



# *Can We Be Friends Now?*

## **Introduction – The Back Story**

**Tom Taylor (TT):** Hi! This is Dr. Tom Taylor. The idea of God is hard enough to wrap your brain around, but the idea that He wants to be friends is unheard of.

Assuming that, at least for the moment, we can agree that there is a God, your perception of Him has probably been formed already from what you've heard from your parents, preachers, ministers, televangelists and others in churches, on the radio, on TV or online.

My impression of God was not helped by the little I read in the King James Bible, because the language was too archaic to hold my interest. I've heard many people say that they just can't read the Bible, and they're usually referring to the King James Bible.

Well, what if much of what you've heard or read about God is wrong or at best incomplete? What if He isn't nearly as mysterious and unapproachable as you've been taught? What if God actually makes sense? And what if He's far more comprehensible and accessible than you've been led to believe?

Barbara and I were at a home where a minister from out of town was going to speak. We arrived early and I happened to overhear a young man ask the minister, "Why do we have to be resurrected when Jesus returns if we're already in heaven after we die? I don't understand why we have to go back down just to come back up again."

I admired the honest attempt to make sense out of something that most Christians just take on faith. The minister, however, invented an answer that was so convoluted and nonsensical that it left the young man more confused and troubled than before.

Later that evening, I told the young man how much I appreciated his question and I showed him my Concordant Literal New Testament. I said, "This is a translation of the scriptures from the

three oldest Greek manuscripts in existence. You'll find answers here that you won't find in most other versions.”

What questions do you have that no one has been able to answer in a way that makes sense? If there is a God, and we are agreeing for now that there is, is He really unapproachable or do religious ceremonies and doctrine only make Him *seem* that way? Is the Sunday morning presentation of God true or is it an invention that others created long ago that simply goes unquestioned?

I'm proposing that not only *should* God make sense to you and me, He *must* make sense or else it's impossible to understand Him, much less have a relationship with Him.

Growing up in a churchgoing family taught me very little about God other than He was both loving and angry at the same time. He could welcome me into heaven or just as easily send me to a terrible place called Hell. Illustrations of a white robed grandfatherly figure with a white flowing beard and hair were fanciful enough, but the notion of an actual Being Who was everywhere all the time, all-seeing and all-knowing, and Who was equally capable of loving or destroying me, made God seem downright scary, not to mention unattainable and untouchable. Jesus was little more than a storybook character Whose picture hanging on the church walls made Him look like a long-haired version of the ministers whose pictures hung on different walls.

Going to church was a weekly ordeal for me. Sunday school was supremely boring, and youth group was full of kids I barely knew. I dreaded big church, which I was obligated to sit through when I served as an acolyte who lit the candles on the altar.

The obligation continued in my late teens as a “crucifer” carrying a bronze cross on a pole in front of the choir in the processional (that's when you go into the church) and their recessional (that's when everybody files out of the church) and by everybody, I mean, I'm in the front of the line carrying this cross, right, and there are two acolytes directly behind me, then the ministers and there were, gosh, no fewer than two and sometimes more than that, and then a choir that must have contained, well I don't know, 30 people or so, forty people, I don't know. Anyway, it was quite the ceremony. I hid out in the janitor's office whenever I wasn't playing a role in that pageant.

As soon as I left home for college in 1969, I threw the whole paradigm overboard. After a year of drug-laced hedonism, I delved into Zen Buddhism and other religions, but their spiritual hierarchies, paths to “enlightenment” and mysticism were as incomprehensible and

unsatisfying as Christianity, so I poured myself into mind control techniques and encounter groups that were popular in the early 1970s.

In the middle of 1971, one of my encounter group members invited us to attend a gathering of so-called charismatic Catholics who met at the gymnasium of a nearby Catholic boys' high school. When we arrived, people were milling around, and we took seats high up in the bleachers. Once everyone had found a seat, the lights were dimmed, and I could hear voices murmuring quietly from a small group of people in the center of the gym floor.

Someone began singing a tone and then another and more voices joined in an ever-widening circle. As people sang without discernible words but sounds that were obviously spontaneous and meaningful to them, I realized that what I was hearing was the phenomenon known as "speaking in tongues." If you look at Acts 2:4, you'll see where that's introduced.

Although I'd never heard it before, I suddenly understood why these people were called charismatic. They had received the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and the captivating sound was that of singing "in the spirit." The absence of religious trappings was a welcome relief, and I found the whole environment warm and welcoming. Amid the singing, an invitation was spoken by someone in the center of the crowd. "If you have never accepted Jesus into your heart," he said, "as your Lord and Savior and would like to now, just stand up."

"Wow! Could it be this simple?" I wondered. My efforts to figure out life hadn't gotten me very far, but I was wooed by the sound of singing "in the spirit," and I wanted more of it so I stood up. I had no idea what that action would set in motion, but a few weeks later I hitchhiked from Cleveland, OH to Denver, CO where I met some "Jesus freaks" living in a communal house. We read, ate, [and] worshipped together and shared our life stories. We attended "Spirit-filled" churches in Denver where people spoke in tongues and miracles of healing often happened. I decided to be baptized in the small church I attended most often where people were relatively poor but full of life and joy.

Soon after my baptism in water, a friend from the commune said, "I think you're ready for the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Well, I agreed and we set a date to drive to the mountains but when he pulled up to my apartment, it was already snowing hard and going into the mountains was out of the question. "We can do this right here," he said when I got into the car. "I'll pray and then I'll start praying in the spirit. You ask God to fill you with His spirit and then start speaking in tongues."

“That's it?” I thought. I expected that God would make my mouth speak in tongues, I was not expecting to have to speak on my own. My friend began praying and soon began praying in tongues. I wavered and hesitated. I felt foolish and almost panicky as if I had been asked to read for the first time in front of my elementary school class, and I had no idea how to start. I was certain that I would make a fool of myself.

I finally asked God to fill me with His spirit, then I waited. Nothing. I knew I was going to have to utter the first sound but every part of me with an ounce of dignity recoiled at the idea. I was frozen until I made myself just blurt out a sound. Just one, but then I blurted out another, and then another, and another. Pretty soon I was uttering a string of sounds that had no meaning to my rational brain, but something welled up inside me and began gushing out like water from a hydrant in a farmyard.

I was aware for the first time of my own spirit, truly aware. Suddenly I felt a direct communication with God that I never wanted to shut off, ever. God had suddenly become real and I was talking to Him. I couldn't understand a word, but I didn't care.

The next morning I pulled into the construction site where I worked and as I faced the mountains in the cold, crisp air, I prayed, “Father, I want to know You, I want to know what's true, and I don't care what it costs.”

Once more, I had no idea what I was setting in motion. A few weeks later, I was invited to a three-day home group meeting where a pastor from Topeka, KS would be sharing discoveries that had led to disbanding his church. The pastor's group of students was studying the scriptures from the Koine Greek language (that's ancient biblical or Hellenistic Greek) into which the original writings in the scripture were transcribed. They found that the traditional teachings of the church were fundamentally flawed in areas like heaven and hell, the Trinity and other important elements of traditional Christian faith.

The biggest point for which the pastor had become infamous was teaching from the scriptures that God would save all mankind and none would be lost in hell or anywhere else. My curiosity was roused when I heard this and I called to cancel a trip with another group on the same weekend. The person on the other end of the phone asked, “Is this the man who teaches ‘the restitution of all things’?”

I said, “I don't know what you call it, but if you mean that all mankind will be saved, then yes.”

The next words sealed my decision. “Well, you know,” the person said, “there is no new revelation.”

Now, something about such an immediate denial of validity accompanied by such a defensive absence of curiosity just rubbed me the wrong way. There was now no way I would miss the opportunity to learn more about what others found so threatening.

During the weekend meetings, the visiting pastor carefully outlined the discoveries that he and his group had made. He described how their lives were changed as a result, and he explained the breakup of his church with some sadness, but without a hint of defensiveness. He never pounded his Bible or insisted that we believe what he was saying. He simply shared the scriptures as they were written and explained what the words meant. He made a compelling case unlike any preacher I'd heard before.

By the second day of the three-day experience, I was convinced that I should study with the pastor and his group. He confirmed my impression on the last day when he invited me to join them in Topeka. I arrived on February 2nd, 1972 to begin a 14-year adventure of discovering what the Scriptures *really* say. In the process, we discovered what Christ actually accomplished, who the Father is, who we are to Him, what His purpose is, and where we fit in it. While each of us worked, completed degrees, [and] raised families, we met throughout the week to pour over Greek-English texts of the New Testament line by line, examine commentaries, examine Christian history and study Old Testament prophetic writings from translations as close to the original Hebrew and Aramaic languages as possible.

What we learned blew the lid off long-held traditions. Not only observing but understanding and eagerly participating in God's purpose, we discovered the Father's character as revealed by His own words and actions. We also found our inherent worth as His offspring and our central importance to the purpose that He's operating today. Everything here is a fresh look at answers to questions that should be asked by anyone who is truly curious about Who God is and what He's up to. Here's Barbara to tell of a completely different experience from mine.

**Barbara Brown, MSE:** I loved going to church on Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday night from as young as I can remember. At the end of every service, the pastor gave an altar call for anyone who wanted to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

One Sunday morning when I was eight, it felt like I was being supernaturally whisked to the front of the church where I asked Jesus to come into my heart. The pastor met with my parents

later to determine if I really understood what I was doing. When they assured him that I did, he agreed to baptize me.

I went to the altar again when I was a teenager and the call was given for people who wanted to be missionaries. In my church, women could either tend the nursery or be missionaries in Africa and I wasn't keen on the nursery. By the time I was old enough to fulfill what I believed was my missionary calling, I was five years into a steadily worsening battle with muscular dystrophy.

One Monday morning, after a full weekend of church activities that had exhausted every muscle in my body to the point that my legs wouldn't work, my neck wouldn't hold my head up, and my hands wouldn't grip, I prayed, "God, I know You've called me to be a missionary, but how can I do it flat on my back?"

It had never occurred to me to pray for healing, but finally my prayer wasn't about me but for God's purpose in my life and then He had something to work with. I was miraculously healed within a few weeks of that prayer, and if you want the whole story of my divine healing and much more, it's in the book, *God is God and We Are Not*. Amen. Good word, right?

Miraculous healing and other spiritual gifts were believed in my church to have ended late in the first century. After I was healed, people in my world acted strangely around me, almost hostile, as if to deny that I'd been healed at all never mind that I no longer needed the Canadian crutches that I had depended on for almost five years.

I began looking elsewhere for help in understanding what had happened to me. I found it at a Spirit-filled Baptist Church whose members my friends and I once made fun of because "they talk in tongues and jump pews." The people in this new church were alive and full of joy compared to the people at my old church who were religious. I wanted the same kind of life for myself that they demonstrated. I also wanted to spread the same healing miracle to others that I had received. When people came into my athletic apparel stores, I offered to pray for some whom God pointed out and they experienced miracles in their lives.

I knew that receiving the Holy Spirit was important, but it turned out to be much harder for me than I would have thought. The folks at church prayed for me and laid hands on me several times, but it just didn't seem to take. While I was on vacation in Hawaii, a group of Japanese tourists walked beneath my balcony at the resort. As they spoke to one another, it was like, "Rwragewr."

I heard the Father ask, "Do you understand what they're saying?"

"No," I replied.

"Does that offend you?" God asked.

"No," I answered. "That's their language."

"So is tongues My kids' language, so why does that offend you?"

Busted! In the book of Acts after His resurrection, Yeshua told the disciples (or Jesus, Yeshua His *real* name) to wait for the Holy Spirit to be poured out. At Pentecost, "**they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the spirit was giving them utterance.**" (Acts 2:4) From that time on, the Holy Spirit moved through the entire community of those who believed in Yeshua. Clearly, my "religious head" was keeping me from getting the gift that Jesus paid a big price to send.

Months after the Father had spoken to me in Hawaii, I was driving and singing along with worship music when a word came out of my mouth that I'd never heard before. I wrote it down and called a friend. "I got a word," I said. "ONE word! What should I do now?"

"Keep saying it."

"What?" I was indignant. After all, I had three Master's degrees, so how hard could this be? "The rest of you have whole languages and I got one word," I said incredulously. "What's up with that?"

The Father was using the foolishness of the gospel to confound my so-called wisdom, but eventually that one word led to more, which became sentences, and then whole spirit languages. In 1 Corinthians 1:27 [it says], "**The stupidity of the world God chooses, that He may be disgracing the wise, and the weakness of the world God chooses, that He may be disgracing the strong.**" So I was hereby busted by my Father.

**TT:** Our individual experiences either draw us to the Father, repel us from Him, or leave us feeling nothing at all. No matter what your experience has been up to now, I pray that you find this a gate that opens into the Father's personality and heart in a way you haven't seen before. If you've already been drawn to Him, I pray you'll find an intimacy with the Father that you

haven't known before. If you've been repelled by Him or by the way He's been portrayed by religion, I pray that He wins you over.

If you felt nothing at all toward Him, I pray He kindles a passion within you to know Him fully.

In any case, I pray you approach this with an open mind, an earnest heart and a willing spirit. I believe you'll discover that your time and attention are richly rewarded. God appears to have been buried under 2,000 years of religious doctrines and pageantry, shrouded in the confusing portrayal of a Being Who is both accepting and condemning at the same time. The Bible, supposedly God's word, has been used both to threaten and encourage. Christendom is divided into competing factions based on doctrinal and ceremonial differences, and Biblegateway.com lists 59 different versions of the Bible in the English language alone, so that God's voice is almost too faint to hear.

Well, why all the division? Is God divided? Is Christ? Is God hopelessly buried in the rubble of religion? Is it yet possible to find God and learn about Him, or even better, come to know Him and perhaps have a relationship with Him?

Haven't you asked similar questions, assuming that you haven't been totally repelled by your image of God? I hope to offer you what may be an alarmingly different view of God, Jesus and the Bible. I don't come trained in theology instead I simply use a version of the scriptures as translated from their original languages. I can read Greek words at a certain level, but Hebrew is a mystery, so I use the most accurate translations I can find and look up words I want to know more about in lexicons to discover the correct meaning. The understanding that results from the effort reveals such clarity and even simplicity that the God I never knew growing up has become as dear and sweet as the kindest dad or the most gentle granddad.

I hope to persuade you to open yourself not only to the possibility, but the reality of a relationship you may have never dreamed possible with the One Who said, "Let there be you." I hope to introduce you to a God Who is much bigger and much better than you were ever taught, Whose voice is as clear as the one you hear in your mind as you hear this recording, and Whose presence is closer than my voice.

More than anything else, I pray that the Father you may have never met fills your heart with His unconditional love and satisfies your mind with His clear revelation and brings profound healing to your spirit, soul and body with His grace, kindness, and unwavering faithfulness. I pray too that the beauty and majesty of His actively operating purpose scatters all doubt and fear from your heart and mind, as surely as a cloudless sunrise scatters the night. And finally, I hope that

God wins your heart and I pray that you'll grasp the magnitude of His love for you and accept His entreaty to be friends.

Until next time: ***Live well!***