

HOW CAN WE DEVELOP RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a restless world. The pressures of the daily routine of our lives are enough to make us lose the real essence of living and of living a fulfilling Christian life.

Every day, we are always searching for something that will give meaning and purpose to our lives.

The worldly people around us may tell themselves, "I am having fun. I am making money. I am busy doing all kinds of things"; but deep inside they know that they need something more fulfilling.

They can even try alcohol, drugs, illicit sex, pornography, gambling, ritualism, kidnapping, yahoo-yahoo, fraud, forgery, bribery & corruption, sports, movies, and games—but none of these can satisfy the hunger and thirst of their souls (*though they may deny this*).

Even as Christians, we get entangled in this same struggle.

We even make some desperate efforts to find something which will satisfy our deep spiritual thirst or needs.

Why do you think some of us leave a congregation to another congregation or leave the church of Christ to a denomination, or even leave

the religious world to an idolatrous world?

Because, sometimes even when we have filled the emptiness of our hearts, yet in the quiet moments of the night we wake up still empty spiritually and wonder what is missing – *right relationship!*

We are all connected to God by creation. We are His offspring. As His creatures, we are also connected to other human beings.

Acts 17:28 - *for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'for we are also His offspring.'*

The essence of the Christian life is hinged on building or developing *right relationship with God and man!*

Matthew 5:23-24 - *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. **First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.***

Here, Jesus emphasized the overwhelming need for speedy reconciliation with people whom we have issues with, because He knows the importance of *right relationships*.

This means a Christian must try to get along well with God and with all

people, whether they are Christians or non-Christians, believers or unbelievers, friends or not friends.

Otherwise, the relationship line with God will be broken, destroyed or removed.

Without this relationship being made right – we will remain empty spiritually, irrespective of our religious performance.

And this leads to tensions (*misunderstanding and wrong perceptions*) in our midst, malice, hatred, wars and fights from among us, vengeance, isolation, backsliding, disobedience and even idolatry. The ultimate end is that we drift into destructive *relationship with the world which is enmity with God (James 4:1,4).*

No one can stand being an enemy of God, for *in His hand, there is power and might, so that no one is able to withstand Him, and He is the consuming fire (II Chronicles 20:6; Hebrews 12:29).*

So, we need *right relationship* as the key that will bring stability and a sense of significance in our relationship with God and our fellowman.

But the question is *how can we develop right relationship with God?*

DEVELOPING A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Don't be surprised that our focus is on God, in terms of developing right relationship.

This is so because God comes first. Once we get it right with God, we can get it right with our fellow human beings, though they are interconnected.

This was and still remains Jesus Christ' emphasis in **Luke 10:27**, that we must *love the LORD our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and our neighbour as ourselves.*

To understand the need to develop right relationship with God, we must understand how God views and rate us, in order to correct any wrong perception and understanding of God, especially in difficult circumstances.

God is not a person that sees us as trash.

In some work places, some workers consider other workers in lower positions, to be nothing. Their treatment of such workers, makes them feel less human. Their feelings are not worthy of being considered no matter how valid they maybe. Even some bosses dehumanize their workers.

Same thing applies to our homes, when it comes to the way certain husbands treat their wives and children and vice versa.

Sometimes, as members of the church, the way we treat new converts and brethren who have been restored back to the faith, reveals a lot of dehumanization.

Also, in the church we experience some sort of discrimination between the rich and the poor, the preferential treatment being given to rich, in an un-Christ-like manner.

Remember *the Pharisee and the Tax Collector* in **Luke 18:9-14**. You can see the manner with which the Pharisee despised the Tax Collector.

We need to understand that God is not man. God is Spirit. That He is Spirit does not mean, He is without feelings and love.

God understands human feelings! God knows our moments of weaknesses, foolishness, anger, fear, hurt, disappointment, frustration, discouragement, loss and sadness.

In His own way, beyond our understanding, God can tolerate our feelings of weaknesses, foolishness, anger, fear, hurt, disappointment, frustration, discouragement, loss and

sadness, as long as we (*the children*) continue to follow Him.

For instance, in ***Psalms 73:2b,3, 12-14***, the writer said, *his steps had nearly slipped. For he was envious of the boastful, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked*

He observed that the wicked *are always at ease; and they increase in riches.*

Certain things we experience are beyond our control but they happen. From these things, we could be prompted to disrespect God, falsely accuse Him and disobey Him.

It could be the loss of job due to bad financial status of a company, death of a loved resulting from a drunken driver-car accident; a woman having a stillborn baby; the death of a sinless child due to health challenges.

While on the other side, we see others enjoying good health despite their poor or evil standing before God; they have not lost anyone to disease or had anyone killed! An evil farmer maybe blessed with good crops while a faithful Christian farmer experiences bad harvest.

In these situations; it may seem that that God is far away; we may have difficulty believing in God, and we become unable (*our failure not God's*) to feel His comforting presence.

People can even mock us saying that why should we continue to believe in a God who could cause or allow tragedy to happen or allow us to face tempting situations.

In ***Jeremiah 20:7-18***, we saw the expressions of Jeremiah: *he was being mocked daily because of standing by God's word. He was filled with fear. All his friends watched for his stumbling.*

Sometimes, we accuse God of failing us and being unjust; we misconstrue His own design of taking

care of us to mean that He promised to ***always*** shelter us from sorrow.

If we knew all the facts of how God handles each of our situations, we would realize that, just as blessings come to every person—the good and the bad alike—so do accidents, disappointments, temptations, losses, sickness, and death.

But men like the writer of ***Psalms 73, Jeremiah, Job***, went on to say that, though they were tempted to renounce their faith in God, they resisted and turned to God.

God demonstrated great patience toward Job and Jeremiah, because He understands them.

So, God understands human feelings!

If we knew all the facts of how God handles each of our situations, we would realize that, God values our relationship with Him.

Our weaknesses and circumstances are likely to cause us to have difficulty in maintaining our faith in God; have difficulty in concentrating on worshiping God and fervent prayers; unable to make ourselves attend church assemblies or even destroy our relationship with God.

Therefore, we must value our relationship with God, just as He values His relationship with us, and thus, we must be willing to put all efforts to develop and build right relationship with Him.

Developing right relationship with God is indeed the only greatest project we will ever work on.

It is a **'must'** task otherwise there is no validation of the essence of our Christianity and we would be just as ordinary as the people of the world.

1 Peter 2:9 - *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who*

called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Let's look at three ways that show how we can develop right relationship with God.

GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

One way to develop right relationship with God is to ***gain a better understanding of God.***

We need to strive to know God better. This is the lesson of ***Hebrews 11:6***. God is well-pleased with those who believe He is a faithful rewarder of those *who diligently seek Him*.

We miss the blessings of an increasing faith because we do not take time to seek God. We are so overwhelmed with secular work and worry that no room is left for meditation or study of our heavenly Father.

A beloved psalm speaks of the blessing which comes to the righteous one who *"in His law meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1ff.)*.

When we fail to place knowing God as a top priority in our lives, we will not enjoy the blessings of being children of God and we will not be able to develop right relationship with Him.

We must constantly seek to know God, because it is only in knowing God that contentment comes.

Gaining a better understanding of God makes us more likely to feel His presence, in every situation.

Our human feelings are always based on perceptions and understandings.

First, a person reaches some conclusion (*whether warranted or unwarranted*), and then he feels something about that conclusion.

Karo may tell me that Emuobo, focuses only on computer games and

making indomie, whenever he is at home.

That may be my perception and initial conclusion about Emuobo. Whenever I see him, what comes to mind is a picture of him not doing any work at home other than playing computer games and making indomie.

Until I get to understand Emuobo on a one-on-one basis, that conclusion can never change; in fact, it becomes a permanent conclusion.

Wrong perceptions and understandings are reasons why some of us have destroyed *the-once-good relationship* we have with other brethren.

Therefore, we should immerse ourselves in what the Scriptures say about God's nature, presence and comfort. As we begin to understand and believe what the Bible teaches, we will be comforted by knowing that God really is with us.

He always believes in us! He is always nearby.

We do not have to feel His presence for Him to be present with us!

This maybe one reason why some of us feel so disconnected in worship and/or act improperly or inappropriately during worship and thus the impact of the worship is never felt in our lives.

Habakkuk 2:20 - *but the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.*

I Corinthians 14:40 - *let all things be done decently and in order.*

1 Timothy 3:15 - *but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Our feeling His presence is for our greater good but it does not determine

God's ability to deliver, help, provide, heal, rescue, comfort, protect and save.

A man is comforted by what he can see: his house, familiar belongings, and the faces of his loved ones.

Imagine, however, that he loses his sight. When he wakes up in the morning, he can no longer see the blessings from which he derives comfort.

Nevertheless, they are still there. Knowing they are there, he can still be comforted by their presence even though he does not see them.

In a similar way, we should not allow perceptions, understandings and circumstances to darken our spiritual vision - God is always there with us. Let's increase our understanding about Him; let's believe and live by His principles, and commands. Let's increase our faith in Him.

If we are to increase our faith in God, we must know Him better!

In this way, we not only develop a right relationship with Him but also strengthen that bond with Him.

However, we must stress here that ***gaining a better understanding of God*** takes time, perseverance and commitment.

The good news for any of us who are struggling to maintain a right relationship with God is that God understands all our struggles (*weaknesses, anger, fear, hurt, disappointment, frustration, discouragement, loss and sadness*) than we may have thought.

God understands people because He made us. God understands us because we are His children.

He knows that we can hardly avoid having these struggles. He knows, He cares, and, He forgives (*when we repent*).

God also expects us, His children to remain faithful to Him, even in the

depths of these struggles. Maintaining a right relationship with God, glorifies God—and our faithfulness to Him will help us to survive the experience of these struggles.

REJECT OR AVOID ILLUSIONS ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION

A second way to develop right relationship with God is to ***reject false ideas about our true spiritual state and physical state.***

We have established that God understand us and our struggles.

However, it is a problem, for us not to be living as a Christian should live, as instructed by God's words (*whether within the church premises, at place of work, at market centres, in our residential areas, at schools, even in our homes*).

When we know we are not measuring up in our Christian life; no need to try to believe that it is not a problem; all we need is to admit that it is a problem that needs to be solved otherwise, our relationship with God will be severed.

Then, we need to humble ourselves to seek for help as God's words instruct.

So, there is no need, whatsoever for us to hide our true spiritual state from God, who knows everything.

However, hiding our *failing* spiritual state from one another does damages our relationship we have with God.

For example, a Christian husband, whose spiritual life (*knowledge, prayer, character, actions*) is dwindling, and refuses to own up to his wife, so they can pray about it and do something to deal with it - only destroys his relationship with God. This also applies to the wife.

Apostle Peter stressed the need for couples to work together as a team,

complementing each other in every aspect of their lives, because such make their prayers not to be hindered (**I Peter 3:7**).

In similar sense, this can be applied to parents and children, leaders with leaders, leaders and members, and members with members.

Often, we are fond of seeing ourselves as competitors as well as seeing Christianity as a game.

This is an illusion. It is a false idea, which if not rejected or avoided, will make us unable to develop a right relationship with God.

You see us as Christians classing ourselves; creating camps within the church; instituting factions among groups (*youths, sisters and brothers*) or even measuring ourselves by ourselves and comparing ourselves with other members.

In **II Corinthians 10:12**, the word of God confirms that such is illusion (*cf. the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14*) and foolishness.

Some of us are too shamed. We pretend and hide behind a mask.

To hide, cover up problems, or run away is illusion, living in a false idea and immaturity and that destroys our relationship with God.

Let's think of it. What's wrong in admitting a reality? Does admission of a problem solve the problem? Does admission of a problem cancel our faith in God's ability to deliver us from that problem? Does admission of a problem make us immature?

For an unemployed person to accept that he does not have a job is maturity at that level.

For a very sick person (*who needs urgent medical attention*), to seek for medical aid, does not in anyway cancel his faith in God to do the healing.

For a Christian to admit he is becoming weak and compromised does

not mean, he is beyond redemption or recovery.

Why do we think James counselled the *sick to call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord?*

Do we know why James listed the benefits of such – that *the sick will be saved, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven?*

Do we understand why James instructed that we *confess our trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that we may be healed?*

Can we realize what prompted James to say that *if anyone among us wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let us know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins? James 5:14-20.*

James hints us about sincerity and team work. Both are needed to help us face reality of the state of our Christian lives and find God-given solutions, so that we can develop right relationship with God.

If we hide our problems, and Satan takes advantage to hold us in bondage (*in any form*) and we eventually die in it – of what gain is it to us?

To admit the reality of our *failing* Christian lives is not wrong. It is giving us an edge in solving the problem because it builds up our willingness to make the necessary changes. It is humility and maturity.

In fact, it is a way of developing right relationship with God.

MAKES THINGS RIGHT WITH ONE ANOTHER

A third way to develop right relationship with God is to ***make things right with one another.***

In **Matthew 5:23-24**, we see how the importance of right relationships was highlighted as what must come before performance of religious duties.

...first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

We know when we have a problem with a brother and/or sister.

But Jesus commands that the only solution is to effect a speedy reconciliation because that condition can affect our relationship with God.

There is nothing worthy enough to be a substitute to this speedy reconciliation.

For example, as stated in **verse 23 & 24** - one cannot solve personal relationships even by giving generously to the church.

Some of us think we are above solving problems we have with one another.

Instead of admitting the problem, go to the persons affected and correct the situation - we are looking for substitutes.

We must recognize the hurt created by the problem, and think of the right reconciliation.

In making right reconciliation, it is not about winning an argument or case. The needs of everyone must be considered.

I need you. You need me! It is not about *"rights' which sometimes could be 'wrongs.'*

In **Matthew 18:15-17**, we see Jesus repeating what He said in **Matthew 5:23-24** from a different angle.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother....

Jesus' instructed that *the offender is to go to his brother and the offended is to go to his brother.*

It is not about rights. If both do what they should, there will be a happy meeting between the two.

What if one of the two does not do what he should? That does not excuse the other.

You cannot say, *"Well, he should have come to me."* Jesus said you need to *"go"* and do all you can to *"be reconciled"* to your brother or sister.

The focus is not on the *rights* but on how our relationship with one another can affect our relationship with God.

In **1 John 4:20**, John wrote, if someone says, *"I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*

If we are unwilling to seek resolution of anger and bitterness, then God will refuse our worship! If we do not try to correct ill feelings, we will be held accountable.

The issue of not focusing on rights, in seeking reconciliation, is also stated in **I Corinthians 6:12; 10:23** - *all things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.*

In effecting reconciliation, we look for what will help both parties be in right relationship with God; we are not to magnify weaknesses nor assume that weaknesses do not exist.

We have to put things in their right perspective, and resolve with love.

In **Philemon 10-20**, we find apostle Paul highlighting the importance of making things right with one another.

Onesimus has done wrong to Philemon. By God's grace, Onesimus has made changes, but his relationship with Philemon was still not right.

Paul came in as a mediator, putting rights aside, seeking the greater good - he said *if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. I*

can't confirm if Onesimus was unable to pay what he owes but Paul was determined to resolve the differences because he knew Onesimus by his new changes will be of immense help to Philemon much later in the ministry work.

For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Paul did not go to the length to tell Philemon that he has no right to be angry with Onesimus; that Philemon must forgive because he (*Paul*) has spoken; or that Onesimus should disregard Philemon and move on with his Christian life - rather Paul tried as much as he could, to ensure that none of them, think negatively of each other.

We cannot think negatively of each other and think we can have a thankful attitude toward God.

Unresolved personal conflicts, endangers the church's unity, its effectiveness, discouragement isolation and it destroys our relationship with God.

In **Matthew 5:23-24**, Jesus hints us that we should lose no time in making matters right with both God and man.

Taking some suggestions from Albert Barnes: If we have wronged someone by owing him a debt which we have not been paid but ought to be paid, *let's pay it*, that will make things right with such a one. If we have injured someone's character, *let's confess it and seek pardon*. If such a one is under an erroneous impression, if our conduct has been such as to lead one to suspect that we have injured him, *let's make an explanation*. If a brother

misunderstands certain actions, *let's clarify things to him in love*.

Let's do all in our power, and all we ought to do, to have the matter settled, for our relationship to be right with God.

CONCLUSION

The Christian life is a personal, growing, intimate relationship with God who laid His life down for us, that He might share His life with us and live through us.

Our relationship with God is eternally important to Him and to us (*our salvation*). It defines every other thing in our lives.

How is our relationship with God? Does there seem to be a barrier between us and Him?

Perhaps it is because we do not have a better understanding of God; or we are living in illusions concerning our true spiritual state and physical state; or there is a barrier between us and a brother or a sister in Christ or a family member or a neighbour or someone at work or school. If that is the case, let's do the needful so that we can develop right relationships with God.

Developing right relationship with God is indeed the only greatest project we will ever work on.