

The Life *The Gospel of John*

Knowing God from the Inside *John 14:8 – 21, part 1*

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Introduction: An Insider's View

If my little baby John could talk to you, he would tell you a little bit of how much his daddy loves him, and although it's very new, you would have an insider's view of our father-son relationship. Let me tell you a little bit about that. Little John was born after a marathon 55 hours of labor, 2 hours of pushing, and a last minute c-section. Obviously, Ming was exhausted, and I was probably the most tired I had ever been, so when the nurses started to lift John out, I wasn't sure how I would feel. Also, I didn't come from a family where physical or verbal affection was really expressed. So what amazed me when little John was born was the depth and power of my own feelings. I walked over to the table where the pediatrician was cleaning him, and the first thing I thought was, "Yup, he's got my nose." He was crying pretty loudly. Now some babies recognize their mommy and daddy's voices from the time they're in the womb. I guess that's what happened there, because when I started talking to him, he stopped crying. At that moment, I felt my heart sing. I thought, You're my boy!, and I felt deeply connected to him. In my mind, I started writing him a poem about where his name comes from and why we think it's meaningful. When we left the hospital, and I found that I could watch him for hours and not be bored. I'd wait for him to open his eyes, and then I'd wait for him to smile. I've even found that I cannot kiss him enough, and though I didn't think I would call my son "cute," indeed I think he is "cute." In fact, one time Ming complained that I was holding him too much. She once said, "Hey, give him to me, the boy needs to eat!!!" And, "I hold him just to nurse him, but you get to play with him all the time!"

Now as I reflected on that episode, it hit me that part of the reason I had such strong feelings for my son is that for about eight years, I have done ministry to at-risk kids. And what I've seen has broken my heart. Some of them have no parents, most have no dad's, some have no one to give them a basic sense of love and structure and encouragement and order. But I felt like I could never do that much, because they weren't my children. They were outside of me and my family. But all those years of working with at-risk kids grew in me a desire to be a good dad to my own children. When John was born, it felt like all my feelings for the at-risk kids I knew could finally be expressed. And I had this thought: If only I could love each and every one of the kids I have ever known through my son John, that I could somehow bring them inside my family through John and that by loving John I could be loving them.

What I cannot do is exactly what God does. He is a Father to His Son, Jesus Christ. And though there are many who are outside His family, He desires to bring inside His family by placing them in Jesus. And He is able to do that. He brings the outsiders in, so that they become insiders. Jesus is the mature Son of his Father, and the Father delights in Jesus infinitely more than I as a father delight in my own son. Jesus is perfectly aware of the love the Father has for him. And Jesus can disclose himself to us. In fact, Jesus will take his own experience of his Father's love for him and pour it directly into our conscious awareness to make it ours. How does he do that? Let's see how he does this in John 14:8 – 21.

Context

We're privy to a very private conversation between Jesus and his closest friends. Jesus is about to go on trial and be executed. He has reserved his most important words for this night. He prepares them for what they're going to see the next day: the dreaded Cross. He's washed the disciples' feet as a symbol that the Cross is really an act of service to them.

The Need to See the Father: v.8

Philip then chirps up, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Who is this guy and what is this question about? To the atheist, it is a taunt and a dare: "Prove to me that God exists!" But Philip was no atheist. It's interesting to think about Philip's spiritual journey. Philip grew up in a sleepy fishing village

called Bethsaida on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. The name Bethsaida means, very appropriately, “House of Fishing.” Probably not a happening place! Philip was ready for action. In John 1, we see him hurrying to find his friend Nathanael to tell him that the Messiah had arrived in the form of this man named Jesus of Nazareth. Philip had been waiting for action. Intelligently, thoughtfully waiting for action. And the action he saw was Jesus talking about God as the Father.

But now, the Jewish authorities were pressing in from all sides; you could feel the tension, thick in the air. Probably some people had said to him along the way, “You’re crazy; this Jesus is nuts.” And Jesus, this long-awaited one, is talking about leaving. Philip is probably red with exasperation. “All this time, you’ve been talking about the Father. The Father this, the Father that. Show me the Father!!!”

Here you are, ready to leave this retreat, and you may already be feeling a rising sense of tension grip your hearts. You’ll be going back into the thick of a university that’s hostile to Jesus or indifferent at best, and you may take some flack for it. People will say you’re crazy for spending your valuable time and energy with Jesus. But you’re ready for action, I hope! The only thing is that you’ve been hearing about the Father this, the Father that. Maybe you’re saying, “Show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

Preliminary Overview of John’s Gospel

But before we plunge into Jesus’ response, I think we need to make a comment about the Gospel of John that will really help us untangle this passage. John is a circular writer, probably because Jesus was a circular speaker! That doesn’t mean that they said the exact same thing over and over again. It’s that they came at a situation time and again to unravel truth in a deeper and more comprehensive way. When you first asked your mom or dad why the sky is blue, they probably said, “The sun lights up the sky in a certain way.” When you were older, they may have said, “The sun being at a certain angle relative to the earth makes the sky blue.” Then if they remembered their physics, they may have told you, “The angle at which the sun’s light waves hit the atmosphere causes the light wave to be at the frequency our eyes see as blue.” The same thing happens here in John. How do we know the Father? There are four cycles of answers, and each time, Jesus’ answers get progressively deeper. There are four ways in which we know the Father: By What Jesus Does: v.9 – 11. By What We Do: v.12 – 14. By Having God’s Spirit Inside Us: v.15 – 18. By Knowing God From the Inside: v.19 – 21.

Secondly, each cycle Jesus goes through has two parts: *what* you experience, and *why* you experience it. Watch for the shift in subjects. When Jesus talks about what you experience, he’ll use “You will” statements. When Jesus talks about why you will experience those things, he’ll use “I will” statements. Let’s read through each section quickly. I have boldfaced the main points.

The First Cycle – By What Jesus Does: v.9 – 11

What have we experienced with Jesus?

“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? **The one who has seen me has seen the Father.** How do you say, “Show us the Father”?”

Why?

Do you not believe that **I am in the Father and the Father is in me**? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in me does His works. Believe me that **I am in the Father, and the Father in me**, otherwise believe on account of the works themselves.

The Second Cycle – By What We Do: v.12 – 14

What will we experience?

Truly, truly, I say to you, **the one who believes in me will do the works that I do; and greater works than these will that one do,**

Why?

because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, **that I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, **I will do it.**

The Third Cycle – By Having Jesus’ Spirit Inside Us: v.15 – 18

What will we experience?

If you love me, **you will keep my commandments.**

Why?

And **I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper** that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him, or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and **will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**

The Fourth Cycle – By Knowing God From the Inside: v.19 – 21

What will we experience?

After a little while the world will behold me no more, but **you will behold me.** Because I live, **you will live** also. In that day, **you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you.**

Why?

The one who has my commandments and keeps them, is the one who loves me, and the one who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and **I will love that person, and to that one I will disclose myself.**

The First Cycle – By Who Jesus Is: v.9 – 11

Let's make some observations on the first three cycles, stop, and then reflect on the fourth. Jesus responds to Philip with a series of quiet but powerful questions. "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' Maybe another way to say that is, "Where have you been? Philip, you've seen me cleanse the Temple, something only the Father has authority to do. You've heard me speak of water and the Spirit to Nicodemus, the Father's agents of creation in Genesis 1:2. And so on. You've seen me, so you've seen the Father."

Should Philip have known this already? Yes. Why? Because in v.10, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." One way to picture this, if it can be pictured at all, is to think about those figurines – done in Japan and Russia and maybe some other countries, too – that sit inside one another. If you open the figurine, you find a smaller one inside that's just like it. In some sense, if you open Jesus up, you'll see another figure exactly the same, the Father. And it's the Father abiding in Jesus does His works. If we want to know who the Father is, or how the Father feels about this or that, look at Jesus. The Son on the outside is the spitting image of the Father who is inside.

The Second Cycle – By What We Do: v.12 – 14

But there's a problem. Jesus has also been talking about leaving. So if the figurine vanishes completely, how do we see the next One inside it? That leads us into the next three cycles. Between the first and the second cycle there is a shift in verb tenses. "He who has seen me has seen the Father." This has been true while Jesus was physically present. But when Jesus goes back to the Father, a different dynamic kicks will kick in. Hence, the future tense: will do, will keep, etc. When Jesus is gone, **WE** will reveal the Father by what we do. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these will he do."

Now that sounds amazing: How can we do greater works than Jesus? Can we do better miracles than Jesus? Is there something greater than raising the dead? I don't think that's the degree of power Jesus means, but the effect and the scope of how that power is used. How effective was Jesus? Not very! Sure, he drew some crowds early on, but almost everyone abandoned him in the end. Very few people seem to have understood him before the Resurrection. When he preached a sermon, how many people really committed to him? But when Simon Peter preached a sermon at Pentecost, three thousand people committed their lives to Christ. When Jesus told the story of the prodigal son, maybe a few people opened their hearts to him. But when Billy Graham tells the same story, thousands around the world open their hearts. Something happened in terms of effectiveness. It's become "greater." In terms of scope, who did Jesus reach? He collected the faithful remnant of Israel and gathered them to himself. But Jesus never mentored a non-Jewish person. He never mentored an African, a native American, an Anglo-Saxon, or an Asian. And yet look around you. Something has happened, something "greater" than what Jesus did in his physical time on earth. And you're experiencing it.

You might say at this point, "Doing things greater than what Jesus did sounds exciting. So how do I get skills like that? Why will my experience be like that?" Jesus says it's, "because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name I will do it." In other words, Jesus is making us his official representatives of his name, his character. We're like heralds bearing the name of our king. And we must act and ask consistently with the name and character of our king.

But notice that Jesus does not say, "The works that I did." We are not just trying our gosh-darned best to imitate what he did. We are doing something he continues to do **THROUGH US**. There's a big difference between the two. When I was in college, I learned it the hard way. In my junior year, I was trying to witness to my drawmates, I was leading worship for my fellowship, I was leading a small group, I was coordinating the small group leaders and setting curriculum for them, I was the core group coordinator, I was teaching a workshop on beginning guitar, I was discipling a younger guy, I preached three times, and I was doing tons of outside Christian reading. I must have been doing at least 40 hours a week of my Christian activity. And you know what I felt during that year? Tired. Angry. Then I thought about why I was doing all that. I was trying to be like Jesus. And trying to be like Jesus was more tiring and more condemning than anything I had ever known. I never lived up to it. Then I realized that Jesus really wanted

me to give up my Christian activity on my own strength and let him live out his life through me. You see, if you're trying to imitate Jesus, you may as well go back under the Mosaic Law because it's easier. Who among us can live like Jesus on our own strength? The only way is to rest in the reality of him living in us, and then let him live his life out through us.

In essence, the real question is not "What Would Jesus Do?" That is a simple way to boil down the Christian life – so simple, it's inaccurate. The real question is, "What IS Jesus Doing Through Me?" You do things not just in the way Jesus would want you to; you do them as he actually IS DOING them through you. This is what the third cycle is all about. It looks underneath the surface of the second cycle.

The Third Cycle – By Having Jesus' Spirit Inside Us: v.15 – 18

What will we experience that undergirds being able to do what Jesus does? Verse 15: "You will keep my commandments." Meaning, you will guard my commandments and preserve them without changing them, since the word translated "keep" is the same as "guard" as when the Philippians jailer "guarded" Paul and Silas (Acts 14). If we love Jesus, we guard his commands. We don't water down what he says about materialism or sexuality or gossip, as it is so tempting to do. Notice that this corresponds with v.17, the Spirit being the Spirit of truth. Of course, actually doing the commandments is imperative, but the primary issue is not whether one performs the commands perfectly. John would have denied that we in fact perform anything perfectly, which is not only the point of 1 Jn.1:9, it was probably why chapter 21 exists: although Simon Peter failed to perform Jesus' commands perfectly, he nevertheless upheld Jesus' teaching, so that he was reinstated as a teacher in chapter 21. Thus, integrity in your lifestyle is absolutely necessary, but the issue here is whether one keeps/guards/retains the truth of Jesus' commands, undiluted and unchanged, even in a postmodern era.

You might have a question about whether the third cycle is really an experience. I think it is. This is a powerful way of speaking because it combines both expectations and empowerment. It's like saying, "You'll do a great job." While Jesus is placing an expectation on his disciples, this is not the primary purpose of this statement, as if Jesus were simply narrowing his eyes and shaking his finger at in guilt-inflicting suspicion, saying, "If you love me, you will keep [voice lilting] my commaaannndments..." I don't think that's the spirit of what Jesus is saying here. This statement can be read as an empowering statement: "If you love me, you will *be able to* keep my commandments." That is better. Furthermore, it's a statement about your experience because it's an identity statement. John's Gospel sees the world in a very clear cut fashion. People are either in Christ or not. They are either in light or in darkness. They either hold to Jesus' teaching or they don't. It's either one or the other, and everything on one side goes together while everything on the other side goes together. You can't separate anything that's meant to be together; you can't put together anything that's meant to be separate. Therefore this is just a statement of fact and your experience: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." That's just the way it is. Also, in the fourth cycle, it's not stated as an expectation. It's simply stated as a fact.

Now again, why will our experience be this way? Because the Spirit will be in you helping you keep them, guard them. Jesus says, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another parakletos, the Spirit of truth" who abides with you in the person of Jesus, who will be in you. The NRSV translates parakletos as "Advocate," the NIV translates it as "Counselor," and the NASB translates it "Helper." But regardless of what specific name we use for the Spirit, we should think about Jesus himself. Why? Because Jesus says the Spirit is the second parakletos; Jesus himself is the first. Jesus said that the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, but he himself is the way, the truth, and the life. And, notice in v.18, when the Spirit comes into the disciples, Jesus can be deliberately ambiguous. When he says, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you," he could be just referring to his resurrection, but then he'll leave again when he ascends to the Father, which would technically make the disciples "orphans" again and would also make this statement untrue. Jesus must mean that when the Spirit comes into the disciples, it's at that moment that they will never be orphaned *by Jesus*. When the Spirit comes into us, he brings the life of Jesus into us.

Twentieth century artists have flirted with this idea. Probably the most notable one is George Lucas. Obi Won Kenobe was the Jedi who trained Anakin, and later Luke, Skywalker. In his lightsaber duel with Darth Vader he said, "If you kill me, I'll become more powerful than you can ever imagine." He dies in some sense, but then becomes a spirit and is able to speak to Luke and continue training him wherever he goes. That's kind of similar to what Jesus is saying. When Jesus was killed, he became more powerful than

anyone ever imagined. But when Jesus died, he did not become disembodied, he remained a physical person. AND he sent his Spirit from within himself, not to be disembodied, but to indwell us, too.

The Fourth Cycle – By Knowing God From the Inside: v.19 – 21

Can we get deeper than that? If we peel that back, is there something underneath it? Yes, the fourth cycle goes deeper. What will the disciples experience? They'll know God from the inside. Notice the three things in v.19. They will behold Jesus: "After a little while the world will behold me no more, but you will behold me." They will live in the resurrection power of Jesus: "Because I live, you will live also." Finally, and most importantly, they will know God from the inside: "In that day, you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you."

I want to explain that by giving you an overview of the Gospel of John. John's Gospel begins like Genesis, "In the beginning." It is structured around seven miracles, seven discourses, seven "I am" statements of Jesus. Why the number seven? It's because John is making a parallel to the seven days of creation in Genesis. And after the resurrection, Jesus breathes the Spirit into the disciples in the same way that God breathed life into Adam. That is another parallel to creation where the disciples are the new humanity God is creating. What's going on? John is portraying Jesus as God, beginning the new creation, the new humanity. After Jesus was resurrected, he appeared to the disciples. They beheld him. Then Jesus breathed upon them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He gave them his life. Thus, "because I live, you will live also."

At the beginning of the Gospel, John says that Jesus came to give those who believed in him the right to become children of God. But, throughout the Gospel, whenever Jesus talks about the Father, he doesn't say "your" Father, or "our" Father. He only says, "the" Father or "my" Father. It's only after the Resurrection and when the Spirit is given that Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, "My God and your God, my Father and your Father." God only becomes our Father when we are in Jesus by the Spirit. The only way to know God as our Father is to know Him from the inside. What does that mean?

Have you ever gone over to a friend's place, and wished that you were a part of that family? That feeling hit me the summer after my freshman year of college when my parents were arguing a lot. One night I had dinner with my friend Erica and her family. Her dad reached over and held his wife's hand. I was *amazed*. I had never seen affection in an Asian home like that. He asked me some good questions and had a conversation around that, he asked his own children some good questions and had conversations around that, he talked about some memories he had, and after dinner, dad and mom went over to the couch; they talked with his arm around her. Not only did I leave feeling very loved, there was an ache in my heart. I felt that as many wonderful things my own dad had done for me, I wished I could experience more fathering. I wanted to step into the inside of a good father-child relationship. That is exactly what Jesus offers us. Jesus has a unique relationship with his Father. When we come to faith in Jesus, we step into Jesus and inherit his relationship with his Father.

Why will we experience this? Here's the last part of the final cycle. Why should we expect to experience that? Because our subjective experience is rooted in the objective action of another person. Jesus will share his own experience of his Father's love with us. "The one who has my commandments and keeps them, [Notice it's not just those who saw and touched Jesus, so it can include us?] is the one who loves me, and the one who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love that one, and to that one I will disclose myself." That last part is the key. Jesus, as the mature Son of his Father, is able to disclose himself to us. Since Jesus is perfectly aware of how his Father loves him, he can share his own experience of his Father's love with us through his Spirit who indwells us. That's why he says here, "the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will disclose myself to him."

My baby boy isn't able to fully understand how much I love him, nor can he disclose that to you. But Jesus is the mature Son of his Father, and he knows exactly how much his Father loves him. Not only is he able to bring you into himself by his Spirit so that you can call God Father, he is able to make you experience what he experiences in his oneness with the Father!

Let me give you a quote to consider: "This knowledge, because it is knowledge of the whole, must be from within. It must be, to use in its strict sense, 'existential' knowledge, which can occur only as the subject

participates in what he knows. Knowledge of the universe never takes shape at an observer's distance; it is not knowledge-by-transcendence. We may, of course, know particular objects in this way, from a relative distance; that is what makes the natural sciences possible. But the more encompassing the object of observation is, the more difficult it is to isolate and transcend; that is what makes it inevitable that the natural sciences, when they approach the limits of the cosmic order – its beginnings, its ultimate constituents, its spatial limits – turn back into philosophy again. We expect scientific knowledge to 'comprehend' or 'contain' its object, whereas in this knowledge the object contains us." (Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, p.79) This is not exhaustive knowledge of God, but it is nevertheless real knowledge of Him. What does this mean for us? Let me offer a few points.

1. This is a Direct Challenge to Postmodernism

The Postmodern view of knowledge is that you can never really know anything, like history, author's intent, a people group, or even another person, because you can't step inside what you want to know. Postmodernism assumes that you are always on the outside of something, so that you can't know it. But Jesus here says that you can know God, from the inside, because his Spirit will bring you inside him. We will know God from the inside because Jesus will share his own experience of his Father's love with us. This is real knowledge of God.

2. No One Comes to the Father But Through the Son

We live in a pluralistic age where it is becoming very fashionable for Christians to water down the essential message of Jesus. But we've just explored why the gospel works the way it does. God only has one Son, Jesus. There is no other. God has a unique Father to Son relation with Jesus only. When we believe in Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus comes into us, and also enfolds us into Jesus himself. We inherit Jesus' relationship to his Father. That makes God our Father, but only through Jesus. There may be people who experience some vague experience with God, but not as a Father, and it's unclear what those experiences mean. God is not a Father to anyone, except to Jesus Christ and those who are in him by faith. That's why Jesus also says in John 14:6, "No one comes to the Father but through me." *We have got to be telling people about Jesus.*

3. Think Through the Language You Use to Describe the Christian Life

Make sure that when you pray, you don't pray, "Lord, what would you do?" but instead, "Lord, what are you doing?" or "What do you want to do through me?" When you share the gospel, don't share it like this: "Jesus died for me, and now I obey his teaching." Or like this: "Christianity is about following the example of Jesus." Share it like this: "Christianity is about one person, Jesus, who died our death and lives our life." Paul put it like this in Galatians 2:20: "For it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God."

Many of us, because of the teaching we've had, or maybe because of our own earthly fathers, picture God or Jesus as a distant authority, high above us. Some of us picture God or Jesus as below you, because you're on the throne of your life and you treat Jesus like an advisor, lower than you. Some of us picture Jesus as just beyond you, constantly leading you forward as try to keep up, and you're slowly burning out. All of those pictures are incorrect. If you have faith in Jesus, then you are in Jesus, and Jesus is in you by his Spirit, waiting for you to come to the end of yourself so that he can express his life and his love out through you. You have all the power and resources you need through the indwelling Jesus. The rest of your life is now just a matter of continually yielding to him. That's why you need to think through phrases and buzzwords like "I'm following Jesus" if by that you mean following him at a distance. There is no distance. Be sensitive to that. The last thing our generation needs is another distant father.

4. Expect Jesus and His Father to Live Through You

When the world says, "Show us the Father," remember that the Father wants to show Himself through Jesus, through you. So ask the Spirit to do it. The life you will see pour out from your bodies will be nothing less than the life of Jesus showing the Father. Each and every day, you have opportunities galore to represent Jesus to the watching world. That's true for everyone generally, but it's especially true for you now. You live in dorms and apartments with people who need Jesus, who need God as their Father, who have had their natural fathers walk out on them. They are saying, "Show us the Father." That is our opportunity.

Let me close with the words of a hymn from Charles Wesley:

No condemnation now I dread
 Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head
 And clothed in righteousness divine
Bold I approach the eternal throne
 And claim the crown through Christ my own.