

# Firsthand

1 John 1:1-2

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## Introduction:

Illustration: I apologize to you if tonight you showed up with an empty stomach and are hungry because I want to start tonight's message with an illustration that involves the best burger joint on God's green earth: In-N-Out! And if you disagree that it's the best, that's ok, you're just wrong.

Most of us have been to In-N-Out more times than we can count and have experienced firsthand how amazing it truly is, but I'm sure there are some online viewers tonight who are from areas where there is no In-N-Out (I am terribly sorry for you).

Here's the thing, I can talk your ear off all day and night about how good a fresh Double-Double is. I can tell you all about how In-N-Out only uses the freshest ingredients. I can tell you about the history and origins of the company. But until you go to In-N-Out yourself, purchase a Double-Double, sink your teeth into that juicy burger, and experience its goodness overwhelming your taste buds, you will not have experienced it **FIRSTHAND**.

Growing up, I heard all about how awesome the Grand Canyon was. I read about it in my schoolbooks and heard from my friends who went. But it was not until I went to the Grand Canyon and experienced it firsthand that I was able to grasp just how incredible it was.

We've likely all been told at some point regarding some thing or place, "you've got to go experience it for yourself".

This same concept is true of our relationship with the Lord: *He wants you to experience Him FIRSTHAND.*

Tonight, we'll learn of how John tells the readers of his first epistle about the firsthand experience that he had with the Word of life, Jesus Christ.

We'll also learn how, though we can't quite have the same *physical* firsthand experience that John had with Jesus, we can still have a deep and intimate experience with God because of what Christ has done for us and the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. Because of these things, **WE CAN KNOW GOD.**

## 1. The Gravity of Knowing God Firsthand

(vs 1-2)

Our first subpoint regarding the gravity of knowing God firsthand is...

### A. Knowing God, the Eternal One

*“That which was **from the beginning**, which we have heard, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **looked** upon, and our hands have **handled**, concerning the Word of life— ” (NKJV)*

What is the “that” that John is referring to here? An even better question to ask is WHO is the “that” John is talking about. The answer is, it is JESUS.

*“[I am writing about] what existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life [the One who existed even before the beginning of the world, Christ]” (AMP)*

When John writes “from the beginning”, he is speaking of the eternal nature and deity of Christ Jesus.

**Revelation 1:8** <sup>8</sup>“I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End*,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

**Revelation 1:17** <sup>17</sup>“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.”

- **Isaiah 44:6** <sup>6</sup>“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; Besides Me *there is* no God.”

**John 17:4-5** <sup>4</sup>“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. <sup>5</sup>And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

**John 1:1-2** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God”

Bible commentator **John Phillips** writes, “Here, in his epistle, when John refers to a ‘beginning,’ he wants us to envision One who had an eternal preexistence but who, at a specific moment in time, entered into human life on planet Earth. When any other baby is born, it marks the beginning of a new life. When Jesus was born, it signified something quite different; it marked the coming into this world of a Person who had existed from all eternity. The Lord Jesus did not have a beginning. He was!”

Our second subpoint regarding the gravity of knowing God firsthand is...

## **B. Knowing God, the Incarnate Christ**

*<sup>2</sup> the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—*

Jesus, being eternal, put on flesh and stepped into time to dwell amongst His creation and ultimately die that He may redeem them.

**John 1:14** <sup>14</sup> And the Word **became flesh** and dwelt among us, and **we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father**, full of grace and truth.”

The eternal God of all glory and creation became seeable. He became hearable. He became touchable. He became KNOWABLE in such a personal way.

John is saying here to his readers, “We **HEARD** Him with our own two ears! We **SAW** Him with our own two eyes and gazed upon the glory of God! We **TOUCHED** Him with our own two hands! We really experienced the One we claim to believe!”

We may ask ourselves, why is John feeling the need to say these things to his readers? The answer to this, I believe, is twofold.

First, John is addressing the false teachings of Docetism and Gnosticism that were creeping their way into the Church. The Docetists and Gnostics were going around teaching that Jesus was some sort of phantom-spirit and that He did not actually come in bodily form. This was no doubt a wacky teaching, that you and I may even laugh at, but there were legitimately those who were being led astray by it.

John is basically saying to them “NO, NO, NO! I saw Him! I heard Him! I touched Him and laid my very head on His bosom the night He was betrayed!”

In writing to the church at Colossae, Paul crushes the teachings of Docetism and Gnosticism in just a few short words. **Colossians 2:9** <sup>9</sup> For in Him dwells **all the fullness** of the Godhead **bodily;**”

- Bodily – in bodily form

**Colossians 1:15-19** <sup>15</sup> He is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. <sup>18</sup> And He is the head of

the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. <sup>19</sup> For it pleased *the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell*, <sup>20</sup> and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

So, in one way John is silencing the heresy of the Docetists and Gnostics, but in another way, he is sharing of that deep and intimate experience that He had with Jesus.

We’ve all probably thought at some point, “Oh how amazing it would’ve been if I could’ve gotten to walk with Jesus when He was physically here on earth”. While the sentiment is sweet, Jesus actually said that those who believe in Him without having *physically* seen Him are BLESSED...

- **John 20:29** “<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those **who have not seen and yet have believed.**”

Jesus also made it clear to the disciples in the Upper Room, just before His death on the cross, that it was to their ADVANTAGE that He go away...

- **John 16:7** “<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth. **It is to your advantage that I go away**; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”
  - “Helper” – the Comforter (Parakletos)
  - This is none other than the Holy Spirit of God!

This leads us perfectly to our third subpoint about the gravity of knowing God firsthand is all about the Holy Spirit...

### **C. Knowing God Firsthand, By the Holy Spirit**

Because the Holy Spirit has come and because He is in us, though we’re not physically with Jesus like John, we can still experience unfathomable intimacy with Christ.

Author and Bible teacher **James Montgomery Boice** writes these powerful words in his commentary on 1 John, “No one today can repeat the **objective** experiences of Christ possessed by the apostles. Nevertheless, **we can and must repeat their subjective experience** as, on the basis of objective revelation, **the Holy Spirit makes Christ alive and real both to our minds and hearts.**”

Though we do not see Him with our physical eyeballs, we see Him through the eyes of faith.

**1 Corinthians 2:9-12** “<sup>9</sup> But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” <sup>10</sup> **But God has revealed *them* to us**

**through His Spirit.** For **the Spirit** searches all things, yes, **the deep things of God.** <sup>11</sup> For what man

knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> **Now we have received**, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.**”

- Because of the Holy Spirit, we can know the deep things of God!
- If your relationship with God is lacking depth, I challenge you to go and study the work of the Holy Spirit and grow in your relationship with Him specifically!

Our fourth subpoint about knowing God firsthand is...

## D. Knowing God Firsthand, through the New Covenant

Because of the New Covenant, ushered in by Christ, we can truly KNOW GOD.

The Old Testament and New Testament each have powerful words for our boring English word “know”.

- Hebrew word = YADA
- Greek word = GINOSKO

These words both translate to speak of a deep knowledge that is gained by experience and relationship.

Let’s briefly look at the story of redemption, woven throughout the pages of the Bible, as we seek to understand how through the New Covenant, we can know God intimately.

CREATION: In the beginning, God creates Adam and Eve, and for a time, they enjoy perfect fellowship with God (they knew God).

THE FALL: Adam and Eve sin against God and **their fellowship with Him is broken**. Their sin had **separated** them from God. God removes and banishes them from the Garden of Eden, and they were no longer able to know God like they did pre-sin.

- **Genesis 3:22-24** <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, **lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**”— <sup>23</sup> **therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden** to till the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, **to guard the way to the tree of life.**”
- It is incredibly significant that God specifically wanted to prevent them from continuing to partake of the tree of life. God didn’t want them to partake of it anymore because if they were to keep eating of its fruit, they would live in a perpetual state of separation from God forever.

- God not allowing them to partake of the tree of life any longer was the most merciful thing He could've possibly done for them!

THE OLD COVENANT/LAW: In the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt, God gives to Moses what we know as the Old Covenant. God told them exactly how He wanted them to live. He told them of how blessed they'd be if they kept it and also told them of how miserable they'd be if they broke it.

- A major component of the Law was the sacrificial system that God gave to the people for when they would sin.
- Under the Old Covenant, it was as though God said "you've sinned and fallen short of My glory, here's how you're going to make **temporary atonement** (through earthly sacrifices)"
  - **"Here's what *you're* going to do about it"**

THE NEW COVENANT: God sends His only begotten Son into the world, and it is through Christ that the New Covenant is ushered in.

- Under the New Covenant, it's as though God has said "You've sinned and fallen short of My glory, here's how I'm going to make **permanent atonement** (through Christ's sacrifice)"
  - **"Here's what *I am* going to do about it"**

The New Covenant was prophesied of throughout the Old Testament, but it was probably most clearly stated in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 31.

- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** <sup>31</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— <sup>32</sup> not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' ***for they all shall know Me***, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. ***For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.***"

Christ came into this world to be the **propitiation**.

- **1 John 2:2** <sup>2</sup> "And He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."
- **1 John 4:10** <sup>10</sup> "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the **propitiation** for our sins."
- **Propitiation** – the appeasement of God's holy wrath on sin

Christ came into this world to be our **Mediator**.

- **1 Timothy 2:5** <sup>5</sup> "For *there is* one God and one **Mediator** between God and men, *the Man* Christ Jesus,"

- **John 14:6** “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** “<sup>18</sup> Now all things *are* of God, who has **reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ**, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”
- **Mediator** – one who intervenes between two for the purpose of restoring relationships.

Because Christ has come to be our propitiation and mediator, all who are in Christ are forgiven of their sins and can KNOW GOD FIRSHTHAND.

Being able to know God firsthand is at the very core of what our salvation is all about...

- **John 17:3** “<sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, ***that they may know You***, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”
  - Eternal life, according to the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, it is **not only something for our future, it is something for us now**. Jesus does not define eternal life as something that is distant and something we must wait for until we die, He defines it as **something that can be experienced NOW as we seek to know God and Christ Jesus**.
  - “A distinctive aspect of John’s conception of eternal life is that it is a **present possession and experience**. This conception corrects a common perversion of the Gospel. Expositors often interpret eternal life as future immortality and withhold the richest gift Christianity offers to men—**life with God now**. It defines the true measure of life as *qualitative* rather than quantitative.” (**The Interpreter’s Bible Commentary**)

Because of what Christ has done, our sin no longer separates us from God (positionally speaking).

- **Ephesians 2:14, 18** “<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has **broken down the middle wall of separation**...<sup>18</sup> For through Him we both have **access by one Spirit to the Father**.”

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that at the very moment Jesus yielded up His spirit, the veil of the temple was torn.

- **Matthew 27:50-51** “<sup>50</sup> And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. <sup>51</sup> Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,”

We cannot afford to miss the significance of this!!! The veil of the temple served as a means of **separation**. The veil separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. It was at the holy of holies where God’s presence dwelt (the Shekinah glory). The priest would only go in to the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to intercede on behalf of the sins of the nation of Israel.

When Christ died and the veil was torn, it signified that, because of what He did for the forgiveness of sins, every forgiven man now had direct access to God!

- **Hebrews 10:19-22** “<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, having **boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus**, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, **His flesh**, <sup>21</sup> and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
- Now, Christ is the veil that we enter the Holiest! Because of His blood, we can do so with boldness!
- A.W. Tozer, regarding the veil being torn, “**this rending of the veil opened the way for every worshipper in the world to come by the new and living way straight into the divine Presence.**”

Through His sacrifice, Jesus paved the way for our fellowship with God to be restored.

Now, we’ve considered the gravity of knowing God firsthand in four ways: 1) Knowing God, the eternal One, 2) Knowing God, the incarnate Christ, 3) Knowing God by the Holy Spirit, and 4) Knowing God through the New Covenant.

**A few questions** I would like us all to consider tonight...

### Do I possess a genuine, firsthand experience with God?

- Dead religion cannot produce this, only abiding can...
  - **John 15:1-8** “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> **Abide in Me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. **He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit**, for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
    - To ABIDE is to have a true **relationship** with Christ where you are **CONNECTED** to Him!
  - Many people limit their experience with God to a secondhand way
    - They don’t read the Word themselves, that’s what pastors are for
    - They don’t go in the “secret place” that Jesus talks about, what’s the point in sitting in silence and praying?



- They don't seek to be used by God, they think that's for those who work at the church
- It is God's desire that you would know Him in a firsthand way
- What we must understand about this firsthand knowing/experiencing of God is that **His Word is what leads us into it.**
  - We do not chase after goosebumps or feelings while leaving the Bible at the door.
  - It is the Word of God that leads us into the presence of its Author.

### Do I know about God, or do I know God?

- Far too many people spend their lives accumulating much head knowledge about God but fail to have a **heart-experience** with Him
- The 18" gap must be closed
  - The gap between the head and the heart
- **You were created to be connected to God**

### Is knowing God firsthand a priority to me?

- Listen to how much knowing God was a priority for Paul the apostle...
- **Philippians 3:7-14** <sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> Yet indeed **I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ** Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, **that I may gain Christ** <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; <sup>10</sup> **that I may know Him** and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup> if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of **the upward call** of God in Christ Jesus.
  - Counting all loss to know Him
  - The upward call – an **intimate relationship** with our Lord

### Does my life prove to others that I know God?

- **1 John 2:3-6** <sup>3</sup> Now **by this** we know that we know Him, **if we keep His commandments.** <sup>4</sup> He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. **By this we know that we are in Him.** <sup>6</sup> He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

- Keeping His commandments proves we truly know Him
- **1 John 4:7-8** <sup>“7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; **and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.** <sup>8</sup> *He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*”
  - Loving one another proves we know God
- **Acts 4:13** <sup>“13</sup> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that **they had been with Jesus.**”
- **Daniel 11:32b** <sup>“but the people</sup> **who know their God will display strength and take action.**” (NASB)

## Conclusion:

Some final verses to meditate on as we close...

**Jeremiah 9:23-24** <sup>“23</sup> Thus says the Lord:

“Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,

Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;

<sup>24</sup> But let him who glories glory in this,

**That he understands and knows Me,**

That I *am* the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight,” says the Lord.

- Knowing God is to be something we glory/boast in!

**1 Corinthians 13:11-12** <sup>“11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. **Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.**”

- The reality is that if we want to go deeper in knowing God, we must put away childish things
- For now, we know God partially but in heaven, we will know Him fully
  - I suppose you can wait till heaven to grow in knowing Him, but you’ll be robbing yourself of an abundant life in Jesus, full of peace, joy, and everything your heart longs for.

**Psalm 34:8a** <sup>“8</sup> Oh, **taste** and **see** that the Lord *is* good;”

In his book, *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer writes **“To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul’s paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too easily satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart.”**

And how I love so dearly what C.H. Spurgeon preached when he said, **“Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.”**

*It is the heartbeat of the believer to devote one’s life to knowing God and pursuing the deep and intimate experience He longs for us to have with Him.*