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**Core Seminar**

**Meeting with God**

**Class 1: Intro: The What, Why and How of Meeting with God**

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Good morning and welcome to the *Meeting with God* core seminar. This class is the part of the “basics” core seminar track, which is designed to help ground us in the foundational disciplines of the Christian life. The goal of the *Meeting with God* core seminar is to give you a Biblical understanding of why we should meet with God on a daily basis and to equip you with practical tools that I hope will help you do just that.

Jon Malone and I will be teaching the class for, Lord willing, the next six weeks. My name is Josh Coover, and I am one of the lay elders here at CHBC. You can find both of our email addresses on the back of your handout. Feel free to email us if you have questions after you leave here today.

Now, just the simple title of this class, Meeting with God, assumes at least two things:

1. That it is possible to meet with God.
2. That meeting with God is something that we should do.

This week’s class will be aimed at addressing these two assumptions and showing why they are not just assumptions, but realities upon which we should build our lives. After we address these two issues we will give an overview of what the rest of the class will look like; where we’re going and what we will cover. All of that rolled together basically accounts for a “What, Why and How of Meeting with God,” which is what we’re calling this first lesson. But, before we do that, let’s pray together.

(Prayer)

**The First Assumption: Can We Really Meet with God? (the “What?”)**

This is a big assumption. Meeting someone or something is an act of encountering. It is being introduced to someone. It is the beginning of a journey towards actually knowing someone. Those of us who are married probably remember the first time that we met our spouse. That was the first step on the way towards getting to know the person who would be our spouse and then marrying them.

We understand and believe that God is a real person. We would not be here today in this class, if we did **not** really believe that it was possible to meet with God, to actually know Him. But, how do we know this is possible? Well, God has revealed Himself to us. This is how we come to know Him. It is His nature to be known. He desires to make Himself known in the world. And so, He has revealed Himself to us.

Because we are finite beings created by an infinite, all-powerful, and holy God, we cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to us. It is His prerogative that we should know Him, and so He has shown Himself to us.

Question number two in the Westminster Larger Catechism asks, “How does it appear that there is a God? Answer: The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God; but his Word and Spirit only do sufficiently and effectually reveal him unto men for their salvation.”

***General Revelation****Psalm 19:1-2 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”* This is what the Westminster Catechism draws on when it tells us here that God uses His works to show Himself to us. He created the heavens, the earth, and He created people in His image, at which we should observe and recognize that all of this could not have come into being without being created. This is known as general revelation. It is “general” because it allows all men to know God generally.

The apostle Paul says in ***Romans 1:19-20***, speaking about ungodly men who suppress God’s truth, *“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (ESV).”*

So, we can see at least some of who God is through creation. Will it then suffice to simply attempt to meet with God through nature or on our own? There are a number of philosophies and religions that say just that. Would we **understand all that we need to understand about God** if we decided to go out to the Shenandoah mountains in Virginia every morning and sit and just soak it all in? While it might be very beautiful out there, we can come to God only so well through His creation. Through creation God points us to Himself as the great creator of the universe, but He does not show us our sin or how we can be saved from our sin in this way. In order for us to know these things, God must speak specific truths to us about Himself and about ourselves.

***Special Revelation***
This is what God does in special revelation. In contrast to general revelation, special revelation does not come to all people. Throughout the course of redemptive history, God has acted in various ways and then explained those actions to His people. This is special revelation. God’s acting and then explaining. Let’s take a very quick survey through some of the ways in which God has done this.

***Old Testament***
**Abraham:** In the Old Testament, God spoke very clearly to Abraham. He called Him with an audible voice, told Him to go where He would lead Him, and spoke a number of promises to Abraham regarding how God would bless him and his descendants.

**The Law:** God also spoke very directly to Moses and even gave him the law by which the people of Israel, God’s chosen people, were to live before their God. It was through the law that God would show His people, both then and now, that we are actually incapable of keeping God’s law because we are sinners. In this way, God shows us that we cannot be righteous on our own but that we need Him to be our righteousness if we are to be with Him forever. We will talk about this in more depth in a few minutes.

**The Prophets**: God was doing a number of things in and through Israel and the surrounding nations in the Old Testament. He used the prophets of old to deliver specific messages from God to God’s people about what God was doing. These were often messages of judgment, but they also included a number of promises of hope for God’s people if they would put their trust in Him and follow Him. Many of these messages were about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

**New Testament**In the New Testament, God spoke to us through His son, Jesus Christ.

***Hebrews 1:1-2*** says, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

***John 1:1*** says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

This “Word” was Jesus Christ. This was not just a catchy nickname that John had for His teacher. John called Jesus the Word because it was through Jesus that God was speaking to us. Words communicate. That is why we use them. And so, it is no accident that John calls Jesus “the Word.”

**Today**But, what about today? Do we hear the audible voice of God today the way Abraham and Moses did? While God spoke to His people audibly in the OT and through prophets, and through Jesus while He was living on the earth, today God speaks to us through His written word, the Bible. In fact, we know about Jesus because of what God tells us about Him through the Bible. From scripture we learn at least five things about Jesus.

First, Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” Therein, God spoke to us through Jesus about what He is like and who He is.

Second, Jesus was a prophet. Prophets deliver God’s message to man. Jesus spoke with the authority that was from God. In John 12:49-50 he says, “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

Third, scripture shows us that Jesus is a priest. What was the priest’s function in OT times? They acted as mediator between God and His people. This is exactly what Jesus does, such that we no longer need a human priest because He serves in this capacity for us for all time. Hebrews 9:11-12 says that Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come and that He entered into the holy places, the very thing that the priest was to do, “not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

Fourth, scripture shows us that Jesus is King or Lord. The gospel of John gives us the account of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate, questioning Jesus before Jesus would go to the cross. In John 18 we hear Pilate ask, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus responds in John 18:36-37, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Finally, we learn from scripture that Jesus is God. Remember John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Col. 1(:16) tells us that it was through Jesus that all things were made. Phil. 2:6 states that Jesus was the very nature, or form of God.

**Hindrances and Solutions**Scripture tells us all of these things about Jesus, but it also tells us very clearly that we are sinners (think of Rom. 3:23, Rom. 6:23, Eph. 2:1). Our sin keeps us from meeting with God. But, we must remember that though we are the transgressors, we cannot simply restore this broken relationship with God by ceasing to sin. There is a punishment that must be born. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God banished them. This is what happens when we sin. God must reach out and remove this banishment if we are to meet with Him.

The NT establishes the means of this restoration, this forgiveness of sin. ***1 John 1:9*** *explicitly says that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* ***Hebrews 4:16*** *also tells us that because we have a great high priest whose name is Jesus we can, with confidence, “draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

Let this verse be emblazoned on this class and on our hearts and lives. We can draw near to God. We can have confidence that we can draw near because Christ is a great high priest who stands in our place for us. Meeting with God always comes through a mediator. This is what differentiates Biblical spirituality from the more mystical traditions of Christianity. We do not meet with God through some kind of ethereal (a the rial) connection that is distinct from Jesus Christ. If we are to meet with God, we must meet with Him through a mediator and that mediator is Christ. So, let us be people who practice Biblical spirituality, recognizing that when we go to God in His word, or in prayer or in fellowship with the saints, we are ultimately meeting with God through the mediation of His son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, based on all of this scripture and all of what learn about Jesus and our relationship to God through scripture, our assumption that we can meet with God is not unfounded. It is a matter of taking God at His word.

Question: So, if a friend asked you if you thought someone could actually meet or commune with God, what would you tell them? How would you explain what we have just talked about to them?

**The Second Assumption: We Should Meet with God (The “Why?”)**Just because we can meet with God, does that mean that we should? Why should we? Some people say that we should only go to God when we have a big question. We should only read the Bible when there is something we don’t totally understand, like the end times maybe. Or, we should only pray to God when there is something we need, like a new job. Or, we should only go to church when we are kind of lonely. But, this is no way to treat the King of creation, the God who made us and who has provided a way to meet with Him despite our rebellion against Him. There are at least six reasons we should meet with God.

First, we meet with God because He is worthy. He has created the world. He has created us. He is good to us beyond what we deserve. We deserve wrath and, if we have repented of our sin and cast ourselves on Him in faith for the forgiveness of that sin, He gives us forgiveness, mercy, grace and ultimately Himself. He is worthy of our praise and adoration and our consistent meeting with Him.

Second, we should meet with God because we are His. We are His children. **Galatians 4:4-5** tells us that God sent His son so that we might receive adoption as sons. As Christians, we are members of God’s family. And so, meeting with God is part of us. At Thanksgiving do you go to the dinner table with your family because you’re hungry or because you simply need to eat? No, we go to the Thanksgiving dinner table because we are family and that is what we do. Just the same, we meet with God because that is what we are. We are His children.

Third, we meet with God because this leads us into a deeper relationship with Him. I’m reminded of Paul’s words to the Philippian church in his letter to them in ch. 3:7-10. “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord…that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” Shunning the things of the world and going to God will lead us into knowing Him in intimate ways. Remember, God is not a subject to be studied but a person to be known. This is an important point that we must not lose sight of. J. I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* highlights the importance of this in the first few chapters. If you are struggling with the distinction, I highly recommend reading that book.

Fourth, when we begin to know God in these intimate ways and our relationship with Him grows, this leads us to worship Him. Knowing God, knowing who we are in light of Him and how he acts in the world leads us to say things like Paul in Romans 11:33-36. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” Knowledge of God and relationship with Him overflows into worship of Him.

Fifth, meeting with God also helps us grow. We are not meant to live in spiritual stagnation. God intends for us to grow. Let me read you two quotes from JC Ryle’s book, *Holiness*.

“It is intimately and inseparably connected with the whole question of sanctification. It is a leading mark of true saints that they grow.”

“Private religion must receive our first attention, if we wish our souls to grow.”

Why does Ryle put so much significance on growing by meeting with God personally? He knows that we are leaky buckets. Without meeting with God we will be stuck in our sins. Though we are saved, we still struggle with our flesh and with the devil. Eph. 6:10-20 makes it very clear that meeting with God will help us to fight sin and cling to Christ. Meeting with God also reminds us that we are not made for this world. The book of 1 Peter tells us that we are aliens. In a very seductive world, we need this reminder daily and that is what meeting with God does for us.

Sixth, and finally, meeting with God helps us fight. Jesus says in Matthew 10:22 that those who persevere to the end will be saved. So, we have this call to persevere in the midst of a world of sin and tragedy and hardship and heaviness. How are we going to do it? We must go to God daily so that we can fight this fight. What I want you to see through this class today and through the remainder of the lessons is that we will not persevere to the end if we do not meet with God in His word and in prayer regularly.

Jesus prays to the Father in ***John 17:17****, “Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth.”* Our sanctification is contingent upon God’s very words.

Again, ***Ephesians 6:17-18*** uses war language when Paul writes *“and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in Sprit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints…”*

Let’s open up and look at a very well known verse about the Word of God. Turn to Hebrews 4:12. “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The verse is surrounded, both before and after, by talk of “not hardening your hearts,” (v. 7) “persevering,” (v. 11) and “heeding God’s word.” You cannot heed God’s word unless you know it and listen to it. This word is the word that leads us to faith, guarding against disobedience. It is a message of encouragement for the Christian to persevere. Tucked away, framed by the talk of not hardening our hearts and heeding God’s word is this powerful verse about what the word of God is and what it does. “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword…” So then, let us go to this living and active Word of God so that we might persevere.

Question: What reason motivates you to meet with God?

**How do we Meet with God?**So, we have gone over the Biblical foundations of meeting with God and seen that we not only can meet with God but also that we should meet with God, and do so consistently. We have hit on this next question a bit already in the last section, but how do we meet with God? If we are able to do so and we ought to do so, how do we do it? Let me give you four ways.

First, and foundationally, we must meet with God through Jesus Christ, our mediator, by faith. Remember ***Hebrews 4:16***, because we have a great high priest whose name is Jesus we can, with confidence, *“draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* We draw near to God by faith. This is what ***Eph. 2:8-9*** tells us. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” We go to God by faith in His son, having confidence that through Him, as our perfect substitution, we can have access to God even though we are sinners.

Second, we meet with God through scripture. But, what do we mean by scripture? Scripture is the Bible, the written Word of God. It is a collection of 66 books that together tell the story of God and his relationship with man and the world. It is the story of redemptive history. It is inspired by God, fully authoritative in its entirety, inerrant and trustworthy. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” Along with all the things I’ve already said about God’s Word, please note that it is useful. It is useful for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteous. It equips us.

Scripture often speaks about itself. As just one example, Jesus tells us in Matthew 4:4 that “Man shall not live on bread alone but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God.” Other verses that speak of scripture include Deut. 8:3, Romans 15:4 and all of Psalm 119.

Part of meeting with God through scripture involves meditation and self-examination. It does no good to simply read and not try to process what you read. This is why the Psalmist says in Psalm 119, “I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” And later, “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statues; I will not forget your word.” Getting into the word involves pouring over it, thinking about what you’ve read and how it applies to your life. George Mueller, pastor and operator of an orphanage in Bristol in the 1800s said the following in his journal regarding prayer and meditation: “Now, I saw that the most important thing was to give myself to the reading of God's Word, and to mediation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord...The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.” (pg 74-75, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Don Whitney).

Third, we meet with God through prayer. Prayer is crucial. It is no coincidence that ***Eph. 6:17-18*** says, *“…and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit…”* In prayer we beseech the Lord and through Christ he hears and answers our prayers to both know Him more and to make Him known. We take up the word of God and pray that He might give us understanding and in this way we meet with God and know Him more. Now, this is not all we pray for. We’ll talk about a number of aspects surrounding prayer in a few weeks, but for now, suffice it to say that we should go to God in prayer that we might know Him more.

Fourth, we meet with God by coming together with the people of God. Though meeting together as a church is not the focus of this class (it is the focus of the “Living as a Church” core seminar), it is important to note that God meets with His people when they come together in worship. We will also talk a bit more about this next week when we discuss the importance of hearing the Word of God preached.

So, we meet with God first of all by faith, in scripture, in prayer and through the people of God. I want to leave you finally with a definition of a quiet time that I hope will be helpful. It is “part of the day that we set aside for the worship of God, for the reading of the Word of God and for fellowship with God so that we would know Him more, know ourselves in light of Him, and know the world according to God’s perspective.” The quiet time recalibrates our perspective on the world according to God’s perspective on the world. The purpose of a quiet time is essentially the same as what Calvin said in the opening lines of his Institutes. “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” May we meet with God this week in hopes of growing in those two areas.

Let’s pray.