

Sermon 22 March 2026 Building a relationship with God

Romans 10:11-15 John 15:9-17

The following notice was spotted in the Lost and Found section of a newspaper: 'Lost dog - \$50 reward. Black and tan dog of poodle and German Shepherd descent. Flea bitten, left hind leg missing, no hair on rump, blind in one eye and recently neutered. Answers to the name of Lucky.'

We may not be in quite as bad shape as Lucky but we can count ourselves lucky. We are lucky to be gathered here this morning. Why do I say that? Well, first of all, there are such lovely, friendly people that belong to this church and it is good to have the opportunity to mix and mingle and get to know each other.

But secondly, and most importantly, it means we have the opportunity to learn about and establish a relationship with God. The benefits are massive and I don't intend to go into them in detail right now. Suffice to say, a relationship with God stands us in such good stead as we wrestle with the rigours of life and as we seek meaning in our lives.

So how do we arrive at this relationship? Well, coming to church is certainly a good start. We mix with people who have a similar goal. We worship with those people. We read the Bible and we pray. All very important, but I just want to make this point, a point I have made before – persevere.

I want you to picture a scene. The scene is a small toddler (we will call him Jimmy) about 12 months old. Jimmy is lurching, stumbling, falling down, picking himself up and continuing across a room. And waiting across the room is Gran, with arms outstretched, encouraging him and sweeping him up in his arms when he finally makes it.

Little Jimmy doesn't realise it but he is at the absolute peaks of his learning powers. He can't talk yet, let alone read and write. In another year he'll be able to say that he wants to go and visit Gran; in 10 years he may be able to explain why he wants to go and visit Gran; and in 20 years, if he takes the right university courses, he will be able to describe how his infant muscles carried him across the room to the waiting arms of Gran.

But at 1 year old, he simply did it. That's how children learn. They make mistakes, they fall down, but they persevere, and in persevering, they learn how.

As adults we are inclined to intellectualise our learning. If we were learning to walk as adults, we would take Walking 101, a basic course in self-propulsion, followed by advanced courses in Balance, in Direction, in Vertical Stability. When it comes to religion, there are invariably rules and regulations, a way of going about learning and practising our religion. But perhaps we need to be like children and just do it; to try and keep on trying until we get it.

Don't give up. Hang in there. No one has promised that it will be easy, but when we get there, we will know. Just as Jimmy felt the love of his Gran when he finally made it, so we will experience the love of God, because that's what it's all about. That is what we are talking about here. I quote from our Gospel reading, *'I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with joy. Yes, your joy will overflow.'* John 15:11.

I also quote from 1 John 4:7-8: *'My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. The unloving know nothing of God, for God is love.'* Wonderful words that carry so much truth. A relationship with God is not only based on this all-encompassing, all-embracing thing called love, it is conditional on love. This love is expressed through compassion, kindness and service. By practising this, we carry out Jesus' commands as expressed in our gospel reading, and we impact in a positive way on the lives of those around us, or as Jesus put it, *'I appointed you to go and bear fruit.'* John 15:16.

Coming back to our relationship with God, I want to finish with an illustration. I have two flowers with me. One of the flowers is a cut flower. It is meant to be placed in a vase of water. The other is a potted flower. One of these flowers will last much longer than the other. It will be stronger and will be able to hold up better under any sort of conditions. Can you tell me which one I am talking about?

That's right. It's the potted plant. It is better and stronger because it has roots. The cut flower will last only a few days and then it will have to be thrown out because it has been cut off from its roots.

We are the same as these flowers. We need our roots. If we are to hold up under any sort of conditions, we need something which is going to provide us with a strong base, a foundation which gives us our strength and stamina, which serves as an anchor.

A personal relationship with God, with Christ will do just that. I am not talking about just having a belief. That's fine and that's important, but if we are to really receive from God that support, that inspiration, then we need to take that belief a step further and develop it into a personal relationship.

Not that easy, and not that straightforward. We really need to work at it, to persevere, because in the end, the result will be rewarding. I quote from our first reading, *'As the scripture tells us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disappointed."*' Romans 10:11. If it's in the Bible, it has to be true!

In the end, it boils down to our relationship with others. Our relationship with God is inextricably entwined with our relationship with people. That is what Jesus means when he said, *'The unloving know nothing of God, for God is love.'* I finish with a quote from Scottish pastor, Alistair Begg: *'Our relationship with God will never be right as long as our relationship with others is wrong.'*