything God said chase.

Dark hearts. And praise the Lord the day came when the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ began to shine in our hearts. Boy, didn't that change everything? We came out of darkness into His marvelous light.

And how did we find the knowledge of the glory of the Lord? How did we get to know how glorious God was? It was all in the face of Jesus Christ. That is in the meeting of Jesus Christ. That is in our first acquaintanceship with Jesus Christ.

When we first met Him in His face was shining the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. We didn't know how glorious God was. We tried not to think about God.

When I was in high school my parents were still dragging me to church. By the time I was out of high school they were tired of dragging and I wasn't going. Boy, the pastor talked about God and what a drag,

what a bore.

Man, get this over. I got to get to some action. This is so irrelevant.

Little did I know I was the one that was irrelevant. I tried not to think about God. Then when I really got my attention on God it was guilt and condemnation and uneasiness.

But oh boy, when His Spirit convicted, the heart melted and broke. How many of you met the Lord in a rather crushed heap of humanity? Boy, a lot of us. I did too.

Grew up in a pastor's home from 15 to 25. Went deep into the world. Had all kinds of opportunities for 15 years.

Wasted them all. But when God was through 10 years later convincing me I should have humbled myself earlier, I was a crushed heap. Messed up life and messed up most lives I had gotten close to.

I was hearing the Word and the Spirit was just pounding on my heart. The Word came the strongest to me through the gal that was to be my wife, now has been for 28 plus years. Boy, all of a sudden the light was dawning.

Oh my word, all that I heard all my life, that was reality wasn't it? That was the truth. I was living a lie and see where it got you Bob? Broken, crushed, but willing to let the light shine in. Oh Lord forgive me.

Oh Lord what a fool I've been. Before that I used to hate to cry. It was embarrassing.

That particular week that salvation came to my life, I learned to love to cry. God loves a broken spirit and a contrite heart. I cried, He forgave.

I confessed, He gave new life. Boy, the light started to shine in. But I saw it was the face of Jesus Christ.

Oh yes, He's the Savior. Oh yeah, He's the one I should have been pursuing. Oh yeah, He's the one I kind of joined in with the crowd and made fun of.

Yeah, my dad preaches about that stuff. Boy, the grace of God that lightning didn't just strike me dead. I'll show you who your dad preaches about.

Zap! Oh Lord, sorry. Like Paul knocked off his horse. Who are you Lord? The knowledge of the glory of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

He came to reveal to us the Father. Holy, righteous judge who wants to be a loving, forgiving Father. Boy, knowing God is what it's all about.

There's nothing without it. Everything else follows it. It's the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

It's life's greatest treasure. It's the highest priority of life. Remember 1 John 5.20. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we may know Him who is true.

And we are in Him who is true. In His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God in eternal life.

Isn't that a beautiful verse? All about knowing God. So many verses in the Word of God about knowing Him that we may know Him who is true. We didn't know the truth before we came to Jesus.

We lived a lie, always half afraid or more that people would find out what a phony we were. By the time I came to the Lord, I was going to church and working for a church and manager of a church radio office. It's amazing how many people you can fool.

You sure can't fool God. You cannot fool God. We have come to know Him who is true.

Praise God, He can expose our lie and yet give us a true life. We know Him who is true. Knowing Him gives us a true life.

We're in Him who is true. In His Son, Jesus Christ. What a glorious thing.

It's just so wonderful to not have to put on a show, a sham, a pretense. He's the one who's true. We're in Him.

He's our life. We just hold Him forth and walk in Him. That's our reality.

We don't have to pretend. We're in the one who's true. We've got a real life to live if we just walk in Him.

Oh, the excellence of the knowledge of the Lord. The excellence of getting to know the Lord. To be acquainted with the Lord.

It's life's greatest treasure. It's the ultimate priority. That's why in verse 8, Paul said he counted all things loss.

And we need to be those who are counting all things loss. For whom I suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ. Paul considered everything as loss, as rubbish, literally and more colorfully, dung.

Translators kind of cleaned it up a little for us. But it's not a pretty picture, is it? If it would compete with getting in the way of knowing God, Paul said, I count it as loss. I count it as rubbish.

I count it as a pile of manure. I don't want anything to do with it. If it gets in the way of knowing the Lord, it's as worthless to me as a pile of barnyard manure.

Boy, I mean, we have that perspective. Because so many things get in the way of knowing the Lord that look so important. The Lord probably wants to ask us, is there anything that wants to get in the way of us knowing God? That is initially meeting Him or once meeting Him, growing to know Him more and more.

For many, it's the good things that want to get in the way. Oh, for some of us along the way, as I've confessed before, it was poker games and gambling on the golf course and trying to find and manipulate and use women. Those were some of my favorite activities in those days before Christ.

And I was much more interested in them than in the Lord. They definitely got in the way. I praise God now I look at that sort of stuff and by the work of the grace of God, all that stuff looks to me like a big pile of manure now.

Oh man, who'd want to do any of that anymore? Who'd want to get into that stuff anymore? The picture is as vivid as taking a running leap headfirst right into a manure pile. Who wants to get into that? Oh, I just

count it as rubbish. But you know, there are other things that sometimes are not as quickly counted as done.

Sometimes it's the job. Well, a man's got to work. Yeah, but does he have to worship it? Does he have to live for it? The reason he has to work is because God said to work.

And to be rebellious and unwilling to work is rebellion against God. So sure, working is right. God's ordained it.

There's value in it. We don't work to get. We work to obey, brothers.

The world works to get. We're already promised all of our needs. We work to obey.

And then God uses us on the job and especially uses the job on us, right? But he doesn't want it getting in the way of knowing him. And it can, can't it? We can end up a slave to the job instead of a bond slave of Jesus Christ. It's not right.

God would want us to look at that and go, diving into that job like that, that's head first into the manure pile. Count it loss. View it as rubbish as far as knowing me.

Commit to knowing me not to live in for your job and I'll put your job in the right place, the right perspective. Might even give you a new job. Your boss might not like having someone around that lives for me instead of for him.

But, you know, so be it. That's part of it. Sometimes the opinions of others get in the way of knowing God.

Oh, I better not be too fanatical. You know, they're going to think I'm a weirdo. They're going to think I am a Jesus freak.

Really? Whoa. Imagine that ever happening. Opinions of others.

So we, you know, we attempted to slack off a little, just cool it concerning the Lord when we're around others. Because their opinion matters, you know. There it is, a jump back in the dung heap.

That's garbage. It's rubbish. It gets in the way.

And we go, oh, well, you got to guard your reputation. Get to know God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We'll have a great reputation with the right people.

And we're guaranteed a lousy reputation with the wrong people. So it's just sorted out beautifully. Habits.

Sometimes they're the thing that gets in the way. You know, something we like to do, we just can't, I can't let that go. You mean I'm supposed to let that go? But there's nothing wrong with that.

You know, whatever that is. Maybe there isn't anything inherently wrong with it. But if it's getting in the way of really getting after knowing the Lord, every time you jump into it, what are you jumping into? More manure.

Count that habit in that thing that's not bad. Count it as rubbish if it's getting in the way of knowing the Lord better. Just take a look at it and say, Lord, give me the eyes to see that as a dung heap.

That'll motivate us to leave it alone. Hobbies. There's nothing ultimately great or ultimately wicked about hobbies.

They can be used of God for blessing, refreshment, even sometimes an avenue of witness and fellowship with others. Don't you know it? It can become a monstrous dung heap, blocking us from knowing the Lord, you know. We just think about it all the time, just every moment that we aren't doing something that others make us do, we've got to get into that hobby.

Dive back into the dung heap. Let's be willing to count anything that gets in the way of the Lord as just rubbish. Are we ready to put these things in the right priority? The way we do it is we get on with knowing the Lord and let the Lord fit them in any time, place, and way He wants, if He wants.

Then we are able to gain Christ. See that end of that verse? Count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ. That is, that I may experience more and more of Him and what He can do in and through my life.

Count all of that rubbish that I may gain Christ. Lord, I want those things out of the way and rightly sorted out in my life that I may gain more of You. May get to know more of You and Your work in my life.

To know the Lord more, to gain more of Him, that is where we're more deeply acquainted, He's more extensively able to work in our lives, gaining more of Him in that sense, we must first be sure that we are found in Him. Verse 9 speaks of that, "...and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." To grow in knowing the Lord, we must first have met Him. We have to be found in Him.

Paul's great desire was growing in the Lord, just being found in Him. When the Father would look for Him, He wanted to be found in Christ. Basically, by the way, remember there's only two places in the universe any individual person can be found, and that is in Christ or out of Christ.

In Christ and the new life He gives, or in Adam and the natural life that was passed on, generation to generation, right down to us through our parents. We need to be found in Him, in Christ. Those who are in Christ and are found in Him are those not having their own righteousness, that is, a righteousness which is from the law.

Instead, they have a righteousness which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. Now, here's the issue. If we're going to know the Lord, if we're going to begin and then develop a relationship with Him, we cannot just walk up to His door, knock on it, or ring the doorbell and say, here I am, I want to meet you.

We cannot approach Him because of our sin, our guilt, our alienation. He's holy and pure, the natural life we got from Adam through our parents that we nurtured and developed as the only life we thought we had. God said through Isaiah, that righteousness, the best kind of life it could produce was like filthy rags.

Can you imagine going before God? Lord, I want to get to know you and here's my calling card, filthy rags. I know you'll want to hang around with me. We cannot access God on our own.

We cannot come into His presence. So, we need to be found in Christ that we might have a new righteousness to bring before the Father. If we went up to the Father in our name, we could not approach Him because all of our unrighteousness, all of our righteousness is very unrighteous.

Our best rightness, the best effort to do right still fell far short of the glory of God. So, how do we get close to God? How do we meet Him? One has come to us to introduce us to Him, Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ came from the Father to reveal the Father to us, to introduce us to the Father, to offer Himself to us, to say, come unto me.

I'm the way, the truth, and the life. You want to know the Father? I'm the way. You want to know what He's like? I'll show Him to you.

I and the Father are one. We're the same. Same righteousness, same holiness, same love, same ability to forgive, but the same righteous judge unless you humbly repent.

This is the end of side 8. To listen to the rest of the message, please turn the tape over now. Jesus Christ came from the Father to reveal the Father to us, to introduce us to the Father, to offer Himself to us, to say, come unto me. I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

You want to know the Father? I'm the way. You want to know what He's like? I'll show Him to you. I and the Father are one.

We're the same. Same righteousness, same holiness, same love, same ability to forgive, but the same righteous judge unless you humbly repent. But to those who repent of their sins, who say, Father, I'm guilty.

Lord Jesus, forgive me. We are cleansed, forgiven, and placed in Jesus Christ. His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

Now we come before the Father in the name of Jesus. Father, in Jesus' name, forgive me. Father, in Jesus' name, hear me.

Father, in Jesus' name, work in my life. And all that relationship with the Father is based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We're not saying, God, work in my life according to what I deserve.

We're saying, Father, work in my life according to what Jesus would deserve. Treat me like He would deserve to be treated. That's a pretty good place to be in, isn't it? That's exactly where we are if we're found in Christ, that we may be found in Him, not having our own righteousness.

Praise the Lord. We don't have to establish a righteous relationship with God on our own best effort, because that would come from the law. There's your standard, God.

There's your commandments. Watch this. Oh, I'm going to live up to them.

Watch this. How's that, God? Well, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Yeah, but I know I'm doing better than He is, Lord.

So He fell short an inch more than you. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And the wages of sin is death.

We can't establish a righteous relationship with God. What we need is a righteousness that is through faith in Christ. We believe on Jesus.

He becomes our Lord and Savior. The Father finds us in Him. The righteousness of Christ is now ours by faith in Christ.

It's a righteousness which is from God by faith. I know most of us have in our lives, in this gathering, the righteousness that is from God by faith. That's the only way to measure up to the righteous standard of God, is to have a righteousness from God that measures up.

Who's the only one that ever measured up to the righteous, holy, glorious law of God? Jesus Christ. We are now in Him. His righteousness is now ours as a gift by faith.

When we're held up to the law of God, we measure up in Christ so we can have a relationship with the Father. It's a righteousness that comes from God by faith. Listen, if you've never put your faith, though, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and no doubt there's some of us here who never have, if you've never put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you must stand before the Father who is a holy judge, as well as wanting to be a loving Father.

And that holy judge will have to condemn you on the basis of your righteousness. It doesn't measure up. And though that may sound like bad news, listen, it's good news to understand the bad news.

You know where you stand. You need the righteousness that comes from God by faith. And I don't know who you are if you're here, but if you don't have that righteousness, you can have it right now.

You say, well, what do I do to get it? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Yeah, but I can hardly see an aisle to walk. Well, we're not even going to stop and do it if there were one.

Now, you could walk an aisle. But when we're done here, you can just turn over your friend who brought you and say, I just found the righteousness of Christ as my righteousness because I believed on His name for the first time in my life. It's a righteousness through faith.

Just right now in your heart, tell the Lord, yeah, Lord, you nailed me. There it is. You got me.

I'm guilty. I'm a sinner. I don't measure up.

I can't have a relationship with you. But there's one available in Christ. Lord, I repent.

I admit I need that kind of cleansing and forgiveness. By faith, I ask you to forgive me, be my Lord and Savior. Clothe me in the righteousness of Christ.

Find me hereafter, ever after in Jesus Christ, your Son. Take Him at His word, and by faith, you'll have what He offers. He keeps His word.

Just confess that with your mouth, as Romans 10 says. Even this day. In fact, if you want to, lean over and tell your friend right now.

But do it today. Even do it before you leave here. Be found in Him, His righteousness.

Now, once having that righteousness, we can develop a relationship with this God we've met through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What do we need to do then? Have a passion to know Him. And the next verse, verse 10, tells us three ways God wants us to be getting to know Him.

Verse 10, that I may know Him. That was Paul's desire, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Verse 10, that I may know Him.

Well, that's a great phrase. Speaks about the highest priority of life. If someone said to us, what's your highest priority? We could just simply say, if this is true, that I may know Him.

Bring it down to just one simple phrase. Hey man, what are you all about? What's your life all about? Where are you headed? What are you after? That I may know Him. Well brother, tell me, what can I be praying with you about? That I may know Him.

Well listen, let's get on another subject. What do you think life's all about? That I may know Him. It's an astounding phrase.

I mean, it just explains so much. That I may know Him. That was Paul's desire.

It's the highest priority. It ought to be ours. May this be our highest priority and our deepest heart's desire, that I may know Him.

If it is, three of the ways God will be working to acquaint us with Him, they're given here in this verse. You know, when you meet someone and get to know them, you go through things together. You communicate together.

You face things together. You get to know each other. That's how it works with God.

These things in the family of God, they're sort of little living parables as it were, illustrations of our walk with the Lord. That I may know Him and, and that word could be, it doesn't need to be for the point, but it could be rendered, even that I may know Him, even the power of His resurrection. Of these three, this is almost unanimously everyone's preference in getting to know God.

Well, think about it. How would you rather get to know Him? The power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, or being made conformable to His death. Yeah, a hard choice.

Yes, I'll take the resurrection, Lord. Thank you. As if we could choose every time the way He's going to reveal Himself to us.

But the power of His resurrection is a very important way to get to know the Lord. In fact, it is the first acquaintanceship we have with the Lord. See, we come to the Lord, as Ephesians 2 says, dead in trespasses and sins.

Broken, guilty, alienated, no life in us at all. That's how we're first introduced through Jesus Christ. In Him, we find new life.

We are raised to new life. We get a taste of the power of the resurrection. Romans 6 says, we died with Christ on the cross, we who believe in Him.

We're buried with Him and we were raised with Him to newness of life. The first acquaintanceship with the Lord is a taste of resurrection power. I remember that last week in 1965, weeping my heart out, thinking it was all over, I was dying, it's done, there's no way out.

And that's true, except I didn't know the reality of the resurrection. And calling on the name of the Lord, I was raised to newness of life. Oh my word, what a tremendous start to 1966.

Walking on resurrection ground, everything looked different, everything felt different, everything was becoming different. My dear wife-to-be, we were engaged, who wanted a godly home and panicked me by it. All of a sudden I thought, hey, maybe we can have a godly home.

Resurrection hope. We come out of the deadness of sin and guilt, resurrected to new life, and it's a honeymoon with our bridegroom, as it were. It's glorious.

It's joy and laughter and delight and freedom and all that thousand pound, hundred thousand pound, million pound load of guilt. Where did it go? I could walk brightly. Glorious.

Power of the resurrection. It's fantastic. And we get to know the Lord in that.

He's a God of resurrection. Oh my God, He's victorious over sin and death. I'm on resurrection ground.

Hallelujah. You know, some give the impression though, that the Christian life is going to be resurrection hallelujah ground all the time. And you know what happens? A bit down the trail, for some a month, for some a year.

But sooner or later, it seems like the resurrection fades. And a strange thing comes around called suffering. Hey, what is the deal here? Don't I know God anymore? Has God forsaken me? No.

He wants to get more acquainted. There's more to Jesus Christ than the power of the resurrection. There's also the fellowship of his sufferings.

When Jesus Christ was upon the earth, he suffered greatly. He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He was persecuted.

He was rejected. He was lied about, betrayed, forsaken, beaten, executed. And all of this was part of his serving the father and reaching out to man.

As we get to know him and start to walk his path and want to do right, not everybody we meet is going to go with a whap on the back. Oh man, I'm so glad you're on resurrection ground. Or you know what? Somebody will kick us in the teeth and say, well, you quit all that religious nonsense.

You irritate me. Or the boss says, you know, I thought that religious thing would kind of cool down. But let me tell you, if it doesn't, you're out of here.

Or a dear relative, you know, says, oh, you know, the Jesus thing you got into is okay, but you know, it's getting obnoxious. All you talk about all the time. I mean, you used to be fun.

Now you're nothing but a drag. And that good friend that just would do anything to spend time with you now starts doing anything to avoid you. And what's the deal, Lord? Don't you love me anymore? And the Lord basically saying, yes, but I want to get more acquainted with you.

There's more to me than resurrection power. There's suffering for righteousness sake too. I went through it on earth.

And you're going to know me better as you go through some of it. We begin to suffer as he did for walking righteously with the father. We get some persecution, some rejection.

We start learning the cost of obedience. And, oh, it's not fun, but we learn to appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ all the more. You know, oh, Lord, as unrighteous on my own as I am, as often as I fail, and I still get righteous persecution.

Oh, Lord, what you must have went through. Lord, what you did to reach out to us. Oh, Lord, I think I know you a little better now.

Love you a lot more too. Getting acquainted with the Lord, growing and knowing the Lord. Well, maybe it's not so bad after all, but it can get worse, see, because there's also being conformed to his death.

This surely is the least chosen, if the option's ever given. The Lord says, how'd you like to get to know me this week? Power of the resurrection? Fellowship in my sufferings? Some will choose the sufferings. Venture out in faith, you know.

Lord, I need to go deeper than just hop and hallelujah swing from the chandelier. I'm resurrected. Acquaintanceship with you.

Maybe I need to have broken, weak, rejected, on my face in tears knowledge of you. Maybe I need to grow up some, Lord. But few choose this next one.

But you know, the amazing thing is, you don't have to choose it. It'll come and get you. If you just want to keep walking to please the Father.

Jesus shrunk from the cross, as it were, because of his holiness and his eternity. He was going to taste sin and death, and every part of his being shuddered at the cup of our sin and death. He didn't run to the cross.

Oh, great! Death and separation from the Father. I mean, he bled as he agonized over that cup. But he said, nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.

The cross comes to you. Some do run and hide from it. And the great new popular thing in the American church is seminars on detours around the cross of discipleship.

Learn how to get high on yourself. Use positive self-talk. Don't say, nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.

But for those that want to really know the Father, committed to his will, we get conformed to his death. As our heart cries out, that I may know him. What is it in practical terms, being conformed to his death? It involves experiencing impossible situations.

As we obey the Father. Sometimes it involves excruciating agony. By the way, you know what the central root word of excruciating is? Crux, cross, crucifying.

Sometimes that excruciating agony, as we learn to say, not my will but yours be done, even though we have a pain like unto death, perhaps, on that given issue. It also relates to those obvious times in our Christian life when only the faithfulness of the Father will deliver us. Maybe we've Jacob'd our way as far as we can go.

Remember Jacob? His name meant schemer. There's a little bit of Jacob in all of our flesh. Sometimes the Lord lets Jacob get in the corner until he gets his thigh broken, gets his hip out of joint.

He has to limp and depend on the provision of God. Those times when we know there is no way out and on but the Father's faithfulness. That's being conformed to his death.

That's where Jesus was. My God, my God, why have you forsaken us? Not that he didn't know the ultimate answer. He was quoting out of Psalm 22, which was the answer.

He was being made sin for all of us. But the only way out of that was the faithfulness of the Father. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Anything left for the Son depended on the faithfulness of the Father at that moment. And we get in places like that where it gets so clear to us. Maybe some of us are there right now.

There's no way on, there's no way out unless the Father comes through. I like to call this being entombed, being conformed to his death. Next month I've been walking with the Lord, let's see, 29 years.

Along the way I've been entombed I think about three times. Really I'm not looking for any more. Though I must say, I sure got to know him better each time than I ever knew him before.

If there's another one, I don't want to shrink from it. It's not pleasing to the Father and it inhibits further growth in the Lord, in knowing him. Oh, I can remember just thinking I was so dead.

I'd been a pastor some years and I thought, been so many disappointments, so many discouragements back in the middle 70s. I was just crushed. I mean, just like all the life and faith and hope were drained out of me.

Just lying around weeping at home, watching a church go through traumatic things over theological aberrations and things that I didn't learn how to contend against and I was dying. Eventually the Lord raised me. You know, that's the thing.

Being conformed to his death, the only way out of it is when he raises you. That's why it's a death experience. Conformed to his death.

You're in that place, brother. Don't forget this. We serve a God of resurrection.

If it looks to you all over, your home, your job, your Christian life, the lies, the condemnations, the enemy, the attacks even of the brethren, you serve a God of resurrection. I don't know how much weight this carries, but let me tell you, I've been raised three times. Maybe that's not as good to you as Lazarus saying, I was in the tomb, but he brought me out.

But I remember being just as helpless as Lazarus and he brought me out all three times. Brothers, we serve a God of resurrection. And you know what happens? When he calls us out of that tomb, you know what? We're back on resurrection ground.

We're back tasting again the power of his resurrection. It's like a second honeymoon. I even remember the third honeymoon.

It's great. Oh, we get to know again. Oh, how could I forget? Oh, you mean your resurrection works in this situation too, Lord? Wow.

Oh, am I glad I know that about you now. I tell you, once you're raised, you're never the same. The lies of the enemy, oh, I'll bury you.

Well, you might. You did once, but he raised me. It just changes everything.

It just changes everything. A new kind of faith, resurrection faith. A little side note, and then we'll read our last verse and stop.

A little side note. All of this we're talking about must be to quote a great phrase out of Psalm 119, according to your word. All of this power of resurrection, fellowship of suffering, conformed to his death.

We're not talking about some experiential trip. We're out on a religious mountain, you know, humming and putting our mind to nothingness and having this great guru trek where we show everybody how to make it to the throne of God. It's not that.

Every bit of it, to be real, must be according to his word. And his word speaks much about all these things. His resurrection power, his sufferings, being conformed to his death.

So, to validate all what we're going through, oh, stay in the word, keep hearing from God, let him be talking to us about these things. So, we're not off on some experiential tangent that gets us away from knowing God. Read Psalm 119 again sometime.

It's all about God's word. Time and again it says, according to your word, according to your word, according to your word. Revive me according to your word.

Strengthen me according to your word. Guide me according to your word. Protect me according to your word.

It all has to be by the word of the Lord. That brings us to our last issue. That's verse 11, which has to do with resurrected living from knowing a resurrected Lord.

Resurrected living from knowing a resurrected Lord. Verse 11, pick up verse 10 again, that I may know him in all these ways. Verse 11, if by any means, if by anything God wants to take me through, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Now, what is this talking about? Well, I'll tell you one thing it's not talking about. It's not talking about the final resurrection of the just. Why? Because Paul has already attained to that.

How? By being in Christ. He's part of that resurrection in the train of Christ, following Christ, of which Christ is the first fruit. If you're in Christ, you've attained to the final resurrection.

In Christ, that last resurrection is yours. But we all need to attain to this one, just like Paul wanted to attain to it, if by any means you might get to know God these ways. What is this? The word here, literally translated, would be outlifting or out-resurrection.

It's not used anywhere else in all the New Testament. It's the only place in the Bible this term is found. It's a unique kind of resurrection.

You can find it paraphrased in some different versions and the Amplified and other places. It's talking about being raised to a Christlike, overcoming, victorious life in this dead world. You could paraphrase this verse something like this, that I may be getting to know the Lord in such a life-transforming way that more and more and more I respond in ways that lift me out, lift me up above this dead and dying world.

That is, I live more and more like Jesus, my resurrected Lord. In other words, we get to know the Lord more and more and more. So as we go through life, we're not responding in things, problems, situations, opportunities, blessings or challenges or decisions like we used to before we were saved, not even like we used to two or three or five years ago when we knew the Lord at that level of relationship.

But we just are raised to a higher and higher out-resurrection life. See, it's about resurrected living from knowing a resurrected Lord. Remember, the Christian life is a resurrected life found and developed by following a resurrected Lord.

And the more we get to know Him, the more we live in a resurrected, a lifted up and out way. This world is dead. Listen, much of the church world is dead.

How do we really live? Live above, weak, fleshy, human, thinking, deciding, reacting. We get to know a resurrected Lord and it causes us to be living more and more of a resurrected life. Well, that's what a dead world needs to see, people who know a resurrected Lord and more and more living a resurrected life.

So people are saying to us, why don't you get all mad and vengeful when people treat you that way? Man, I guess I've just been raised out of that. Praise God, my resurrected Lord must be doing something in my life. How come you're not as selfish as you used to be? Praise the Lord, I guess I've been raised up some out of that.

It's resurrected living, I guess. Resurrected living from knowing a resurrected Lord. Well, in conclusion and reflection, let's be in the Word.

Let's be in the Word to know the Lord, praying something like Ephesians 1:17, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, in knowing Him. Be in the Word praying, Lord, by your Spirit give me wisdom that reveals who you are. In the Word, prayerfully, that's how we get to know the Lord.

And then let's also be in fellowship with one another, 2 Corinthians 3:2 and 3, you are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men. Clearly, you are an epistle of Christ. You know, if we all hang out with the Lord and get to know Him, He writes His life and reality on our hearts by the Spirit.

Then if we hang out with each other, we're epistles of Christ to each other. May the Lord stir our hearts to answer that call for more and more heavenly fellowship during our earthly trek, because our priority is growing in knowing the Lord. Let's pray together.

Lord, we ask you to stir our hearts in this one necessary thing. Enlighten the eyes of our heart. Lord, it kind of blows our mind, how could there just be one necessary thing? Teach us the depth of it, the extent of it, the application of it, how everything else sorts out in it.

And may we be those that turn from things behind us and just press on to know you with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Lord, we know that's your priority call for us. May your grace be at work abundantly in us.

Lord, we confess, if you left this to ourselves, we'd mess this up totally. We couldn't do it. We couldn't even begin to understand it.

We'd just in despair quit. Lord, bring us on. Work in us to will and to do of your good pleasure on this great matter of pressing on to know you, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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