

INTRODUCTION As a kid, I used vending machines. I would put in my money and then look at all of my options, strategizing, which would be the wisest choice, then I would press the button.

The little metal spiral would start to spin, and it would push what I wanted forward. Ultimately, it would drop my choice down where I could reach in and get it.

But did this ever happen to you? Put your money in, and push the button, and the spinner would start to spin, and push your prize forward, but then it would get stuck on the shelf. What would you do? It took your money. You felt cheated.

So, what would you do? You would shake it. You might bang on it. You ask for your money back.

Well the reality is many of us treat God like a vending machine. We put in our good behavior, church attendance, Bible reading, tithes, and then we press the prayer button, and we expect God to give us exactly what we ordered.

We go to church at least three weekends a month and read our Bibles eleven days in a row. But we need to understand God isn't a vending machine and our faith isn't a contract.

We tend to think, "**If I do my part, then God has to do His part.**" And without knowing it, that turns our faith in God into a transaction with God.

And if God doesn't do what we want Him to do or give us what we want, or answer our prayer the way we want, we often feel frustrated. We might feel hurt and maybe even betrayed by God.

Today I want to expose one of the most dangerous lies that keeps so many of us from real faith. Because unfortunately, we can fall victim to transactional faith.

What is transactional faith? We tend to believe that God owes us. If I do my part, then God has to do His part. And unfortunately, that distorts our understanding of faith.

And I would suggest that this one lie may cause many people to walk away from God, and the church.

So I want to show you from God's Word that true faith is relational, not transactional. True faith is about knowing and loving God for who He is, not just for what He does.

We are in a message series called **Christian-ish**. What does it mean to be **Christian-ish**? That's a person who often has a half-hearted faith in Jesus. And they wear the label Christian, without actually truly following Jesus.

What does it mean to have a transactional faith?

Transactional faith is a distorted belief that turns our relationship with God into a contract, believing that if we do our part, God is obligated to do His part.

If any of you find yourself thinking, "**God didn't do what He was supposed to do,**" you're not alone. It actually brings me comfort to know there were several people in the Bible who fell victim to that same sort of thinking.

In Exodus 16:3, the Israelites followed God, believing that He was going to bless them. Then they said, "**God, we trusted you. Why are we struggling so much? God, you didn't do what we thought you were going to do.**"

We see the same thing in Jonah 4. Jonah thought, "**God, I obeyed you, at least mostly, I obeyed you. So God, why are you blessing them? You should be blessing me, not those evil people.**"

We see the same thing with Martha. When her brother Lazarus died, she said, "**Lord, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. My brother served you, why did you let this happen? This isn't what you were supposed to do.**"

We see the same thing with the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. The younger brother said, "**Dad, give me my share of the estate.**" Then he went out and wasted what he received on worldly pleasures.

Then he came home broke and broken. But his father was so glad he came home! He threw a big party even though his son had squandered everything.

Then the older brother was not happy. **“That's not fair. I did everything. Where's my party? This isn't what I expected. I've been living faithfully in this house. Why are you blessing him and not blessing me?”**

Then there was the rich, young ruler, who said to Jesus, **“I kept all the rules. I've done everything just right. Jesus, why isn't that enough? Why don't you live up to your part of the deal.”**

I would suggest that most of us think the more we seek God, serve God, are faithful to God, and obey God, we tend to expect a little preferential treatment.

Those other people aren't serving you the way I am. I'm praying, God, you should answer my prayer.

And the problem is it actually feels like faith. But it's really a dangerous lie because we start to believe that if we serve God faithfully, then He owes us. And the way it comes out is like this.

“Okay, God, I've been doing a lot for you lately. I mean, I've been in the word for a long time and it's hard to serve in the nursery and there's not a lot of people signing up for that!

And I fasted early on in the year. And God, not only am I tithing, but I've given offerings and I've been really faithfully praying and I've been sharing my faith and serving you.

And I know I'm not perfect, God, but I'm really trying to honor you with all that I have and all that I am. So, God, why didn't you answer my prayer?”

And we start making our kind of arguments with God. God, I've been tithing faithfully for years, and I'm still living paycheck to paycheck. God, aren't you going to live up to the deal? But we have to understand that...

True faith is relational, not transactional. It's about knowing and loving God for who He is and not just what He does.

Jesus said, **“Watch and pray.”**

So, this is the prayer we'd like to pray. God help me to know you, love you, for who You are. Not just for what you do.

You may say, "**In week two, you talked about the covenantal nature of God.**" In every covenant, there is an unconditional promise from God and there are conditional blessings.

Remember that? Well, if God loves us no matter what, and then we do the right thing and He blesses us, isn't that contractual?

I want to show you that is not contractual, it's not transactional. It's actually covenantal and it's relational.

A covenant is a divine agreement between God and us. He initiates it. We don't make the deal. If I do this, God, then you have to help me pass this test. God is the one who initiates the covenant.

And what is the difference between a covenant and a contract? I'll show you the difference.

A CONTRACT IS TRANSACTIONAL, TEMPORARY, AND ENFORCEABLE BY LAW.

A covenant, on the other hand, is different.

A COVENANT IS RELATIONAL, ETERNAL, AND SUSTAINED BY LOVE.

When you think about a contract, it's based on mutual distrust. I don't know you, you don't know me, so let's make a contract, so you have to do your part and I have to do my part.

But God loves us with a relational, covenantal love that is not temporary, it's unconditional. It's Him sending His Son to pay the price for our sinfulness. And His covenantal relationship with us is not temporary, it is unconditional.

Even if we don't live up to our end, God will live up to His end.

2nd Timothy 2:13 says, ***13if we are faithless, God remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.***

That's how good our God is. So, we love God, not just for what He does but for who He is.

And I want to show you a glimpse into a relationship David had with God. David was described as a man after God's own heart. Look at the relational language of this powerful text in Psalm 63. Here's what he says to God. **"God, You are my God."**

"Earnestly, I seek your blessings. And earnestly, I seek your miracles. And earnestly, I seek your provision." He's seeking God for who He is.

In Psalm 63 he says, *¹You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you ... ³Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. ...*

⁶On my bed I remember you ... ⁷... I sing in the shadow of your wings. ⁸I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

That's way beyond friendship.

So how do we know if we actually have a transactional faith in God? If we're putting our expectations on Him and getting disappointed because He doesn't do what we want Him to do?

I'm going to show you three questions to ask.

① Do I follow God because of what He does for me, OR because of who He is?

When God doesn't do what some people want Him to do, they say, **"God, I'm not following you anymore."** Do I follow Him for who He is or for what He does?

② Do I still trust God when He doesn't answer my prayer the way I want, or do I feel betrayed?

Do I still worship Him and believe in His goodness when I've prayed and fasted and begged and thought He would, and He didn't? Or do I feel hurt and betrayed by God?

③ Do I serve God because I love Him or because I'm hoping for something in return?

Do I follow God because of what He does for me or because of who He is?

God, why haven't you answered my prayer? God, why don't I have a better job? God, why haven't you fixed my marriage? Why is my life still so hard? I want to say this very clearly and very lovingly.

IF YOU'RE DOING GOD'S WILL JUST TO GET GOD'S STUFF, YOU'RE MISSING GOD'S HEART.

God is not a tool we use. He's a king that we worship.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, *³³But seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and then everything else will be given to you as well.*

You seek God first. You don't seek what He can do for you. You seek Him.

You don't seek an answer to prayer; you seek His heart. You seek Him first. Before you seek the approval of other people, you seek God. Before you seek the things of this world, you seek God.

You seek God before you seek money. You seek God before you seek your own comfort. You seek God before you seek your own will.

Why? Because true faith is relational, not transactional. It's about loving God for who He is, not just for what He does.

So, I'm going to pray, and then I'm going to let you pray. God, I'm so sorry for all the times I've had strings attached to my relationship with you.

God, would you forgive me when I have a transactional heart toward you. When I think you owe me something.

God, I want my heart to pursue you and you alone. God, would you forgive me for all the ways I try to use you, to do for me what I think you should do for me. Would You just forgive me?

God, help me to know You and love You for who You are, not just what You do.

If you don't know where you stand with God, let me tell you how good God is. He sent His only Son, Jesus, the Lamb of God, perfect in every way. Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins. That's how much He loves you.

He died in your place on a cross. And God raised him from the dead so that anyone who calls on His name would be saved and forgiven.

If you're not sure where you stand with God, you can ask Him and He will forgive your sins.

Pray. Heavenly Father, I give my life to You. Thank You for Your love. Forgive all of my sins and fill me with Your spirit.

My life is not my own. I give it to You. Help me to know You and love You for who You are, not just for what You do. Thank You for new life. You have all of mine. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

THE END