

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Jesus: Knowing God on a first name basis”
(Part I of the Lenten series “The great “I AM” statements of Jesus”)
February 22, 2026

Scripture

Exodus 3:13-14
John 8:58

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. This is the first sermon in the series.

Core theological idea: To know Jesus is to know God on a first name basis

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to seek an intimate relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

The Sermon

When I was a 1st Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, I was the Assistant Intelligence Officer of the 2nd Armor Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division (Mech). The 2nd Brigade Commander was a great leader who took excellent care of his soldiers. But to me, he was always ready to bark out orders and send chills down my spine. As far as I could tell, he wore a permanent scowl on his face. Yes, I feared him and the hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up when he was nearby.

His name was Colonel J.D. Thurman. I never knew what J.D. stood for, but that was ok. I did not need to know his first name because I would never call him by his first name. To me, his first name was always ‘Colonel’.

There are certain people who are so far above us that we should never call them by their first name. An elementary student should address his/her teacher as Mr. or Mrs. ‘So & So’. If we ever meet the President of the United States or Prime Minister of England, we should never call them by their first names because we are not on a first name basis with them. Someday, we might develop a more intimate relationship that enables us to call them by their first name but until then, we say, “Sir”, “Ma’am”, “Mr.” or “Mrs.”.

So, if we are not on a first name basis with fellow human beings who hold a high position, then surely, we are not on a first name basis with God. God is so high, mighty, and holy that we could never say his name. We are not holy enough to say God’s name.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters understand this. They are not even sure how to pronounce God’s holy name because they never say it.

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In Hebrew, God’s holy name is **יהוה**. The English transliteration of God’s holy name is YHWH. There are no vowel symbols associated with this name because the Jews are not sure how to pronounce the name. So, they do not know what vowel symbols to use.

To remind us not to speak God’s holy name, they add the vowels for Adonai to YHWH. (Adonai is Hebrew for LORD)



God’s holy name with the Adonai vowels added to it is :
So, when the Jewish reader sees YHWH with the Adonai vowels, he/she says Adonai (LORD) instead of trying to pronounce YHWH.¹

God reiterated the holiness of his name to Moses when he spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Moses was tending his sheep when he looked upon Mt. Sinai and saw a burning bush that was not being consumed. Moses was curious and approached the burning bush to investigate. That is when God spoke to him through the burning bush.

Now, I imagine Moses was nervous, even scared. The Lord God Almighty was telling him that he is going to lead the Hebrews out of Egyptian slavery. Yikes!! I would be scared too.

Not surprisingly, Moses came up with excuses for not wanting to do this. One of his excuses was that he did not know God’s name. He said, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’. Then what shall I tell them?”

That is when God reiterated the holiness of His name by stating, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. ‘I AM’ has sent me to you.”

There are many meanings attached to this Hebrew phrase. It can mean: I AM WHO I AM or I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE or I AM BECAUSE I AM. No matter how you translate the Hebrew phrase, it denotes God’s uniqueness. God exists simply because it his nature to exist. No one had to create him. God has no beginning or end because He always was and always is. God is simply **I AM**.

This makes God so high and mighty that we could not possibly say his holy name. We could not possibly be on a first name basis with God. But God is also

¹ This is also how we get the word Jehova as God’s name. During the 19th century, German scholars pronounced YHWH using the Adonai vowels. The German pronunciation (transliteration) of YHWH with the Adonai vowels added to it creates Jehova.

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love and wants an intimate, personal relationship with us. God wants to be on a first name basis with us. This is where our Savior & Lord Jesus comes in.

While debating with the Pharisees and religious leaders of His day, Jesus made the most remarkable statement in the entire world. With a loud, clear voice He said, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was Born, **I AM!**” The Jews who heard this knew immediately what Jesus was claiming. They would have connected Jesus’ I AM statement with the story of Moses at the burning bush. The only one who can claim to be I AM is God and here Jesus is stating, “I AM!”. No wonder they picked up rocks to stone Jesus. He was claiming to be God!

Jesus is, in fact, God in the flesh. Remember, the one true God is made up of three persons: FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT. They are bound to each other by perfect love. (This is why we can say God literally is love) To worship one of these three persons is to worship all three because the three make up the one true God. Of the three persons, THE SON emptied himself of some of his divine perks and became a human named Jesus. So, Jesus was able to rightly say, “...before Abraham was born, I AM!”

Now, Jesus has a first name. It is...Jesus! We can be on a first name basis with Jesus. And, since Jesus is fully human and fully God, we can now be on a first name basis with God. Through faith in Jesus, we can know God intimately.

As ‘God in the flesh’ Jesus reveals God’s loving character. As we come to know God on a first name basis through faith in Jesus, we learn some wonderful things about God’s character. We learn that God is love. Based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, 1 John 4:8 & 16 declares that God is love. We also learn that God is righteous. This means that God will do whatever it takes to have a loving relationship with every individual person and with creation. As stated in John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Lastly, we learn that God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. Matthew 12:18 tells us that Jesus came, not only to save us from sin, but to also proclaim justice to the nations. Perhaps most of all, as we come to know God on a first name basis through faith in Jesus, we learn that God, the SOVEREIGN LORD over the universe, wants to be our friend.

If I ever run into Colonel J.D. Thurman, I would probably address him as sir or Colonel because that was my habit. But, maybe, just maybe, we would hit it off and become friends and I would start to call him J.D. But, I will most likely never see him again and get the opportunity to call him J.D. That, however, is ok, because I am on a first name basis with the one who rules all of creation with

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truth, justice, righteousness, and love. Through faith in Jesus, I am on a first name basis with God! I can talk with Him anytime.

Would you like to be on a first name basis with God? If so, you must repent and trust in Jesus. There are three elements to repentance. They are:

- 1) **Admit:** Admit you are a sinner, you have been unloving in thought, word & deed
- 2) **Receive:** Receive God’s forgiveness. This will restore your relationship with God. We receive God’s forgiveness by trusting that Jesus defeated sin, death, and evil with His resurrection.
- 3) **Ask:** Ask God to change your heart so you can love others with God’s type of love – to become more like Jesus. As we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, our perspectives will become a Jesus perspective, and our attitudes & desires will conform to Jesus’ attitudes and desires.

Remember, repentance is not something we do one time when we first become a Christian. It is a daily exercise that will continue for the rest of our lives. Each day, we must admit our shortcomings, receive God’s forgiveness and ask God to change us.

Now is as good a time as any to repent. In fact, the time to repent is always now. During the concluding music, bow your heads and silently repent – admit, receive and ask. We do this so we can be on a first name basis with God.

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Sermon Outline

- I. When I was a 1st Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, I was the Assistant Intelligence Officer of the 2nd Armor Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division (Mech).
 - A. The 2nd Brigade Commander was a great leader who took excellent care of his soldiers.
 - B. But to me, he was always ready to bark out orders and send chills down my spine.
 - As far as I could tell, he wore a permanent scowl on his face.
 - Yes, I feared him and the hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up when he was nearby.
 - C. His name was Colonel J.D. Thurman.
 - I never knew what J.D. stood for, but that was ok.
 - I did not need to know his first name because I would never call him by his first name.
 - To me, his first name was always ‘Colonel’.
- II. There are certain people who are so far above us that we should never call them by their first name.
 - A. An elementary student should address his/her teacher as Mr. or Mrs. ‘So & So’.
 - B. If we ever meet the President of the United States or the Prime Minister of England, we should never say, “Hey Joe, what’s up?”
 - C. We do not address these people by their first names because we are not on a first name basis with them.
 - Someday, we might develop a more intimate relationship that enables us to call them by their first name but until then, we say, “Sir”, Ma’am”, “Mr.” or “Mrs.”
 - D. So, if we are not on a first name basis with fellow human beings who are above us, then surely, we are not on a first name basis with God.

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- God is so high, mighty, and holy that we could never say his name.
- We are not holy enough to say God’s name.

III. Our Jewish brothers and sisters understand this. They are not even sure how to pronounce God’s holy name because they never say it.

A. In Hebrew, God’s holy name is .

B. The English transliteration of God’s holy name is YHWH.

- There are no vowel symbols associated with this name.
- This is because the Jews are not sure how to pronounce the name, so they do not know what vowel symbols to use.

C. To remind us not to speak God’s holy name, they add the vowels for Adonai to YHWH.

- (Adonai is Hebrew for LORD)
- God’s holy name with the Adonai vowels added to it is : .
- So, when the Jewish reader sees YHWH with the Adonai vowels, he/she says Adonai (LORD) instead of trying to pronounce YHWH.²

IV. God reiterated the holiness of his name to Moses when he spoke to Moses through a burning bush.

A. Moses was tending his sheep when he looked upon Mt. Sinai and saw a burning bush that was not being consumed.

- Moses was curious and approached the burning bush to investigate.
- That is when God spoke to him through the burning bush.

B. Now, I imagine Moses was nervous, even scared.

- The Lord God Almighty was telling him that he is going to lead the Hebrews out of Egyptian slavery.

² This is also how we get the word Jehova as God’s name. During the 19th century, German scholars pronounced YHWH using the Adonai vowels. The German pronunciation (transliteration) of YHWH with the Adonai vowels added to it creates Jehova.

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- Yikes!! I would be scared too.
- Not surprisingly, Moses came up with excuses for not wanting to do this.
 - One of his excuses was that he did not know God’s name. He said, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’. Then what shall I tell them?”
 - That is when God reiterated the holiness of His name by stating, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. ‘I AM’ has sent me to you.”
- C. There are many meanings attached to this Hebrew phrase.
 - It can mean: I AM WHO I AM or I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE or I AM BECAUSE I AM.
 - No matter how you translate the Hebrew phrase, it denotes God’s uniqueness.
 - God exists simply because it his nature to exist.
 - No one had to create him.
 - God has no beginning or end because He always was and always is.
 - God is simply **I AM**.
- D. This makes God so high and mighty that we could not possibly say his holy name.
 - We could not possibly be on a first name basis with God.
 - But God is also love and wants an intimate, personal relationship with us.
 - God wants to be on a first name basis with us.
 - This is where our Savior & Lord Jesus comes in.
- V. While debating with the Pharisees and religious leaders of His day, Jesus made the most remarkable statement in the entire world.

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A. With a loud, clear voice He said, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was Born, **I AM!**”

- The Jews who heard this knew immediately what Jesus was claiming.
- They would have connected Jesus’ I AM statement with the story of Moses at the burning bush.
- The only one who can claim to be I AM is God and here Jesus is stating, “I AM!”.
- No wonder they picked up rocks to stone Jesus. He was claiming to be God!

B. Jesus is, in fact, God in the flesh.

- Remember, the one true God is made up of three persons: FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT.
 - They are bound to each other by perfect love. (This is why we can say God literally is love)
 - To worship one of these three persons is to worship all three because the three make up the one true God.
- Of the three persons, THE SON emptied himself of some of his divine perks and became a human named Jesus.
 - So, Jesus was able to rightly say, “...before Abraham was born, I AM!”

C. Now, Jesus has a first name. It is...Jesus!

- We can be on a first name basis with Jesus.
- And, since Jesus is God in the flesh, we can now be on a first name basis with God.
- Through faith in Jesus, we can know God intimately.

VI. As we come to know God on a first name basis through faith in Jesus, we learn some wonderful things about God’s character.

A. We learn that God is love.

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- Based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, 1 John 4:8 & 16 declares that God is love.

B. We also learn that God is righteous.

- This means that God will do whatever it takes to have a loving relationship with every individual person and with creation.
- As stated in John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

C. Lastly, we learn that God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

- Matthew 12:18 tells us that Jesus came to proclaim justice to the nations.

D. Perhaps most of all, as we come to know God on a first name basis through faith in Jesus, we learn that God, the SOVEREIGN LORD over the universe, wants to be our friend.

VII. If I ever run into Colonel J.D. Thurman, I would probably address him as sir or Colonel because that was my habit.

- A. But, maybe, just maybe, we would hit it off and become friends and I would start to call him J.D.
- B. But, I will most likely never see him again and get the opportunity to call him J.D.
- C. That, however, is ok, because I am on a first name basis with the one who rules all of creation with truth, justice, righteousness, and love.
 - Through faith in Jesus, I am on a first name basis with God!
 - I can talk with Him anytime.

VIII. Would you like to be on a first name basis with God?

- A. If so, you must repent and trust in Jesus.
- B. There are three elements to repentance. They are:

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