

I'm not sure I should say this. I don't feel God's presence. I don't feel God's presence in me or around me. And I can't say that I hear God speaking to me. Sometimes when I say that, I can feel people's disappointment. I'm not sure if they're disappointed in me or disappointed for me or disappointed for themselves. We like to feel a special connection with the people we love. Many people look for and expect that same special feeling connection with God. I can't promise you that. I can't promise that Christians feel God's presence or that Christians can hear God speaking to them. I can't promise you that feeling, but I can promise you something better.

God loves you. Whether you feel it or not. Whether you hear a special whisper or not. God loves you. Not just generally, generically, universally; but personally, individually - you and you and you and you. He knows how each of you is formed; he put you together before you were born. Like a shepherd knows each of his sheep, and can tell the differences, God knows each of you by name. He knows your insecurities, your strengths, what makes you tick. And he loves you. Not just in a general way. He doesn't love you or share his love with you in just a general way - **"Go and make disciples of all nations."** No, God shares his love individually, personally - **"I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** "Take eat; take drink; my body for you; my blood for you; my peace, my love, my life for you."

And God's love for you isn't just a feeling. God loves you with feeling. His heart hurts when people reject his love. His heart delights and celebrates when he gets to share his love. But God's love for you isn't just a feeling. You heard Jesus: **"God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son."** John tells us: **"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."** God's love for you isn't just a feeling. In love, God gave his Son for you. In love, Jesus sacrificed his life for you. Listen to what Paul tells husbands: **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and**

blameless.” God’s love isn’t just a feeling. God’s love for you gives and works for you.

To what end? Not so we can be the pizza God loves and devours. Not so we can be the car or the pearl necklace God loves and hides away for special days. No, God loves you personally as a person, to share his life and his love with you. He calls you his child. He shares the secrets of his heart with you. He listens to you, for your prayers, the hurts and the hopes of your heart. He cares for you day by day. And when he sees into your future, God sees you at home with him, in heaven with him, relaxing with him, running the family business with him. That’s what God wants with you; that’s what God promises to you.

Think about that. Have you ever been treated like you’re nothing more than a number, a tool, a chore? Have you ever felt left out, ignored? Have you ever gotten the cold shoulder because somebody decided you weren’t a good fit? It doesn’t matter what other people think of you, Jesus has called you, he keeps calling you to life with him. Do you have relationships in your life that are all one-sided - at your expense? Relationships in your life that feel toxic? Poisonous? People in your life who set you on edge? It doesn’t matter how other people treat you, Jesus has called you, he keeps calling you to life with him. Do you have someone in your life that you’ve wronged, and now they won’t have anything to do with you? Or maybe they just imagine you’ve wronged them and so they won’t have anything to do with you. It doesn’t matter what other people hold against you, Jesus has called you, he keeps calling you to life with him.

And that is so amazing, because Jesus wouldn’t have to imagine or make up some wrong to hold against us, to get between us. We have filled our resumes; we have broken his heart with wrongs. By our sin, we have earned a death sentence; by our sin, we have earned the fires of hell. If anybody would have any right or reason to ghost us, to freeze us out, to turn bitter against us, it would be God. **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** - for me, for you. Why? So we can have life with God.

The question on the table today is “Is it possible to have a personal

relationship with God?” Do you think we answered it? If you’re not sure, let’s talk. Right now, I’d like to change the question a bit. Instead of “is it possible?” let’s change the question to “how do we get a personal relationship with God? And what kind of personal relationship with God?”

You are family with God. In baptism you are born of water and the Spirit, born of God to be the children of God. In baptism you are covered with Christ to be the sons of God. In baptism you are born to be the heirs of God. At the same time, in baptism, you are washed, washed clean of sin and guilt, washed clean to be holy and blameless, washed clean to be the bride of Christ. Our relationship with God is more than master, servant; more than employer, employee; it’s more than friends and neighbors. In baptism, God puts his name on you to be the family of God with all the rights and privileges of the family of God.

God treasures his relationship with you. So God invites you in close. He invites you again and again. He invites you to listen and read and learn his heart. He invites you to pray and share your heart. He invites you to come together as family, not just on Christmas and Easter, but every week for a family get-together to grow tight as the family of God. Why? God treasures his relationship with you!

So what do we do with relationships we treasure? Some people work to control and manipulate the relationships they “treasure.” Some take their relationships for granted. And some work, really work, to make their relationships work. What do you do with the relationships you treasure? Don’t think you can control him, keep him in his place, by giving him a smile now and then. Don’t think you can hold him at arm’s length and still hold on to him. Don’t take your relationship with God for granted, expecting him to do all the relationship work.

Treasure your relationship with God. Take him up on his invitation - listen and learn the life of God, the life God has for you! Take him up on his invitation - pray, share your hopes and hurts with God. Take him up on his invitation - come together and grow tight in the family of God. Is it possible to have a personal relationship with God? Take God up on his invitation and be blessed! Amen.