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Presentation Transcript
Relating to God – Becoming Secure
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The title of this presentation is *Becoming Secure*. It's the fourth in our series on *Relating to God*.

God has built into every human brain the capacity and the desire for relationship. As we've discussed earlier in this series, that capacity begins with a relationship with parents and that expands out to encompass every other kind of human relationship. And, as we grow from children to adults, that capacity extends out even further to God as well. So how we experience early relationship has a lot to do with how we relate to God later.

So the question is, "Are you secure in your relationship with God?" Is it easy to have faith? Do you trust that God is going to take care of you? These are the things we learned as infants, if we had good parents. And they get transferred to God later. But what can be done to become *more* secure in our relationship with God? You know, there's never been a perfect parent, so there's never been a human that's been perfectly secure. So what can be done to increase the security of our relationship with God?

Well, let's think about how we're approaching this topic. I want you to turn with me to Psalm 19:1. It says:

Psalms 19:1 – *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.* Okay, so there's something we can learn about God just by looking around, right? – at what He has made. And one of the things He has made is us. We can look at how we work and we can learn things about God. We were created for a relationship with Him. That's what this is all about.

So what can we learn from the way God has made us about how to connect to Him? Well, we've already looked at what He tells us in the Bible. And what we see when we look at how we're made explains not only why He says what He says, but it adds focus and intentionality to our efforts. We're going to talk more about that today.

I want you to look at another scripture with me, though.

Mark 12:30 – *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.* Now that’s focus and intentionality, isn’t it? When you focus tightly on something, you’re applying all you’ve got to it. And that’s what God wants us to do. So when we talk about focus and intentionality in our relationship with God, we’re talking about being wholehearted.

James 4:8 – *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.* So we’ve talked a lot about how God *draws* us, but we have a part that we play in that, too. We can draw near to God. So how do you do that?

How do we draw close to God? Well, we always think about fasting, praying and studying. Right? I mean, you look in the Bible and that’s what they did. We know that. But what should we be doing in our prayers, our fasting and our study – intentionally – to develop our relationship with God – to draw close to Him? Should it just be the *gimmies* when we pray? How should we pray? Well, that’s what we’re going to talk about today – what to focus on to draw close to God.

I want you to turn with me to Exodus 12:24. I’m going to read a section up here about something that God told ancient Israel to do. He said – talking about the Passover and festival:

Exodus 12:24 – *You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever – whole family – everybody. And when you come to the land that the LORD has given you, as He has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, “What do you mean by this service?” you shall say, “It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for He passed over the houses of the people of Israel, when He struck the Egyptians, but spared our houses. And the people bowed their head and worshipped.” And then the people of Israel went and did so. As the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.*

So what was God telling them to do there? And what was He telling them to do with their kids? How was He telling them to teach them? What form was the teaching to be in? What were they verbalizing though? They were remembering. But this isn’t an outline – point A, B, C, D. This is a story, isn’t it, that’s being told. Tell children the story of how this all happened. Tell them the stories about how I saved you from Egypt. Okay?

Okay, now go with to 1 Samuel 17:26 and let’s read another story. This is a story David is going to tell. It says:

1 Samuel 17:26 – *David said to the man – this is when he was in the camp of Israel while they were being confronted by Goliath, the giant, and his dad had sent him down to take some cheese to the commander of his sons and some bread for them. The good stuff went to the commander. Dad wasn’t dumb. David said to the man who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the Living God?”* Now he’s a teenager! Here’s all these men of war. *Now Eliab, his*

oldest brother, heard what he spoke to the man, and Eliab's anger was kindled against David – probably because he was too chicken to go out and fight the giant. And he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?" He was kind of insulting him. "I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." And David, "Well, what have I done now?" Now is the key word there. He probably spent a lot of time getting into trouble. And he said, "Was it not but a word?" And he turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him as before. When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. So here's David standing before the king, Saul, now – the first king of Israel. And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him" – because of the giant – "your servant will go and fight this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You're not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth. And he's been a man of war from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father" – here comes the story – "and when there came a lion or a bear and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him, and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears. And this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the Living God!" And David said, "The LORD" – now this is the really important part of this story – "the LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will also deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

So what's this story about? Right. It's the story about how God empowered David, and saved him, and saved his sheep. There's probably as much about the life of David as anybody in the Bible. It's a *story* about him, isn't it? Here he is telling a story to help King Saul understand why he's willing to go out there with a staff, and a sling and five smooth stones against this giant. It wasn't because he was cocky. It was because he had seen God's deliverance and he believed God would deliver him this time, too. It was an act of faith.

Let's go to Daniel 9, verse 1.

Daniel 9:1 – *In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, by decent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived, in the books, a number of years, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem – namely seventy years. And then I turned my face to the LORD God – so this is a story, too, isn't it? Daniel is telling us a story. I turned my face to the LORD God, seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O LORD, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, and have done wrong, and acted wickedly, and rebelled and turned aside from your commandments and rules. We have not listened to Your servants, the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. To you, O LORD, belongs righteousness, but to us, open shame, as at this*

day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel – those who are near and those who are far away – and all the lands to which You have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against You. To us belongs open shame – to our kings, our princes, our fathers – because we have sinned against You. To the LORD our God belongs mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him, and we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in His laws, which He set before us by His servants, the prophets. All Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and the oath that are written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us because we have sinned against Him. He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us, and against our rulers, who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. So under the whole heaven, there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities, and gaining insight by Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept ready the calamity that He brought upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works He has done, and we have not obeyed His voice. And now, O LORD our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for Yourself, as of at this day, we have sinned. We have done wickedly. O LORD, according to all Your righteous acts, let Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy hill, because of our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers. Jerusalem and Your people have become a by-word among all who are around us. Now therefore, O LORD our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for Your own sake, O LORD, make Your face shine upon Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear, open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by Your name, for we do not present our pleas before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercy. O LORD, hear. O LORD, forgive. O LORD, pay attention and act. Delay not for Your own sake, O my God, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

So his prayer actually is a story, too, isn't it? He's telling a story about why they got in the mess they got in. When you've been in trouble, what part of your story have you told God when you were looking for help?

Acts 12:1 – *About that time, Herod, the king, laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter, also. This was during the days of unleavened bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison. But earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shown in the cell. And he struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly!" And the chains fell off his hands, and the angel said, "Dress yourself, and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and*

follow me.” And he went out and followed him. And he did not know what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision – thought he was still in the cell chained up and that he was just dreaming that he was being freed. And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord. And they went and went along one street, and immediately, the angel left him – you know, the disappearing man. Right? Everybody’s got one of those stories, right? When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now, I’m sure the Lord sent His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from what all the Jewish people were expecting. And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked on the door of the gateway, a servant girl, named Rhoda, came to answer. Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy, she didn’t open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing by the gate. And they said to her, “You’re out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It’s his angel.” But Peter kept knocking. And when they opened, they saw him and were amazed! But he motioned with his hand to be silent. Then he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell these things to James and the brothers.” Then he departed and went to another place.

It’s a story, isn’t it? In fact, the whole book of Acts is a story – from beginning to end – told by Luke – right? – how the early church got started. The gospels are four stories about what happened to Jesus. The Bible is a story, from beginning to end, of how God made us, how Satan influenced us to go away from God, how God worked with us down through history, and how Jesus Christ came to save us, and then how God’s going to draw us all back to Himself through Christ, and how it’s our destiny to be with God and His family forever. It’s all a story. The book of Revelation is a story about how all that’s going to happen at the end.

So where’s *your* story in all of this? Faith starts in childhood with parents. And the greatest predictor of a successful secure attachment of a person to their parents is the ability to tell a coherent complete story about what’s happened. Isn’t that interesting? God communicates with us in stories, and the Bible is a story, in fact, and the biggest predictor of a successful secure attachment is the ability to tell a story about us – about our life.

I work with lots of people every week, and I’m especially interested to work with teenagers about their stories, because a lot of them don’t have stories. We’re gradually losing the ability to tell and create stories.

I talk a lot about this child. I’ve been working with this one child from the time she was nine until fourteen, so far, and her dad died when she was a couple months old. She was in my office the other day talking about what that meant. She said, “I wonder what would have happened if my dad were still here and if he weren’t a drug addict,” because he died of a drug overdose. I said, “Well, what did you come up with?” And she said, “Well, if my dad were around, he never would have let my brother beat on me like he did, and that means that I wouldn’t have been so angry, and I wouldn’t have gotten in trouble at

school. And my dad certainly wouldn't have let me do all that damage I did, when I was in the third grade, to my classroom." A third grader – vandalizing – it just kind of doesn't fit together, does it? And she said, "Then, if that hadn't happened, then I never would have met you." And I said, "Yeah, but you did meet me, and so what does that mean?" She said, "Life is weird."

I mean, you think about the things that have happened in the Bible to people, and how people thought something really bad was happening – like the church thought it was a terrible thing that Peter was thrown in jail by Herod – but it turned out not to be, right? It's kind of like the zen-master, "We'll see." I've told that story before, right? The zen-master?

This peasant boy in China, a thousand years ago or more, was out in the countryside one day, and he spotted a wild horse. He managed to capture it, and he brought it back to the village, and everyone said, "That is so wonderful! All of a sudden, you're the richest person in town." So he went to the zen-master and told him what the people said, and he said, "Oh, well, we'll see." So that fall, when it was time for harvest, he fell off the horse and broke his arm, and people said, "That's just terrible! You've broken your arm and you won't be able to harvest the crops. Too bad you have that horse." So he went to the zen-master and told him that the people said it was terrible that he broke his arm, and he said, "Well, we'll see." Not long after that – just a few weeks – while his arm was still broken, the emperor's soldiers came through conscripting young boys for the army. They didn't take him because his arm was broken. Everybody said, "Oh, that's so great that you don't have to go fight!" And the zen-master said, "Well, we'll see." So life is weird. I mean, sometimes, you can't tell what's going to happen.

I was talking to a lady a few weeks ago, and she was telling me that she had been really abused by the husband of one of her daughters. She's very close to this daughter. And her daughter just had a baby. That's the light of her life. She just loves this grandchild. I said, "Isn't that weird that such a great thing came from such a bad relationship?" I mean, this guy used to really beat her up – knock her teeth out, threatened to kill her, and all that. I mean, it was really bad. She came back the next week, and I said, "So how upset are you about all that abuse?" She said, "You know, I'm not really upset about it. It was worth it to get my daughter and my grandchild." You know, we'll see. But she has a new piece to her story, right? And this little girl has a story to tell now – that's starting to develop in her mind – about how she came to be who she is.

I had a boy who used to come to see me. He got in a lot of fights. He got in so many fights that the police told his mother that, if he got into one more fight at school, the school was probably going to send him to the police, and he would probably be charged. He's been in a physical fight with his bio-father, his step-father, some of his brothers. When he first came, he had no way to explain what was going on, so we've been working on his story. The story is that he got beat up a lot when he was a little kid, and when he was twelve, he really got picked on a lot by the older kids at middle school. But one day he told me, "But now" – by the way, now he's 6'2" and weighs about 180 pounds, and he's 14 years old – "when I hit them in the face, they're heads snap back." He was telling

me that when he told me that he went and took care of business with all the kids that picked on him when he was little. “What’s going on in your family?” “Well, my mom married my step-dad, who is just like my bio-dad – that’s what all my brothers say – and...” So he’s starting to piece together why he’s so angry. And all that is kind of falling in place for him. And as he does that – as he puts that story together – he’s interestingly becoming more and more confident that he’s not going to get out of control and wind up in *juve*. There’s just something really interesting about how that works.

I had another girl come, who was sixteen, and really angry – violently angry – in the family. She was laughed at, at school, because she couldn’t control her anger, by her friends and others. She was kicked off her soccer team, because she was too angry. She had no explanation for why she was angry. (I’ve done EMDR with all these people on the background stuff – that causes them to be angry – and then the story starts to develop after that.) When she first talked to me, it was just hit and miss stuff all over the place, and our job was to piece it all together – you know, be able to put it in order. She was talking one day, and she said, “Well, it all started when my dad left for Afghanistan.” He’s in the military. “And my mom already had one child, and not much money, living on a military base, and I came along, and she just didn’t have enough to take care of me.” So she’s starting to understand why she had trouble controlling her emotions. It starts to get better when the story starts to develop – when there’s an explanation for why I’m acting like I’m acting. Isn’t that amazing – how that works?

They learn how to put order to the things that happen, so there’s a beginning, a middle and an end to it, instead of just all over the place. Through the process, they loop back to connect stuff up that hasn’t found its place in the story. There’s an ordering that goes there. And there’s an inclusiveness, where we don’t leave out any of the bad parts, but we talk about them. This girl – the last one – has finished her therapy, and when she was done, she wrote me note, and said, “I’ve never talked to anybody but you about my feelings.” But talking about her feelings is what has helped her get control of herself, as she figures out who she is. She’s learning not to leave out the bad parts, but to include them to make sense of them, and make the connections that are in the story – that were in her life – and the others, too.

I ask all these people, “Well, when this happened, how did it make *you* feel? And how did it make the other people in the story feel? What was going on with them at that time? And how was the rest of your family feeling? How did that affect your family?” We talk about the mobile hanging from the ceiling, and if you yank one of those things on the mobile, it affects everything. “So, when this happened to you, how did it affect everybody else?” Or, “If that happened to your brother, how did that affect you?” You start building the pieces together – all the connections – and how it affects everybody. And suddenly, it starts to make sense. So you make sense of life, even if it’s just to realize that life is weird. I mean, isn’t that a great insight to have at fourteen? You can’t always have it your way, can’t always get what you want. Sometimes, when you least expect it, good stuff is going to pop up. Sometimes you think everything’s good, something bad might happen. You have to be careful. Right? All that comes from the story that is created.

What about our story with God? I mean, it's fun to sit and listen – to talk about other people that have a story and are building a story – but what about yours? What about mine? Where did God start with us and what was that like? And why do we think that He might have started where He did and when He did with us? And the way He did it? And what does that say about God and about you? And what you need? What would it might be like if He hadn't done that?

I have a brother that's about three years younger than I am. I kind of look at my brother and think, "Well, if I hadn't been grabbed by God the way He grabbed me, I would probably be a lot like my brother." But I'm different from him, because of a different influence – God's influence. I don't know that I'd be just like him, but I'd probably be a lot like him, because we came from the same place.

So where did God start with us? What might it be like if He hadn't done what He did when He did? I've tried to be pretty transparent about myself, in some ways, through the years. I've given sermons about *Old Time Religion* – you know, that story about my life and how God started working with me through music, even though I'm as unmusical as a person can be. I'm not quite sure I still – to this day – understand that, except that it did have the desired effect.

Also, what has God done for us? We spoke last time about the things that God does for us to draw us close to Him – sent Christ to sacrifice His life. He's given us a church. He's given us the Holy Spirit. He promises to protect us. So where can you see that in your life? And how have you responded to it? And what can you do more? This part of the story – right here – what God has done for us – is probably one of the most important parts in reaching other people. Remember the Gadarene demoniac? The guy that lived out in the rocks and the graves. He would cut himself. They'd chain him and he'd rip the chains off with his bare hands. That probably cut his hands all up. He was a lot more like an animal than a person. And Jesus went out there and healed him – cast the demon out of him. And he wanted to follow Jesus. And He said, "No, you go back and tell everybody you knew what I did for you." That is what he was supposed to do.

So, if you don't know what's been done for you, how can you talk about it? If you're not thankful, how can you talk about it? So what has God done for you? In my life, it seems to me – I know that God is around all the time – but it seems to me that He intervenes the most when I'm really the most desperate and need the help the most. Sometimes not, but that might be a clue as to where to look.

What else could there be about your story? What are you hoping for – short term – in your life? That's part of your story, too. My short-term goals really have everything to do with my calling. I know we're going to an activity tomorrow, but I don't mean by that – What are you doing tomorrow – for fun? I'm talking about, "What are your short-term goals for your life?"

Through LifeResource Ministries, we hope to strengthen the church. And the purpose for that is a strong church produces strong children. We don't believe that it's just the

parents. We know it's mostly the parents and they're responsible, but we know, for example, that in the time of ancient Israel, and even in the New Testament church, people lived with family a lot. So they had help. And now, the church has to be our family. We can help each other that way. If you could take a poll of all the young people that have left the church, it's because they mostly have been alienated by the behavior of people in the church. It's kind of like Ghandi said, "The worst part of Christianity is the Christians." So we're hoping to strengthen the church, get focus off of things that don't matter – like being doctrinally correct and in control – to taking care of people.

I heard some time ago something that caught my attention. It's reported that Ghandi said that everybody that tries to change the world, in the end, believes he's failed. And that sounds kind of negative, but really it's not. Ghandi changed the world, but he believed he failed, because there is just so much to do. Nobody *can* do it all. Nobody can do everything they want. So I saw from that, I don't have to change everything. I just have to help those people who are interested or who are in front of me. And we work hard to do that.

And I have to go back and think about where we started in LifeResource Ministries. One of the things we said was, "We're going to help people one at a time." And that's my short-term goal. I get to do that every day in my office. People come in one after another. I get to help them one at a time. And that's good enough. I don't have to do everything.

So that's a bit about my story that I'm relating to you as sort of an example. But what are your goals? What are you trying to accomplish short-term? Also, what are your long-term goals? Well, we say, "The Kingdom of God." Everyone just rolls that out, right? You've got to work in the trees, but remember the forest, right? You've got to keep your eye on the goal. What is it about the Kingdom of God that is meaningful to you? Different things are important to different people. What part of the Kingdom really catches your fancy? It's interesting to think about it.

That's all stuff that needs to be included in your story. And as you do that – as you build that story – what you're building is a *faith* story, which is a *trust* story, which is *connection*. When we can tell a healthy, involved, detailed story, covering all the bases – good and bad – about our relationship with God, and what He's done with us in our lives, then we're going to feel better about it. We're going to feel closer to God. We're going to *be* closer to God, because it's not just that He draws us. We have to draw closer to Him. So this isn't everything, but when you pray, when you study your Bible, when you fast, this is something that you can *intentionally* work on to make things better. And it's also supported by the way we work – the way our brains work – what kind of beings we are.

God's a story-teller. And we're story-tellers, too. I personally believe that that faith story that we develop is something we're going to draw on to work with people for a *long* time after Christ returns – very important.

So our story is a life-long work and it's something we get to work on all the time, if we will. It's something that connects us to God in our mind, in our soul, in our heart and in

our spirit. It's something that connects us to God in every way, because God is a story-oriented God, because He created us to be that way, too.

Okay, so next time, we're going to turn it around, and we're going to examine what parents can do to enhance their child's relationship with God. I mean, we're learning a lot about security, and trust and relationship, and we need to put that information to use in everyday life with our kids, whether they're 3 or 30. That *is* the heart and core of LifeResource Ministries – helping children develop a relationship with God. And He uses those of us, who are in church, to do that. So, we'll be about that next time. The video of this presentation is going to be uploaded pretty soon today, so don't forget to look for it on YouStream, which you can also access at www.liferesource.org. See you there next time.