

Pastor Charley ...: Well, hello there. We're so glad that you've joined us for worship here at Johns Creek United Methodist Church, our remote worship time. We appreciate you connecting with us. I'm Pastor Charley Reeb, one of the pastors of this great church. It's an honor and privilege to be with you during this time of worship. Whether you're worshipping with us in the morning or afternoon or evening by yourself or loved ones, we hope this is a great time of connection with God and knowing you're worshipping with the rest of the church. So let us be in an attitude of prayer together.

Lord, we do thank you for this time of worship. It grounds us. It reminds us of what is most important. It helps us prioritize what's most important in life. And so, Lord, we appreciate this time and we are grateful for it. And now, Lord, you've given me the amazing privilege and responsibility of preaching your word to these, my friends and your servants, a great task that I need your strength in order to do. So, ask you to speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

I once had a person come to see me in my office when I served another church. And he had wanted to come in and see me for quite a while, but he kept putting it off and putting it off. He said he had a question to ask me. And it turned out when he finally came to see me, he had the nerve to see me, he asked me a very, very good question. He sat down and he said, "Pastor, I just want to know, how do I experience God?" He said, "I hear you talk about God a lot. I come to worship and we pray to God, and I go to Bible studies sometimes. But how do I experience God?" Thought it was a great question. And that question led me eventually to begin a study. And actually we've done one here already by Henry Blackaby called Experiencing God, powerful study.

I encourage you to do it. I think we'll offer it again. But here's the thing. The majority of you who are watching me, and the majority of you who come to worship, whether inside or outside, will probably not be able to do that study because of schedules or for whatever reason. So I decided, today and next week that I would bring a short sermon series based on that study and bring it to you. I feel it's that important because I believe there's a hunger in many people to experience God. I believe a lot of the restlessness in our world right now is because people have a void and their hearts for God. Saint Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, oh Lord." And he would also say, "There is a God-shaped void in all of us that only God can fill."

Augustine was right I believe. Until we truly experience God and his love for us, we will never be satisfied, we will always be frustrated. But the moment we experience God truly, as we were created to do, we will find the peace and the joy and the hope deep, deep down in our hearts. But the question is, how do we experience God exactly? How do we experience God's will and his ways? Maybe you're someone who has been involved in the church for a long, long time, and you've done everything. You've come to worship every week. You've gone to

Sunday school every week. You've been on the committees, you've volunteered for ministries. But you still really haven't experienced God and you don't know why. You listen to other people talk about how they experience God with great passion, and you're thinking, "Well, what are they doing that I'm not doing? What am I doing wrong?"

Or perhaps you're someone who there was a time when you did experience God, you had a great fire with your faith, you knew the Lord was near, you experienced that intimacy with God, but it's long past, and you're trying to get back on that path again but you don't know how. You don't know where you went wrong. Or maybe you're someone who's seeking direction in your life. You have an important decision you need to make. You need some kind of guidance and you've prayed to the Lord for it. But there seems to be no answer. You don't know what to do. Or maybe you're searching for meaning and purpose. You're desperate for purpose and meaning in your life, and you've been asking God, "Lord, I need that. I want that." But there has been no answer. Well, I'm telling you today and next week I'm going to give you the answer to those questions.

I'm going to give you the answer to that struggle. And if you listen and apply these messages, I believe you'll find the answers and the hope and the fulfillment you're looking for. I want to help you experience God. But how do we do that? How does that happen? Well, the truth is, learning how to experience God is not some kind of mythical secret reserved only for a few. Nor is it a special technique or strategy. To be honest with you, experiencing God is rather simple. All we have to do is understand how God reveals himself and adjust our lives to that. We need to move the focus from how we expect God to reveal himself and move our focus to how God wants to reveal himself. You see, so often in our spiritual life, we have these preconceived ideas and expectations as to how God is supposed to operate.

And so often that blocks our ability to experience God and his will and his ways. I recall Brandy and I going on a little vacation sometime ago. And we found a resort. It was very beautiful, nice, and it had a big pool. It also had a huge water slide, and I love water slides. And so we were hanging around the pool and I saw all these kids, tons of kids going up to the slide and sliding down and going back up again and sliding down. There were tons of them. But I didn't see any adults. I wanted to get on the slide, but I didn't see any adults doing it, and I was reluctant. And I said, "Brandy, that looks fun." She goes, "Well, go do it." I said, "I'll be the only adult." She goes, "Who cares? Go and do it. There's no sign that says you can't do it."

So I got up and I walked to the stairs to the slide, and all these kids are running, bolting past me to go to the slide again. And I finally got to the top and I sat down and there was a sensor that looked at the bottom of the slide to tell you when to go. It was red, which means wait. And of course when it became green, you could go, it was clear. So I sat there, I sat there, I sat there ready to go, ready to go, red, red, red, red, red. It wouldn't turn. And there was a bunch of

kids waiting behind me to slide, and I could hear them snickering, red, red, red. I was just so embarrassed. And finally, there was about a 10-year-old girl who said to me, "Sir, sir." Said, "Yes." "You're blocking the sensor. Your body is blocking the sensor."

And was at that moment, folks where I realized, even though I felt 20 inside, they were looking at me like just an old man. "Why is he up here?" So I got out of the way so the sensor could see down below, and finally it turned green and I went fast down that slide, made a big splash, and I walked out of that pool, didn't go back, I was terribly embarrassed. Now I tell you that story because I experienced that story really as an illustration of what we often do in our faith and what we do in our spiritual lives when it comes to experiencing God. So often, we block the green light God wants to give to us and the way we experience him. Our ego, our expectations, our big ideas of control simply block how we can experience God and how God chooses to reveal himself and how God wants to reveal to us his purpose and his will and his love.

So if you're struggling finding that green light for God, it's time to get out of the way. Sometimes we just need to get out of the way and allow God to reveal himself, to adjust to how God wants to reveal himself. So how do we discover the way God desires to reveal himself? One of the important ways is studying scripture. Some of you're surely thinking, "I bet he was going to say that." Studying scripture is one of the key ways to understanding how God reveals himself into adjusting our lives to God because scripture is basically a recording of how God has chosen to reveal himself to humanity. And it's also a recording of how humanity, of how people have adjusted their lives to God. So today I want us to look at a very powerful portion of scripture that I believe is going to give us the answer to some of our questions when it comes to this.

And believe it or not, the inspiration, the answer comes from a very unlikely biblical character. Doubting Thomas. Now, I'll be honest with you, I think Doubting Thomas has gotten a bad rep. Doubting Thomas. Truthfully, Thomas was simply the person who had the guts to ask the questions that everybody wanted to ask, but didn't have the courage to ask. I feel so bad that that's his legacy. Doubting Thomas. I bet that's not the legacy he wanted to leave. Couldn't we have called him Curious Thomas or Inquisitive Thomas? No, Doubting Thomas. But I tell you, you and I are given a huge blessing by a question that Thomas asked Jesus. There is a powerful answer to our struggles today and a question that Thomas asked Jesus. You see, Thomas and the other disciples were in the upper room with Jesus shortly before Jesus's capture and crucifixion.

And the disciples knew something was about to happen. They weren't sure what, but they were scared and they were anxious and they were filled with questions. And then Jesus began to talk about how we needed to leave, but he was going to send a helper. And the disciples were all confused, but they were saying nothing. And finally Thomas thought to himself, "Am I going to have to

ask the question again? Okay, Jesus, here goes." And we see it in John 14:5. Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you're going. So how can we know the way?" Thomas was like many of us. He wanted to know when, where, how, what, to whom? Can you relate to that? I know I can relate to that. There have been times in my journey of faith when I've said to God, "God, I'm not asking for much. I don't want to know much. Just tell me what, where, when, to whom and how much. And then tell me the outcome and I'll be fine."

Can I get a witness? I think all of us can relate to that. And perhaps that's where you are today. You're saying, "God, in the midst of this decision or in the midst of this desire to experience you, I don't need much. I just need a map and then I'll be on my way." Jesus's response to Thomas is priceless, is powerful. And it cuts through all the expectations and all of our frustrations when Jesus says this. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well." Now, notice something. Notice what Jesus does not say.

Jesus does not say, "I'm going to show you the way." He does not say, "I'm going to give you directions." He does not say, "I'm going to give you a map." What does Jesus say? He says, "I am the way. I am the way." Jesus is the way. So as we're clamoring, trying to figure out how to experience God and how to understand God chooses to reveal himself, in the midst of our frustration, in the midst of our pain, in the midst of our confusion, we hear Jesus say to us, "You don't need to know all the details. I'll take care of that. That's up to me. What I need for you to do is simply focus on my love for you and your love for me. I need you to simply focus on me one step at a time and the rest will follow."

And you knowing Jesus, he would give a similar instruction on the Sermon on the Mount when he would say this, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Folks, this reveals a message, "I want you to get good today." And if you truly want to experience God, you will listen closely because it's our inability to deny this or our inability to receive this and to apply it that keeps us from experiencing God. So here goes, listen closely. We experience God one step at a time, one day at a time. Let me say that again. We experience God one step at a time, one day at a time. Now, for many of you, type A control freaks, maybe you don't like this message or answer, but it's the truth. So listen closely. Our faith in God, our experience with God happens in the present moment. We experience God in the present moment.

So it's so important for us to push aside the future and wanting to know when, where, and how and what and who. It is so important for us to push aside all of our expectations and finally say, "Lord, I want to know what you need me to do today, right now, in this moment, today." You see folks, there is a great freedom that comes from this when we can release all of our anxiety and all our control and all of our frustrations and all of our expectations to God and say, "Lord, I

just want to know what you want me to do today." And God says to us, when we get ahead of ourselves, "Listen, listen, you're getting ahead of yourself. All that stuff you're worrying about, let me handle it. I'll take care of it. What I need for you to do is focus on me because I am the way. Don't move too quickly." Oh, there's a great freedom and release in that.

Because when we can release all of that stuff to God, then we receive and listen closely. Because I've learned this about my faith. I've learned I can't receive God, I can't experience God until I release all my expectations and all my desire to know every step of the way and all my desire to know the details and all my desires to control everything. When I finally release that and say, "Lord, today, in this moment, you show me what you want me to know, you show me what to do." And when I do that, I find I am more sensitive to the way God wants to guide me and I can move in the direction I feel led without knowing or having to know all the details. You see, that's one of the problems we have as Christians and as the Church in general.

So often, we don't move the direction God wants us to move until we have all the details, until we make all the plans, until everything is organized and everything is perfect, and we never move until we get there. And then the opportunity has gone because we have tried to take control when God simply wants us to move with him one day at a time, one step at a time, and he will reveal the way. That's important to hear. In fact, one of the greatest examples of this in scripture of this kind of faith is Abraham. You remember Abraham? This is what God said to Abraham when God called him. The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land. I will show you, I will make you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. And whoever curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So Abraham wimp, it said. As the Lord had told him and lot with him, and Abraham was 75 years old. Now, did you see, did you hear how specific God was with Abraham? "Go, Abraham. Leave." "Where God?" "To a land I will show you." Now, that wasn't very specific, was it? Not very specific at all. If we had been Abraham, would probably say, "No, no, no, no. God, wait a second. I need more than that. I'm 75 years old. I don't have time for this. You need to show me more. You need to give me more details. I need to know." Abraham though is wise enough to trust God one step at a time, knowing God would be faithful of revealing the way.

And I tell you folks, one of the key lessons I've learned in my faith and as I've watched the faith of others as well in the church, is that God rarely, rarely gives us a map. God rarely gives us detailed instructions. Most of the time, God simply reveals himself enough to take a step. We learn this when we ever drive a car at night. I know I do. When I drive my Jeep at night, my headlights, although they are strong, they don't show me the danger ahead a mile away. No. Instead, they

simply show me the next bend, the next turn. That's what they shown me. And folks, this is a great metaphor to how we receive God, how we experience God. One step at a time, one day at a time. Now listen, be careful what you wish for. Because to be honest with you, we couldn't handle all the things we want to know from God.

If God were to show us everything in our future and all the details and all the plans and how all things were going to play out, we would freak out. We couldn't handle it spiritually, and we would run in the opposite direction. If you would've told me, or if God would've told me when I was 14 or 15 years old that I would be up here in my adult years preaching, I would've said, "God, you got to be kidding me. There's no way. I can't even get through a book report. Are you joking? Sorry, not for me." Or when Brandy and I were first married, if God had shown us, if God had told us, "Listen, not until your mid-forties will you have a child." Excuse me, that's a little too old. I'm sorry.

We would run in the opposite direction if God revealed too much to us. No, our faith, our relationship with God is experienced in the present moment, one step at a time, one day at a time. You see, that's how we adjust our lives to God, one of the key ways. And I'm so grateful for Henry Blackaby and his study that reveals these truths in a powerful way. I don't know where you are in your faith. I don't know what decisions you have to make in your life. I don't know where you want to go and what your struggles are. But I do know this.

God is found and revealed and experienced one moment at a time, one step at a time, one day at a time. So your homework today is as simple to say, "Lord, in this moment of being with you, of being present with you, show me, guide me, lead me on what you want me to do today, one step at a time." And next week I'll talk a little more about experiencing God's will and his ways. But for now, it's time to experience God on this day. Let's pray.

Lord, we pause now in this moment, refusing to get ahead of ourselves, releasing all of our expectations of how we think you're supposed to work. Then we sit and yield and surrender to you and ask you, "Lord, what is it you want me to do? How do you want me to be today? Today. In this moment." Lord, that is our earnest prayer. That is our honest prayer. And help us to have the trust in you to know that when we do that, the rest will take care of itself. We don't have to know everything. We don't have to do everything. We don't have to be in control of everything. We yield to you. Make yourself known. It's in Christ name we pray. Amen.

Receive this benediction. And now may that mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you also. May the love of God or Heavenly Father abide with you this day and through this week. And the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit fall fresh upon you, and the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ go with you and sustain you both now and forevermore. Amen.

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