

THE GENTLE WHISPER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (v. 24b)

Finally, John tells us, "We know that we know him by the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit." In addition to the certainty of God's promises and the vitality of our relationship with Christ, we have the quiet witness of God's Spirit.

24b And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

1. Read Romans 8:14-16. What are some of the ways the Spirit reassures us that we are indeed children of God?
2. What is the most important truth you have learned from this study?
3. How will you put that truth into practice in the next 48 hours?

KNOWING THAT WE KNOW HIM

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Few things are more vital than life-giving relationships.

Children thrive in homes where the parents are deeply committed to each other, and every member of the family is deeply committed to every other member of the family. No favorites. No jealousy. No competition. There are meaningful boundaries, along with a lot of grace and acceptance when boundaries are crossed. Children are loved deeply for who they are without feeling the pressure to be some idealized version of what their parents want them to be.

Couples thrive in marriages built on honesty, mutual affection, and deep friendship. Each one cherishing the other and giving themselves freely for the other.

We all thrive in churches where we are challenged by the beauty and grandeur of the gospel, and deeply loved back to the truth of the gospel when we run, hide and pretend. And we all run, hide and pretend.

Unfortunately, our homes, marriages, and churches seldom, if ever, work the way they should. We are broken people living in a broken world, and our most vital relationships will always feel the sting of our brokenness.

There is one relationship, however, that we can always count on. It is not only a relationship that restores and renews us, it is a relationship that breathes fresh life into every other relationship. Of course, we are talking about our relationship with Christ.

And while there is nothing more certain than our relationship with Christ, there are times when we feel as far from him as we could possibly be. We may know the gospel in our heads, but our hearts are not always convinced.

John wants his readers to be firmly established in the truth of the gospel and the certainty of their relationship with Christ. John wants us to know that we know him, so he lays down three huge markers. We know that we know him because of the certainty of God's promises, the vitality of our relationship with Christ, and the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit.

THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PROMISES (vv. 19-20)

First, John tells us, "We know that we know him because of the certainty of God's promises." When John says God is greater than our hearts, he means the truth of God's word is far more powerful than the way we may feel in any given moment.

19 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

1. John tells us, "this is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence." For John, "setting our hearts at rest" and "knowing we belong to the truth," seem to go hand in hand. How do the two work together?
2. What might cause our "hearts to condemn us?"
3. What do you think John means when he tells us, "God is greater than our hearts?"
4. What are some of the things God has done for us that set our hearts at ease in his presence?
5. It is usually unnerving to think someone might know our darkest secrets, why is it particularly encouraging that "God knows everything" about us?

THE VITALITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST (vv. 21-24a)

John also tells us, "We can know that we know him by the vitality of our relationship with Christ." While John draws our attention to one particularly important vital sign, there are many he could have mentioned. The bottom line is that we see the power of the gospel at work in our life.

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 24a The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them.

1. If we are not careful, we might think these verses are describing some kind of transactional relationship where we give God what he wants from us, so that we get what we want from him. What are some hints from the text that John has much more in mind?
2. Read John 14:15-21. Jesus makes a vital connection between "love" and "obedience." How does he describe the relationship between the two? What can we expect when we follow Christ in loving obedience?

3. How would you describe the difference between "dutiful obedience" and "loving obedience?"
4. Is there ever a place for dutiful obedience in our relationship with Christ? Explain your answer.
5. Why do you think John focusses on answered prayer as a particularly powerful indicator of the vitality of our relationship with Christ?
6. What are some other vital signs John might have mentioned?
7. Why should we expect the gospel to lead us into a more vibrant, loving relationship with Christ?
8. Notice how seamlessly John moves from the plural (commandments) to the singular (commandment) and then back to the plural. And when he speaks of "his commandment (in the singular)" he actually gives us two commands.
 - a. What are the two commandments John brings to our attention?
 - b. Why do you think he refers to them in the singular, as "his command?"
 - c. What are the two commandments Jesus told us that captured the heart of the Law and the Prophets?
 - d. What does the fact that John substitutes "believe in the name of his Son" for "love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and mind," tell us about what it means to "believe in the name of his Son?"
 - e. How does John expand on Jesus' command to "love your neighbor as yourself?"
9. How does a vital and growing relationship with God set our hearts at ease in his presence?
10. How do we cultivate a vital and growing relationship with Christ?