

Spiritual Intimacy with God

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Several years ago I was walking through a neighborhood development sale looking for some bargains. It was a lovely spring day. The birds were chirping and the flowers were blooming. As Solomon declared “the time of the singing of the birds is come” (Song of Solomon 2:12). I can remember how one particular woman was doing some major house cleaning. She was actually selling her organ. The organ was sitting outside in the yard and to demonstrate that it was in good working order she was playing the old-time favorite of many Christians:

“Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.”

As I walked through the development I could hear the lady repeating this particular song over and over again. It must have been the only song she knew. Maybe this is why she was getting rid of the organ! Nevertheless, this song struck a cord in my heart that spring day. It was a reminder that God was calling me to spiritual intimacy with Himself. This is the theme I want to develop in this study. Spiritual intimacy points to the intimate fellowship and worship we can have with God. It’s an intimacy that originates from within a person’s human spirit, which is the place where a man can contact God and where all true worship occurs (“worship God in the spirit” - Phil. 3:3 and “worship in spirit” - John 4:24). It also points to the kind of intimacy that is initiated and fostered by the Holy Spirit (John 16:14 - “he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you”). Hence, it is spiritual intimacy. It originates from the realm of man’s inner existence (the place where spiritual life and true worship exists) and is wrought by the Holy Spirit who indwells him.

Devotional living, worshipping God, and enjoying His abiding presence are all part of developing this spiritual intimacy with God or a closer walk with the Lord in our daily living. Intimacy involves personal quiet times when we get alone with God (Ps. 5:1-3; 63:1),

pray (Ps. 5:2), meditate upon God (Ps. 63:3) and His Word (Psalm 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148), and praise Him for who He is and what He has done (Ps. 99:3; 145:3). It also involves an entire life of devotion, obedience, and worship that is rendered up to God (1 Pet. 2:5). It involves enjoying God's presence on a daily and hourly basis (Psalm 37:4 – "delight thyself also in the Lord"). It isn't enough just to start the day in meditation and prayer. We must seek to maintain this posture and continue to "abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1).

"When my soul is faint and thirsty, 'neath the shadow of His wing,
There is cool and pleasant shelter and a fresh crystal spring;
And my Saviour rests beside me, as we hold communion sweet:
If I tried, I could not utter, what He says when thus we meet."

Without this kind of intimacy or devotional life with God we lose sight of the true meaning of our Christian existence, which is to walk in communion with the God who has saved us, and to enjoy His presence in our lives (Ps. 16:11; 18:1; 40:16; 42:1).

Gordon MacDonald tells the story of a Chinese pastor who was imprisoned for 18 years by the Communists because of his faith. Day after day, year after year he was assigned to work in the prison camp's cesspool. Every morning he had to wade into that stinking hole and spend his day scooping out the human waste. He was given this job as a special punishment because he kept holding tenaciously to his faith. The pastor was grateful for the assignment because of the solitude he had. The stench was so bad that even the guards stayed far away. So the pastor had the freedom to pray aloud, sing hymns to the Lord, and recite Scripture. The cesspool had become a garden of communion with God.

Practicing the presence of God! This is what God wants for our lives today as His people. When we practice the presence of God we will develop spiritual intimacy with Him. As a result, we will not become defeated, discouraged, and distraught in life. Many Christians wonder what went wrong when they find themselves overcome by sin and debilitating fears and discouragement. If they retrace their steps they will discover that they have not been walking with God, as they should be, and as a result they are overcome with life's perplexities

and problems. James 4:8 tells us to “draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.” Paul expressed his desire for spiritual intimacy with God when he said, “That I may know him” (Phil. 3:10). A daily devotional life consisting of fellowship with God and worship is not something that can be overlooked or bypassed without having damaging and debilitating effects upon our lives. Webster defines devotion like this: “attachment to a cause or person.” So it is with the Christian life. We are to be attached to God and walk with Him faithfully and lovingly embrace Him in our daily living. We are to pour our hearts out to God in daily worship, draw close to Him, and live our lives connected to the Lord. The most important part of your life is the part that only God sees – your inner spiritual life of fellowship with Him. Peter calls it the “hidden man of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4). It is the spiritual part of man’s existence where true intimacy with God takes place.

A small boy was very fond of his father and loved to join him wherever he went. One day while his dad was engaged in intensive study, the youngster tapped at his office door. "Well, my little man, what do you want now?" "Nothing, daddy, I just want to be near you." Receiving permission to come in, the boy made his way to a far corner of the room and sat quietly for a long time. He was content just to be alone with his father. Is this the kind of love we have toward God who is our heavenly Father? Do we often go to God, even when we don't want anything, so we can just be near Him? If we develop spiritual intimacy with the Lord, we will be greatly blessed and possess a life of richness and “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

J. Oswald Sanders said:

“Everything in our Christian life and service flows from our relationship with God. If we are not in vital fellowship with Him, everything else will be out of focus. But when our communion with Him is close and real, it is gloriously possible to experience a growing intimacy.”

Spiritual intimacy or fellowship with God should not be an added option in our lives as Christians, but a loving act of stewardship directed toward God. Our heart’s desire and experience in life should be that of the hymn writer who said:

“My God and I go in the field together,
We walk and talk as good friends should and do;
We clasp our hands, our voices ring with laughter,
My God and I walk thru the meadow’s hue.”

Jesus had 70 disciples who followed Him (Luke 10:1) but He also had twelve disciples that lived even closer to Him than the 70 (Matthew 10:1; 19:28). Then, among the twelve there emerged an inner circle of three disciples who chose to live closest to Jesus. The inner circle was Peter, James, and John (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3). Each of the disciples was as close to Jesus as they chose to be, for the Son of God had no favorites. Among the three there was one (John) who was said to lean upon the breast of Jesus. In John 13:25 we read, “He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?” John always identified himself as the one who was leaning upon Jesus’ breast (John 21:20). Seventy, twelve, three, one! In which group would you be found today? How close are you to the Lord? How close do you really want to be with God?

John chose to live closest to the Lord for He loved the Lord in a greater way than the rest. So there are varying degrees of intimacy that we can have with God based upon our level of love for the Lord. If we want to become part of the inner circle of deepening intimacy with God we must choose to enjoy His presence through greater worship, communion, and obedience. We must also remember that there is a vacant place on Jesus’ breast that is open to any who is willing to love the Lord with a deepening intimacy. We are now, and we will be in the future, only as intimate with God as we really choose to be. We must appropriate the place of privilege that is available to each one of us.

The Tabernacle of God

Revelation 21:3 says, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God.”

The word “tabernacle” means tent or dwelling place and reminds us of how God desires to dwell among His people to fellowship with them. It speaks of God’s desire to commune with His people and

develop spiritual intimacy with them. A common thread from Genesis to Revelation is the Lord's desire to tabernacle among His people and to be their God. The fellowship or spiritual intimacy between God and man began in the Garden of Eden but this was broken when Adam sinned. However, in the garden Adam had walked and talked with God as He revealed His presence to their lives ("they heard the voice of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" - Gen. 3:8) The implication of this verse is that God had done this on a regular basis in order to express His desire to fellowship with man. This is captured in the well-known and beloved hymn "In the Garden."

"I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear,
Falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses."

He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing;
And the melody
That He gave to me,
Within my heart is ringing."

I'd stay in the garden with Him,
Though the night around me be falling,
But He bids me go:
Through the voice of woe
His voice to me is calling.

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known."

What do we learn from this text in Genesis 3:8? We learn that *sin breaks fellowship with God*. This is why God was seeking Adam at this particular time. Sin does break communion or intimacy with God. This is always true even in connection with the Christian life (Psalm 51:1-12; 66:18). This is why the believer in His own daily routine

needs to ask for forgiveness and restore his fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). More on this later.

Prior to the days of the Genesis Flood we read about men who walked with God in spiritual intimacy or fellowship. Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:22, 24) and Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). After the Flood the Lord reaffirmed His desire to fellowship or possess spiritual intimacy with man by initiating a relationship with Israel. He visibly displayed His desire to fellowship with man by displaying His Shekinah presence in Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple (Exodus 40:34). God demonstrated that He wanted to have a relationship with His people and communicate His life to His children by manifesting His presence to them.

Leviticus 26:11-12 reads: "And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people."

Sadly, God's dwelling among Israel, similar to that of Eden, ended due to sin on the part of His people (Ezek. 10-11). Once again we see that sin breaks God's fellowship with His people. This is a reoccurring principle. God always desires the fellowship of His people to remain unbroken by sin. This wonderful fellowship is typically portrayed in the Song of Solomon ("My beloved is mine, and I am his" – 2:16). God wants to express spiritual intimacy with His people and have them enjoy His abiding presence in their lives. *The life of spiritual intimacy with God is a reciprocal relationship.* If we draw near to God then God will draw near to us (James 4:8). We are married one to another (Rom. 7:4) and have a mutual spiritual intimacy and relationship that is representative of one lover (the believer) with another Lover (Christ). Together we sense the nearness of each other's presence so that we can say, "I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine" (Song of Solomon 6:3).

"Heav'n above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green!
Something lives in ev'ry hue
Christless eyes have never seen:
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Doubt, and care, and self resign,

While He whispers in my ear?
I am His, and He is mine.”

God tabernacled among Israel but from a dispensational perspective we must understand that today the tabernacle of God takes place individually in every believer’s life (1 Cor. 6:19 – “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you”). God dwells within His New Testament people called the Church which is pictured as the “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). Christ also individually dwells within our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17) and because of this we can possess a special awareness of God’s presence living within us and express intimacy and fellowship with God. Of course, the tabernacle of God also takes place corporately in the Church (1 Cor. 3:16). Our bodies are now the temple of God and He dwells in His people desiring fellowship with them. What a tremendous privilege and blessing. God wants fellowship with us! “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:4).

As they knocked on the door of Ed Claesson's room in a home for the elderly, Clair and Frances Hess heard Ed talking to someone. Frances whispered, "Clair, he has a visitor." After Ed said, "Come in," they went into his room, but they didn't see anyone with him. When they said they had heard him talking to somebody, the stately 98-year-old Swede smiled and said, "Oh, I was just talking to Jesus. I asked Him why it is taking him so long to call me Home." Jesus Christ WAS in the room with Ed. Although bodily in heaven, Jesus is present in spirit with all of His people just as He promised (Matt. 28:20 – “lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen”).

In Heaven and throughout eternity the believer will also experience the tabernacle of God. In eternity the actual tabernacle of God will be with men. God will reveal Himself to His people as they dwell in His actual presence. Revelation 21:1-3 states: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will

dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be their God.*”

There is coming an eternal day of glorious fellowship and communion with God. God is going to manifest His presence to the lives of His people in a special and intimate way. Eternity! We will fellowship in the very presence of God throughout the unending ages of time and sense His nearness and dearness to our lives. Revelation 7:15 also states: “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.”

God will dwell among us! He will express intimacy with our lives in Heaven and throughout eternity. This tells us that God’s desire has always been to fellowship and commune with His own people and throughout eternity we will experience the tabernacle of God among us. We will experience a close spiritual intimacy with the God who loves us and the God who has saved us. Heaven and eternity is a place of eternal fellowship with our Creator. This is what will make Heaven so wonderful. It’s not just the scenery and reunion with our saved loved ones that will make Heaven so wonderful (1 Thess. 2:19). It is the eternal intimate fellowship we will have with our Lord. God will tabernacle among us! Even today the believer needs to experience this tabernacle of God in his own life and walk (2 Cor. 6:16). The believer needs to experience joyous communion and daily intimacy with God so that he can get a taste of Heaven on earth (Deut. 11:21- “as the days of heaven upon the earth”).

The Vine Relationship

The Lord’s desire to fellowship, commune, and have spiritual intimacy with His people is again clearly conveyed in the analogy that Jesus gave concerning the vine and the branches. He pictures Himself as the vine producing sustenance or growth and the branches as His own people who produce fruit because of their attachment to the vine. Jesus said in John 15:4-5: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

“Abide in me, and I in you.” This is the central truth for Christian living. It’s the secret of the deeper life as so many call it today. By the way, how close are you to the Lord today? How deep have you gone in your Christian experience and walk with the Lord? The term “abide” means to stay or remain and suggests intimacy and fellowship with Christ. When a person abides in Christ it means they have an unbroken contact with Christ in a union of intimate love. In reference to a position of intimacy with the Lord, the believer is told to abide in Christ. This blessed truth speaks about the believer’s communion with the Lord, which flows out of their union with Him. Union with Christ occurs at conversion (Rom. 6) and is a non-experiential transaction. But communion, experiential living with Christ, flows out of this spiritual union with Christ and is suggested here in John chapter 15. We are to have a deep abiding relationship with Jesus Christ since we are in union with Him.

Jesus is saying, “Stay close to Me. Keep in close, intimate fellowship with Me, for the closer you are to Me, the more fruit you will bear. The farther you get from Me, the less fruit you will bear.” This is the key truth to all Christian living - “Abide in me.” And when we abide in Him or live close to the Lord, we will bear luscious fruit in our Christian experience. This is because the power to produce fruit and live for God comes from Jesus Christ who is pictured as the vine. The life and power are in the vine! That’s why without Christ we can do nothing! This is why Jesus is still the answer to all the heartaches and valleys that we face in life. The vine will help us to produce fruit in the times when we suffer and need God’s strength. Jesus wants us to remain in close proximity to Him, have fellowship with Him, and cling to Him day-by-day and hour-by-hour.

“Abide with me, Fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me!”

The Spirit’s Ministry

Intimacy with Christ and God is maintained and fostered by the presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells within each and every believer

(John 14:16). The Holy Spirit is the Person within the Godhead that shows us the glories and grandeur of Christ's life.

Jesus said in John 16:13-15, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you."

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is primarily and essentially Christocentric. He reveals the life of Jesus Christ to us so that we can understand His life and experience a developing intimacy with the Lord. The Holy Spirit makes Christ real to our lives and opens up His glories and beauty to us so we can experience intimacy with God. The Holy Spirit is involved in our worship as we direct our heart to God (Rom. 8:26; Eph. 6:18). The Spirit's function is to reveal and explain Jesus Christ to our lives. The Spirit's promptings point us to Christ and promotes intimacy with God.

Dr. A.B Simpson clarified the Spirit's function when saying: "The great business of the Holy Spirit is to stand behind the scenes and make Jesus real. Just as the telescope reveals not itself, but the stars beyond, so Christ is revealed by the Holy Spirit, as the medium of our spiritual vision. ... Through the telephone of prayer, we may catch the very voice of our absent Master and be conscious of the heart-throbs of His love. ... The presence of the Comforter but makes Him nearer and dearer, and enables us to realize and know that we are in Him and He in us."

Paul said in Galatians 1:15-16:

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by his grace. To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."

The revelation of God's Son in Paul's heart ("To reveal his Son in me") was accomplished through the presence of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings us into a living and intimate relationship with Jesus

Christ. He makes God's life real or precious (1 Pet. 2:7 – "he is precious") to us and brings us into a place of communion with the Lord. The Spirit's ministry is not external revelation but internal revelation of Christ's life so that the believer can develop a daily spiritual intimacy and walk with God. The Holy Spirit develops and fosters a life of intimacy with God so that our life can have true meaning, inner fulfillment, and then outward Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18). The Spirit also helps us to maintain victory in our lives ("walk in the Spirit" – Gal. 5:25) which enables us to continue fostering intimacy with God. When we walk in the Spirit we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).

"Spirit of Jesus, glorify,
The Master's name in me;
Whether I live or if I die,
Let Christ exalted be."

Worshipping God

Spiritual intimacy with God is nourished by worship. The hyper-busyness of our culture holds many Christians in a spiritual death grip. The cult of busyness and activism infects Christians and keeps them from worshipping God. *Our priorities are upside down and nothing short of radical action will solve our spiritual problems!* Many Christians today need to allow their souls to catch up with their bodies. This can only be done when we practice the presence of God and worship Him in a greater way.

Worship should be our highest priority in life since God is to be our highest priority in life (Mark 12:30; Matt. 4:10). Nothing is more important than to build a strong devotional life through worship. An amazing fact is that the Father is seeking those who He has created to worship Him (John 4:23 – "... for the Father seeketh such to worship him"). Worship involves giving back to God - not receiving from God. This is illustrated in the many verses that speak about worship (Ps. 96:7-8; 1 Chron. 16:29). Psalm 29:1-2 says, "Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness."

In all of these verses there is no mention of God's people worshipping the Lord in order to selfishly get what they want out of worship, which might include a particular high or feeling generated from a rock sound, a specific style of music designed to initiate worship, or some other kind of electrical experience. When you feel that you need something in order to worship God, then you have missed the true meaning of worship, which revolves around God and God alone. *We don't worship God to get; we worship God to give.*

One lady told a pastor that she was not going to come back to his church because when she was there she did not *feel* anything. Since when does worship revolve around feeling something? Since when do we go to church to get a feeling? Many today fall into the trap of worshipping a contemporary sound of worship in order to get a certain feeling or euphoric experience. They are worshipping their feelings. *Many are worshipping their own form of worship.* They are praising their own form of praise instead of silently and unselfishly giving back to God in their time of worship. Worship is when God's people humbly and unselfishly give back to God the glory that is due His name. Worship takes place when God's people open their hearts to Him without any prerequisites or requests. Worship occurs when God's children render unto Him thanksgiving and meditate upon His greatness and His wonderful redemptive and creative works.

I'm convinced that the "show-biz" and "me generation" has invaded the worship scene today. People are asking one main question about worship today: "What's in it for me?" They are infatuated with finding a certain feeling in their time of worship, so much so, that it becomes a selfish and carnal diversion from what true worship is to be – giving back to God. As I have already stated, many Christians today are actually worshipping their worship and losing sight of the "holy hush" in worship where an individual unselfishly gives himself to God without secular sounds, synthesizers, and singers who are dancing around on a platform.

Here is a working definition of worship: "Worship is the act of giving back to God His rightful worth through the humble acts of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, singing, meditation, preaching, and even Christian service and sacrifice. It is expressing to God the worth that He has in our lives." When we worship God we reflect upon His

attributes of holiness, righteousness, mercy, and love. In worship we open our hearts to Him in praise, reflect upon who God is and what God has done for us, return our thanks to Him, and direct our hearts toward Him without expecting anything in return.

The old writer Carl Armerding said this about worship:

“Worship is the overflow of a heart that has no request to make.”

In worship we are the givers and God is the receiver! When we come to worship God we are not asking Him to fill up our empty bucket. We are coming before Him with a bucket that is already full and ready to share with Him our expressions of joyful worship, for who He is, what He has done, and what He means to our lives. Real worship of God does not involve God’s return to me but my return to God!

Someone said:

“Worship is a verb. It is not something done to us, or for us, but by us.”

The Christian life that lacks worship becomes stale and stagnant. It lacks spiritual intimacy with God. Worship adds spiritual spice to the believer’s life and keeps the spiritual juices flowing. It keeps us from developing form without power, routine without a relationship with God, and living without purpose. Someone stated: “It’s amazing how much easier the wheels of mortal life spin when we take time to worship God.”

The Bible reveals three areas of worship.

1. Personal Worship as a Way of Life

Worship involves the whole life of the Christian. All that we do should become loving service directed toward Him (Col. 3:23 – “do it heartily as to the Lord”). Then too, our surrender and sacrifice to the Lord (His will, way, word) is a specific act of spiritual worship rendered unto God. Paul says we are to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice and then says that this is our “reasonable service” or worship (Rom. 12:2). Mark this down. The believer’s loving surrender or obedience is an act of worship rendered up to God. We must remember that the most satisfying life has always been the most

sacrificial life. The believer's entire life is looked upon as an act of worship rendered up to God. All my stewardship, separation, reverence, holy living, service, and obedience are to be acts of worship rendered up to God. Many times we think of worship as only singing, praise, or silent meditation upon God. But worship extends to every area and facet of our lives, even our sacrificial service and holy living for God. All should be presented to God as an act of worship.

Romans 12:1 states:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*"

The word service (*latreia*) speaks of sacred services rendered up to God, as an act of worship, similar to the Old Testament priests' sacred services of worship that were rendered up to God. This tells us that sacrificing our lives for the Lord and living holy lives before Him is an act of worship directed toward God. It is not simply a superficial act of obedience but a sacred act of worship presented to God. In fact, all of our living, giving, working, and praising are seen to be priestly and sacred acts of worship rendered up to God (1 Pet. 2:5 – "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ").

The believer as a New Testament priest is to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. His entire life is to be lived in such a way that all of His actions and services are to be expressions of worship directed to God. How wonderful this is! The believer does not have to become a legalist performing dead works (Heb. 6:1) but a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) presenting his works and entire life to God as an act of worship. *Worship is not something you just do in church on Sunday morning. It is to be an entire lifestyle.* Our entire life, as a New Testament priest, is to be one of worship, where we offer up praise and acts of services to God. In fact, all that we do in life is to be presented unto the Lord as an act of worship and for His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Someone has said: "We are to be worshippers first and workers second."

In the old dispensation the priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. In the new dispensation all believers are priests with instant access to the throne room of God, day or night.

Their function is to offer up “spiritual sacrifices” which refer to sacrifices that are inspired by the Holy Spirit and which are opposite of carnal works (non-carnal). The “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Pet. 2:5) of the New Testament priest would include:

- ✓ The sacrifice of the body (Rom. 12:1).
- ✓ The sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15).
- ✓ The sacrifice of good works (Heb. 13:16).
- ✓ The sacrifice of possessions (Heb. 13:16).
- ✓ The sacrifice of service (Rom. 15:16).

Paul speaks of his ministry to the Gentiles as a priestly offering.

Think of this. As we serve other people through witnessing and assist them spiritually or physically we can render up these services to the Lord as an act of worship. This Biblical outlook can put a whole new face on our everyday living and actions. My whole life can be an act of worship rendered up to God. The things that I do which honor God become acceptable sacrifices presented unto the Lord and acts of worship that He accepts (1 Pet. 2:5).

2. Personal Worship as Specific Times of Focus on God

Worship certainly refers to those specific times when we focus on God through prayer, praise, meditation, and Bible reading. David worshipped as he prayed and sang alone at night (Ps. 63:6-7; see also Ps. 119:62). We worship God as we enjoy His presence in our lives (Ps. 37:4) and when we reflect or meditate on Him and His Word (Psalm 119:10-11, 97) at any time of the day or night. Although we can and should worship God in our daily routine of living, we also discover that there should be a regular and concentrated time of personal worship in each one of our lives. Many believers have called this time of worship their *quiet time* with God. It is their morning manna (Ex. 16:15). It's when they worship or reflect upon God and His truth at a specific time every day.

Good Biblical examples and general experience seem to indicate that a daily routine of morning devotion is best. The Lord Jesus rose early in the morning to pray and commune with the Father (Mark 1:35). The Psalmist got up before dawn to meet with God (Psalm 119:147).

Other references point to morning as a regular routine of worship with God (Ps. 5:2; 63:1). *The Lord graciously gives each one of us the same amount of time and it is what we do with this time that counts.* Daily devotion with God has always been the mark of a man who lives close to God and has spiritual intimacy with Him. We should not simply view this time as a discipline or stewardship of the Christian life but as an opportunity! It should be seen as a time when God's presence and Word can flood into our souls and a time when we can give back to the God who we love and serve.

Someone remarked:

"The Bible world is the real world. When you spend time alone with the Lord, you are in contact with reality, the things that matter most, the things that will last."

In our time of personal devotion, we are also building a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (John 15:5). Jesus longs for our fellowship and wants to share His life with ours. Our own personal devotional time is something that we all need. Life is sometimes difficult and we need to cultivate a satisfying quiet time to assure us of stability. Develop a habit and system that works for you and draw closer to God through a daily quiet time. We do many things out of habit everyday (bathing, eating, brushing our teeth). Habit does not mean that we become a legalist caught in a trap but a worshipper caught loving God!

When we get into the habit of spending time daily with the Lord I believe 90 percent of the battle will be won for the day. *Habit without heart can become routine* (Matt. 15:8) but we must view our devotions as enhancing our personal relationship with God through the Word and prayer. This keeps us from falling into the devotional doldrums of life! Looking at the spiritual exercise of our devotions as a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:10) and a time when we can worship the God that we love (Deut. 6:5; Ps. 18:1) keeps us from developing devotional routine without heart. We must also remember to possess a love for God's Word when coming to the devotional table since we know that it is God's voice speaking to us today (Ps. 119:159). I'm so thankful that God still speaks to us through His Word in that still small voice (1 Kings 19:12).

Establishing a quiet time is one of the most important steps you can take that will help you to experience intimacy with God, the abundant life with Jesus (John 10:10), and spiritual growth in your Christian walk. Four things need to be remembered when developing a devotional life. First, you must make *time* and be definite about keeping this time for God. Second, you need a definite *place* where you can be alone with God. Find a quiet place to meet with the Lover of your soul. Third, you need a definite *purpose*. This should be to “know him” (Phil. 3:10) as a Person and draw closer to the Lord.

Your personal quiet time should also have another purpose, which should include self-examination, confession, and cleansing (1 John 1:7-9). Also, through the quiet time you will be strengthened to live for the Lord and do what is right (Isa. 40:29-31). It's during the quiet time that we exchange human strength for spiritual strength. Fourth, you need to develop a method of devotions that has three main ingredients – meditation on truth and God, prayer, and praise. The beginning prayer of our devotional time should be that of the Psalmist, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18).

It is important that we keep our appointments with God. Devotions are a matter of discipline but they are much more than this. They are to be a matter of the heart. We should want to spend time with God to experience His presence in our lives. A healthy devotional life is how we respond to God's desire to walk with us. This is the way we connect with God on a regular basis. A quiet time helps us to build a relational approach to God instead of just a legalistic approach. It helps us to enrich our lives with God and enables us to please Him in all that we do, as we yield to His Word.

The quiet time also helps us to face another day as we take God's truth and power and apply it to real life problems and situations (Psalm 119:9, 59, 105). Believers need to take time to step out of this world and let God speak to their hearts, so they can step back into the world again, able to face another day victoriously, and with God's perspective. No believer can stay spiritually healthy unless they take time with God. This is why we need to plan in our day a specific time where we can be alone with God and during this time present our entire day to the Lord for Him to manage. We need blessing breaks

where we can cling to the promises of God's Word, open our hearts in worship to Him, develop and deepen our intimacy with God, and give our lives some spiritual breathing space.

A.W. Tozer summed it up well when saying:

"God is trying to call us back to that for which He created us, to worship Him and to enjoy Him forever!"

It's important to remember that Satan wants to keep us from having personal devotion with God, which involves praying to God, reflecting upon Scripture, and meditation upon God. If the devil can keep us from taking time to reflect upon God's truth and from praying to the Lord, we will be defeated in life and lose our spiritual compass for living and "the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). I will never forget one sign that read: "Save precious time by skipping your devotions." It was signed – The Devil.

3. Corporate Worship Among God's People

Worship can also refer to those times when Christians gather together as a congregation to praise God. This form of worship is commendable and commanded in Scripture (Heb. 10:25; Ps. 111:1). There were those who were not faithful to God's meeting place and the writer of Hebrews chides them for their lack of attendance. When you refuse to attend God's house you are disobedient, you lack good stewardship, and the desire for expressing worship with God's people and intimacy with God. David desired to be in God's house to sense God's nearness and presence. Psalm 27:4, "One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple." Psalm 84:4, "Blessed *are* they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah." Psalm 122:1, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD."

Prayer

Prayer is the primary way to develop a devotional life with God that consists of worship and a growing intimacy with Him. Communication with God on a daily basis heightens our intimacy with God. Through prayer we have contact with God and this develops a bond and

closeness with Him. Prayer or talking to God is one of the most effective ways to cultivate a deeper devotional life and relationship with Him. How often do we miss prayer? When was the last time you had a meaningful prayer time with the Lord? We often say that we are too busy for the quiet time and too busy to pray. If so, we are too busy (Col. 4:2 – “continue in prayer”). Drawing closer to God means that we must have contact with God. Without constant contact and communication with God we cannot experience a growing intimacy with God (Ps. 5:1-3; Mark 1:35).

Prayer, perhaps more than any other activity, measures the level of intimacy we have with the Lord. Generally speaking, you can tell a man’s intimacy with God by the way that he prays. Hebrews 10:22 says, “Let us draw near (near to God) with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” You will notice that “drawing near” to God or experiencing spiritual intimacy with God comes through prayer.

But this drawing near or intimacy with God can only occur when we have a clean conscience that comes from being cleansed in our Christian life. Clean before my Lord! The point is this. In order to draw near we must come into God’s presence through the ministry of prayer and do so with a clean heart and life. Prayer is the way we draw near to God and experience the wonder and fellowship of God within our daily living. “O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up” (Psalm 5:3).

Dr. Andrew Bonar, a saintly man, wrote in his diary: "Tonight I gave myself to a time of waiting upon the Lord. I had not been much in the spirit of prayer, but now several things have become clear to me. I realize I have not communed enough with the Lord, nor come to Him as often as I should. Little forethought has been given to the requests I've made. There has been much conversing and outward engagement with men, but I have not been occupied enough with God himself. I also realize that a closeness to Him gives abundant strength and is like sunlight shining through the clouds on a gloomy day."

Praise

Praise is an integral part of a life of devotion, worship, and spiritual intimacy with God. Praise helps us to develop a deepening intimacy with God. Today there is much talk about contemporary praise and worship music. One must wonder if people could praise and worship the Lord before the invention of praise choruses and other contemporary musical sounds. Praise music did not originate with our generation. Nor is praise, which is an act of reverence, to be offered up to a holy God through the use of the irreverent, unholy, and perverted sounds of a rock culture, which is in direct rebellion against God (Rom. 12:2).

Part of our stewardship is to offer pure and holy praise to God, which will not offend His holy character (Ps. 29:2; 96:9). Biblical praise music is found in the Psalms which is actually the hymnbook given to Israel. Psalms might be better understood as praises because this is what the Psalms record. In the Scriptural references to praise we find that God is the central object of praise (Ps. 30:12; 40:3; 42:5, 11; 43:4-5; 44:8; 50:23; 66:18; 86:12; 104:33; 106:48; 147:1, 7; 150). We are to praise God for who He is and for the wonderful things that He has done and is doing for our lives everyday. The believer must get beyond the level of just petitioning God. He must learn to mix his petitions with praise!

What is a good working definition of praise? Praise is an action of worship that is directed to God through the medium of speaking, singing, and the playing of musical instruments, where grateful homage (reverence and respect) is expressed to the Lord for His character and wonderful works. The Bible speaks about praising God's name (Ps. 99:3; 148:13; see also 7:17; 9:2; 69:30). We can praise God's name as we think of Him as our provider (Gen. 22:4); healer (Psalm 103:1-2), peace (Judges 6:24), and shepherd (Ps. 23:1).

The Bible also speaks about praising God's Word (Ps. 56:4; 106:12). The Lord's love letter to His people is something that should elicit our praise. We need to praise the Lord for His unchangeable and infallible Word. Psalm 138:2, "I will worship toward thy holy temple,

and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” We should also praise the Lord when He gives us instruction from His Word on how to live and conduct ourselves (Ps. 119:171).

William Cowper wrote:

“A glory gilds the sacred page,
Majestic like the sun;
It gives a light to every age,
It gives, but borrows none.”

We should also praise God’s character – His righteousness (Ps. 7:17); holiness (Ps. 99:3; 71:22), loving kindness (Ezra 3:11; 2 Chron. 5:13; 20:21; Ps. 63:3; 117:2), power (Ps. 21:13), goodness (Ezra 3:11; Ps. 153:3), grace (Eph. 1:6), mercy, (Ps. 106:1; Jer, 33:11; 2 Chron. 20:21), mighty acts (Ps. 150:2), greatness (Ps. 48:1; 66:3-4; 96:4; 145:3; 150:2), and glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). We should also praise God for His conduct or all that God does for us – help/deliverance (Ps. 145:4; Jer. 20:13), for His works (Ps. 145:4; 150:2; Isa. 12:5), healing (Luke 18:42-43), and for His eternal dominion or sovereignty over our lives (Dan. 4:34). We will also praise the Lord when we reflect upon God’s patience (Neh. 9:7; Ps. 103:8; 145:8), justice (Duet. 32:4; Rev. 15:3), and His many other attributes that reflect what God is like in all of His greatness and glory. Praising God’s character and attributes is an integral part of developing intimacy with God.

Music is another way that we express praise to God. Praise can be offered up to the Lord through the use of musical instruments. The Old Testament demonstrates that praise came from a 4,000-piece praise orchestra (1 Chron. 23:5) to a 10-string harp (Ps. 33:2). Many instruments are used to praise God such as the cymbals (Ezra 3:10; Ps. 150:5); lyre (Ps. 43:4; 71:22; 98:5; 147:7); harp (Ps. 71:22; 150:3); timbrel (Ps. 149:3; 150:3); pipe (Ps. 150:4), and stringed instruments (Ps. 150:4).

Singing is also another way to praise the Lord. In other words, we can also praise the Lord through singing. The first recorded song of praise came from Moses (Ex. 15:1-18) who wrote to celebrate God’s victory

over Pharaoh and Israel's liberation from the Egyptians (vs. 2). Deborah and Barak wrote a hymn of celebration to give God all the glory for their victory over the Canaanites (Judges 5:2-31). The Psalmist connected singing with praise (Ps. 69:30; see also Ps. 9:11; 147:7; 2 Sam. 22:50; 1 Chron. 16:9).

"Praise Him! praise Him!
Tell of His excellent greatness;
Praise Him! Praise Him! ever in joyful song!"

"Lord of all to Thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise!" We are to have a new song of praise in our mouth to offer up to the Lord (Ps. 40:3). In Solomon's day, during the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 5:13), the people praised God with songs for His everlasting loving-kindness. In Nehemiah's day the people praised the Lord with "songs of praise" as they dedicated the temple to God (Neh. 12:46).

The songwriter wrote these lovely words of praise and worship rendered up to God:

"Here am I, holy Lord, seeking now Your face,
Thankful for Your grace, as I worship You!
Here am I, holy Lord, in this quiet hour,
By Your Spirit's power, cleanse my heart anew.
Oh Lamb of God, the One that I adore,
I long to sing Your praise forevermore.
I worship You with songs of praise.
In You alone my heart rejoices.
Accept this offering of love, Oh God above, I worship You.
Search my heart, know my thoughts, lead me in Your ways,
As I seek to praise and magnify Your name.
Mighty King, Lord of all, I stand in awe of You.
Faithful, just and true, You're evermore the same.
O righteous One, Who knows my heart and mind,
In You alone a blessed peace I find,
As I worship You with songs of praise.
In You alone my heart rejoices!
Accept this offering of love, Oh God above, I worship You.
I worship You with songs of praise.
In You alone my heart rejoices.

Accept this offering of love, O God above,
I worship you. God I worship You!"

Praise through simple acts of speaking was always an integral part of the life of God's people. The nation gave praise to God as part of the tabernacle worship (Lev. 19:24). The Levites praised God daily for seven days during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (2 Chron. 30:21). Leah and Jacob praised God for the birth of Judah whose name means praise (Gen. 29:35). Ezra praised the Lord for the rebuilt temple (Ezra 3:10-11). Daniel praised God for what He did on his behalf (Dan. 2:23). The birth of Jesus prompted tremendous praise from the angels (Luke 2:13) and then from the shepherds (vs. 20). Paul praised God in prison (Acts 16:22-25).

This means that we are also to praise God in the dark valley, as well as in the times of plenty, when life is on the mountaintop. Praise to God is not conditioned upon good circumstances and clear blue skies. Praise comes in the storms and testings of life (Ps. 71:13-14). "Does sadness fill my mind, A solace here I find; May Jesus Christ be praised." Praise highlighted the early church's worship. Acts 2:47 says that the early church was "Praising God, and having favour with all the people ..."

Many times praise is linked with blessing and thanksgiving to God (Ps. 34:1; 66:8; 68:26; 100:4; 115:18). Praise and thanksgiving often appear side by side (Ps. 18:49; 30:4; 35:18; 69:30; 92:1; 147:7).

"Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of Harvest-Home;
All is safely gathered in, Ere the winter storms begin.
God, our Maker, doth provide, For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of Harvest-Home."

The Bible records in Psalm 47:6-7: "Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God *is* the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding." In Psalm 66:1-2 we read: "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious."

“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!
Praise him, all creatures here below!
Praise him above, ye heavenly host!
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!”

The Bible says that we are to praise God every day (Ps. 145:2), praise God many times daily (Psalm 119:164), and praise Him from sunup to sundown (Ps. 71:8). Praise is to be a habit of our lives (Ps. 34:1) and is expected to come from the lips of the upright (Ps. 33:1). “Praise ye the LORD. Praise, O ye servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name *is* to be praised” (Psalm 113:1-3). The believer is to praise God up to the time of his death (Ps. 145:1). May Jesus Christ be praised!

“When morning gilds the skies,
My heart awakening cries:
May Jesus Christ be praised.”

Meditation

Someone has said: “The bridge between learning and living is meditation.” A key part of devotion, worship, and spiritual intimacy with God is meditation. This is when we take specific time to reflect upon God and His Word. Part of our stewardship, worship, and intimacy with God involves making specific time to meditate upon God (Ps. 5:1-3). Meditation involves prolonged thought or pondering. Our American figure of speech says that we should “chew” on a thought. This is what meditation really means. It involves chewing on something and turning it over in your mind.

Scripture commands believers to meditate in three areas:

- God’s Worth (Ps. 27:4; 63:6) – His character and glory
- God’s Word (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:97, 148) – The Bible’s truth and accuracy
- God’s works (Ps. 77:11-12; 143:5; 145:17; 40:1-3) – His saving, sovereign, and creative works.

“This is my Father’s world,
And to my list’ning ears,
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.

This is my Father’s world,
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father’s world,
The birds their carols raise;
The morning light, the lily white
Declare their Maker’s praise.

This is my Father’s world,
He shines in all that’s fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.”

The key to all meditation is the Scriptures. The word meditate is used seven times in Psalm 119 and it usually is connected with delighting in the Word or loving the Word (see Ps. 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). Joshua was instructed to meditate in the Scripture (Joshua 1:8) as well as the Psalmist (Psalm 1:2). This is because it’s through the Scriptures that we learn about God’s will for our lives, His character, and all of His sovereign workings. The Bible is God’s way of talking to us and only as we meditate upon truth can we develop scriptural thinking and living. The Bible helps us to cleanse away the old thought patterns that are not of God and reinforces God’s thoughts in our minds. Right thinking is the result of daily meditation on the Word of God (compare the list of Phil. 4:8 with Psalm 19:7-9 which is a description of the Word of God). The Bible will keep us from sinful thinking and living (Ps. 119:11, 15, 59; Joshua 1:8).

“Thy Word is a lamp to my feet,
A light to my path always,
To guide and to save me from sin,
And show me the heav’nly way.”

Through Biblical meditation we can develop a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2), an illuminated mind (1 Cor. 2:12-13), and a Christlike mind (Phil. 2:5-8). Without Scripture we would know relatively very little about God and our level of intimacy with God would be limited. As we look into His Word we find out who God is and what God has done. We also discover what God expects of our lives. This in return helps us to know God's mind, live out God's will for our lives, and love and fellowship with God (John 14:15, 23). We cannot love and communicate with God on an intimate or close level without obedience to His Word. Mark it down. Spiritual intimacy with God only comes through meditating on His Word and obeying what God says.

Philippians 4:8 speaks about the importance of meditation. As we reflect upon the three Biblical areas of meditation (God's worth, God's Word, and God's works) we will be carrying out God's plan for meditation and draw closer to God through spiritual intimacy with the Lord.

Philippians 4:8 says:

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

This verse gives a catalog list or *mental menu* that we need to meditate upon and put into practice within our daily minds and lives. This list consists of several important items that would relate to the three primary areas of meditation – God's worth, God's Word, and God's works. In other words, as we obey God's command to meditate in these three key areas, we will practice meditating on the things mentioned in this list.

First, there are true things. These are things which conform to Biblical reality and God's standard. The opposite of true things are dishonest, unreliable, hidden, or concealed things. A false witness and fantasies are unreal and do not conform to Biblical reality. Our life can never be right if our thinking is wrong.

Second, there are honest things. These are noble things that are honorable and worthy of our reverence, respect, and worship. We

should not think about flippant and careless thoughts but those thoughts that are respectful and reverent in character.

Third, there are just things which point to right things or those things that are upright, holy, and which conform to God's standards of righteousness (Ps. 1:2). They refer to right actions or holy living which is to be directed toward both God and man. The opposite of right things are wrong things. Too often we think upon those things that are unwholesome and ungodly.

Fourth, there are pure things which refer to uncontaminated, chaste, wholesome, pure, clean, and innocent things that are free from all moral impurity. These are things that will not contaminate our lives. Thinking on dirty things will corrupt our lives. We are to concentrate on that which separates us from sin instead of that which leads us to sin. Obeying this standard alone would eliminate about half of the problems with our thought lives.

Fifth, there are lovely things. This word is a combination of one of the Greek words for "love" (phileo) and the preposition (pros) meaning "toward" and might literally be understood as "that which is toward love." Instead of thinking about strife, hostility, resentment, and bitterness, we are to think about love and friendship. This is speaking about those things that are ethically acceptable, pleasing, beautiful, and attractive in God's sight because they promote love, concord, and peace among God's people instead of turmoil and unrest. The believer must concentrate on those things that promote love among God's people instead of being a professional backbiter and gossip (James 4:11). Some Christians have a degree in gossip!

Finally, there are reputable things or things of "good report" which is a beautiful term meaning things that are admirable, reputable, and well-spoken. It refers to things that are worthy to talk about. These things are the opposite of "filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting" (Eph. 5:4) – dirty talk and gutter talk. These things contain no immoral or sexually suggestive talk. They do not contain vulgar talk. These things are also the opposite of slander and gossip. Admirable things are "fair-sounding" things that relate to what is positive and constructive rather than negative and destructive. Instead of thinking about how to slander a person's reputation we should think about speaking well of

people. To think about saying good things about people instead of criticizing them all the time is what this word is suggesting.

One writer said:

“No Christian can afford to waste mind power on thoughts that tear him down or that would tear others down if these thoughts were shared.”

Roy Laurin remarked:

“Many believers need a revised version of their thoughts.”

We are to meditate on these things mentioned in Philippians 4:8 with careful reflection, not casually and superficially, but constantly (“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” - Prov 23:7). The Christian does not advocate TM (transcendental meditation) but SM (Scriptural meditation). Meditation is not a blind leap in the dark. To open yourself up to anything that is out in the cosmos is very dangerous. Satan is all too ready to deceive a person who is uninformed on how to worship and meditate (2 Cor. 11:13 – “angel of light”). Let us remember that meditating on God’s Word and God’s character and God’s works bring a person into a closer intimacy with God.

Dr. Oswald Sanders once said:

“Each of us is as close to God as we choose to be.”

In his interesting book “Singing With Understanding,” Kenneth Osbeck tells of the origin of the much loved hymn, “Nearer, My God to Thee.” He writes that the author, Sarah Adams of England, was known for her literary talents. One day her pastor said he wished he could find a song to use with his sermon about the Lord’s unique appearance to Jacob recorded in Genesis 28. We must remember how the patriarch was reminded of God’s covenant with him through a dream. This expression of God’s loving and providential care drew Jacob into a closer fellowship with the Heavenly Father. After seeing the ladder which reached to Heaven and witnessing the LORD, Jacob exclaimed: “Surely the LORD is in this place” (Gen. 28:16), “this is the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17), and “then shall the LORD be my God” (Gen. 28:21). Having caught the gist of her minister’s sermon, Sarah Adams skillfully condensed that Biblical story into five stanzas. These two give the spiritual flavor of its lyrics:

"Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee.
Nearer to Thee!

There let the way appear, steps unto heaven;
All that Thou sendest me, in mercy given -
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!"

Pursuing God

Another area directly related to the believer's devotional life or intimacy with God is the matter of pursuing or seeking God. This is an important truth to grasp. Our number one aim in life should be to seek the Lord.

Psalm 27:8

"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

Psalm 63:1 also states:

"O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

To seek after God means to practice the presence of God. It means to desire His fellowship, companionship, and open our hearts to God in worship, meditation, and praise. Seeking God is a personal encounter that brings a believer closer to God. This seeking helps a believer to experience God's abiding presence and daily strength in life. In fact, God makes some tremendous promises to those who seek Him. For those who seek Him God promises companionship (Ps. 27:8-10), protection (Ps. 9:9-10), provision (Ps. 34:10), gladness (Ps. 119:2; 70:4; 40:16), goodness (Lam. 3:25), and reward (Heb. 11:6). The seeking saint will find all that he needs in God. God is the

answer to the meaning of life and all that is connected to life's provision and blessing. The answer is God!

In Psalm 42:1-2 we also see the hunger of the Psalmist to pursue God. The Psalmist declares: "As the hart (deer) panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

"As the deer panteth for the water,
So my soul longeth after Thee.
You alone are my heart's desire,
And I long to worship Thee.
You alone are my strength, my shield,
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire,
And I long to worship Thee."

What are you really pursuing in life? As we pursue God we will find ourselves delighting in the Lord, or enjoying His presence in our lives (Ps. 37:4), and we will become filled with God's spiritual desires for our lives. As we pursue God and experience His presence and companionship we will become like Enoch (Gen. 5:22, 24) and Noah (Gen. 6:9) who were men who walked with God. What a wonderful journey we can have in life when we walk with God. So many Christians do not really walk with God, as they should. Many Christians live for self and personal gain (1 Tim. 6:10) and miss out on the real meaning of their Christian existence, which involves sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His Word (Luke 10:39), seeking God's face, and walking close to Him on a daily basis.

"Nearer, still nearer, close to Thy heart,
Draw me, my Savior so precious Thou art;
Fold me, O fold me close to Thy breast,
Shelter me safe in that haven of rest,
Shelter me safe in that haven of rest."

Purity

2 Corinthians 6:16-18

“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

God’s desire for fellowship and spiritual intimacy among His people is stated very clearly in verse 16 – “as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” God wants to dwell within us *experientially* so we can have a life of spiritual intimacy with Him. After all, living the Christian life is all about possessing a deepening relationship with God and walking with God in communion and fellowship. If you are living for any other reason than to worship and walk with God than your life will become empty and meaningless as a Christian.

Our lives are designed to communicate with the One who has saved us but we can only do this as we keep our lives from impurity. This text (vs. 16) reveals how pagan worship, which involved idolatrous practices, can affect our level of fellowship and spiritual intimacy with God. Paul reminds the believers of Corinth that their bodies are God’s temple and because of this they must be careful where they go, and what they associate their bodies with in society, since it is God’s holy dwelling place. Where we go can defile our lives from a spiritual perspective. Associating with the sinner’s places of depravity and the devil’s work can defile our lives spiritually both in association and eventually in practice.

We see by this verse that purity is a necessary prerequisite to fellowship or spiritual intimacy with God. Intimacy is preceded by cleansing. We must learn to separate from the sins of sinners, such as false pagan worship, and “touch not the unclean thing” (pagan worship) in order for God to receive us (“I will receive you” – vs. 17). This expression of God receiving His children means that God wants to fellowship with our lives and communicate with us in an intimate

and personal way. But in order for God to be able to fellowship with His people they needed to disassociate themselves from idols and the religious pagan practices surrounding them. God's people were associating their lives with idols in a rebellious setting where pagan acts of worship were occurring. This called for radical separation and cleansing.

We learn from this verse and others that God's children are to have no association and zero tolerance with religious paganism (1 Cor. 10:20). This is because associating with any form of religious paganism corrupts God's people from God's vantage point. Whether God's people realize it or not, they become corrupt by wrong association. Furthermore, the idols themselves will eventually steal their hearts away from God and will corrupt their lives (1 Kings 11:2 - "for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods"). Therefore, God's people must clean up their act. They must separate from those places that physically and spiritually corrupt their lives and which could potentially cause a loss of their spiritual intimacy with God. The places we attend in society and the atmosphere we place ourselves is still important to God.

So how can we apply this to our lives today? There are many possible applications but one thing is for sure. When we attend those places where religious apostasy or pagan worship is being committed and condoned in some form, when we attend those places that cause lust, covetousness, and pride to ignite in our hearts, when we attend those places that draw us away from loving the Lord and focusing on Him, as we should, then we have entered the forbidden zone (1 John 2:15-17).

Many times God's people need to evaluate where they are at spiritually (1 Cor. 11:28) and cleanse themselves from pagan worship and from 21st century modern idols that steal away their hearts from God, and which keep them from fellowshiping with God in a greater way. In a wider application the Bible reminds us: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). This is because the idols of sports, hobbies, work, money, rock music, pornography, sexual pleasure outside marriage, and many other things draw us away from the Lord and threaten our spiritual intimacy with God.

Jesus asked in John 21:15, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? How about it? Do you love the idols of the world more than the Lord your God who has saved you and given you eternal life? Where is your heart's affection? When idols rule our hearts and lives we cannot fellowship with God or have spiritual intimacy with Him. Idols and impurity in general choke out our intimacy with God. God is looking for purity so we can have personal intimacy with Him.

We must take the initiative to cleanse our lives from all "filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). When we do this God will "receive" us (2 Cor. 6:17) or communicate His life to us in a very real and precious way. 2 Corinthians 6:18 expresses the deep spiritual intimacy that we can have with God in this way: "And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." To experience in our daily living that God is our Father and that we are His sons means that we will sense His intimate love for us, and His care or provision over our lives, as a loving father would express toward his children. We will cry "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). We will know that we are linked with God in a close family relationship that is very precious and dear to our hearts. We will cherish our relationship with the Father ("ye have known the Father - 1 John 2:13 - "and truly our fellowship is with the Father" - 1 John 1:3). God is my Father!

Many people in this world never had a caring and loving father but how wonderful to realize that when we become a Christian God wants to reveal Himself to us as a caring and loving father would reveal himself to the children he loves (Ps. 27:10). God wants to take us in His arms, carry us, and baby our lives. He wants us to know that He loves us and desires the best for our lives.

God wants to communicate His love toward us and express Himself to us in an intimate, personal, and fatherly way. How beautiful this is! But sin breaks fellowship with God and when the believer sins in his life he needs to take the initiative to restore his fellowship with God and once again "draw near to God" by cleansing his life from sin through godly sorrow and repentance (James 4:8-9). Until we cleanse our lives from contamination we cannot communicate with the Lord.

Confession and cleansing precedes communication with God. Purity is a prerequisite for personal fellowship with God.

It's interesting that God did not walk in the direction that Enoch was going. Enoch had to make a break with his godless generation (Jude 1:14) and walk in the direction God was going (Gen. 5:22). The same is true of us today. We must break with sin and those who are leading us away from intimacy with God. "Come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17). This means to separate ourselves from those who are leading us down a wrong path that will threaten our intimacy with God.

An honest woman once shared this story. It was my birthday, and on my way to work, I told God how awful I felt about allowing my bad mood to get out of control the day before. But for some reason, even though I had confessed it, I didn't feel as though I really deserved his forgiveness. Then, during my lunch hour, as I went out to enjoy the fresh air and the thick falling snow, I felt God say to me, "Just as the snow comes down and makes everything clean, so will I cleanse you. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow" (Isa. 1:18). I realized what a great gift He had given me! Dear friend, cleansing always precedes fellowship. We must be cleansed of our sins in order to have fellowship with God. John reveals this to us.

1 John 1:7-8

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

John reveals that we must choose to walk in the light of God's holiness in order to have fellowship "one with another." Contextually this refers to the fellowship that the believer has with God. There is a *purity prerequisite* to fellowship. We must be willing to walk the highway of holiness in order to walk with God in sweet communion. Sin keeps us from spiritual intimacy with God and this is why we need confession (1 John 1:9) and cleansing (1 John 1:7) when we become defiled by sin in our Christian experience. *When we choose to live a sinful life we have chosen to neglect our life of intimacy with God.* Let us not deceive ourselves and "say that we have fellowship with him"

(1 John 1:6) when we are knowingly walking in darkness or sin. We can't fool God. We must face our sins and confess them before God (1 John 1:9).

Purity is a prerequisite to fellowship or spiritual intimacy with God. Confession is a prerequisite to communion. James 4:8 once again says, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded." Notice that James immediately qualifies what it means to fellowship or draw near to God. If a man is going to draw near to God this man must cleanse himself from sin through repentance and forsake his sin. He must clean up his heart and then live in obedience to God's will.

David knew that cleansing was necessary for restored fellowship and cried out in Psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In Psalm 51:10 he also cried: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Intimacy with God can be forfeited. But praise God it can be restored and renewed once again with joy. Psalm 51:12, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit." One thing is certain. Cleansing and a return to obedience always precedes spiritual intimacy. The Psalmist said in Psalm 119:32-33, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it *unto* the end."

Love and Obedience

Love and obedience are two sides of the same coin and together they help us to develop spiritual intimacy with God. Drawing near (Heb. 10:22) is a privilege and we are only as near to God as we choose to be. Drawing near to God in spiritual intimacy is also a reciprocal love. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love him, because he first loved us." Our love for Christ and intimacy with Him is fostered by His great love for us (1 John 3:1). The love that God has for us (Rom. 5:5) stimulates us to love God in return, to walk with Him, and obey Him.

When we love the Lord, as we should, then a deepening intimacy with God will take place in our lives. It's interesting that God has made the first move in loving us (Rom. 5:8) and continues to initiate

His desire for love and fellowship with His children (Rev. 3:20 - "I stand at the door and knock"). However, God wants His people to respond with a love that is directed toward Him so that He can draw near to them (James 4:8 - "draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you"). Fellowship occurs when a believer responds to God's initiating love which in return causes God to express Himself to the believer. Day by day His sweet voice soundeth, Saying, "Christian love me more." But what about obedience?

Jesus said in John 14:21

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

Jesus is saying that when we express love toward Him through our acts of obedience, it's then that we will experience a loving relationship with both the Father and Son. In short, we will have a life of spiritual intimacy with God. There will be a close fellowship that is experienced between the believer and God when His people obey truth. If we are living obediently, or following truth and God's will for our lives, we then have John 14:21 as our assurance. We can have spiritual intimacy with God.

"I worship Thee, sweet will of God,
And all Thy ways adore,
And every day I live I seem
To love Thee more and more."

Let us remember that the true test of love and spiritual intimacy with God is obedience. Obedience is the very best thing! Jesus said in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." *The greater we knowingly obey and live for the Lord the deeper our intimacy will be with God.* Obedience is the test of love and obedience is rewarded by experiencing a deepening intimacy with God. The key question is not, "How do you feel?" but, "Have you obeyed?" Love is expressed through the will and when we actively seek to obey God's truth we are expressing our love for Him and developing intimacy with God. Dear friend, when we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way!

“O Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord,
 Forgive me if I say,
For very love Thy sacred name
 A thousand times a day.

Burn, burn O love within my heart
 Burn fiercely night and day
Till all the dross of earthly love
 Is burned, and burned away.”

Knowing God

Knowing God or developing a life of intimacy with the Creator should be the believer’s reason for existence in life. In my younger years I can remember looking at a book cover that said, “Knowing God.” That title always seemed to stab me in the heart for I wanted to know God better and have a deepening relationship with Him. Many times we live for other reasons and miss out on the true spiritual purpose for our existence on earth, which is to know God. The Bible teaches that we can know God in a *sovereign* way. As we pursue God we will get to know who God is in relationship to His character and ways. We will discover how an omniscient and all-wise God works in our lives and how He is part of all the circumstances that we pass through in life.

Psalm 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Knowing God is the secret of everything! The Bible teaches we can know God in a sovereign way. Psalm 46 is a Psalm for the “all shook up.” The believer finds stillness or rest in knowing that God is sovereign and that what He does is absolutely right. We can rest in God’s sovereign workings and know that He is in charge of the circumstances and events surrounding our lives (Ex. 14:13). But we cannot come to this place of stillness or rest in God’s sovereign works over our lives if we do not walk close to Him. We must have an awareness of God’s greatness and wisdom, which can only come through studying the Scriptures and meditating upon God.

The Bible also teaches that we can know God *intimately* through developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ makes life worth the living and brings the believer into a close intimate relationship with God. As we commune with Christ we commune with God (Tit. 2:13) and develop a deepening walk with the Lord.

Philippians 3:10

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”

Paul is not talking about knowing God intellectually but experientially. There is a vast difference! Knowing God intimately and experientially through Jesus Christ makes life a glorious spiritual adventure. It keeps our hearts awakened to the presence of God and His ever-present power, provision, and personal care over our lives. The believer can know God in a deepening, intimate, and experiential way through Christ’s life and experience God’s abiding presence and the wonder of His peace, presence, power, and personal enrichment. Paul prayed that the believers would be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10).

This speaks about a growing experiential knowledge and awareness of God’s presence, power, and person in our lives. The believer must experience an intimate relationship, walk, and encounter with God. Jesus said in John 10:10, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly.” The abundant life is the life of spiritual intimacy with God. It’s a life of bounty and rich blessing. The Greek word for “abundantly” (*perissos*) has been explained in this way:

<p>“exceeding some number or measure or rank or need a) over and above, more than is necessary, superadded 1) exceeding abundantly, supremely 2) something further, more, much more than all, more plainly b) superior, extraordinary, surpassing, uncommon pre-eminence, superiority, advantage, more eminent, more remarkable, more excellent.”</p>

What a life! It's a wonderful, wonderful life!

John W. Peterson wrote:

“It's a wonderful, wonderful life,
When you know the Lord above,
It's a wonderful, wonderful life,
When He's saved you by His love.

There's a joy that you never once knew
And a peace in the darkest night.
As you travel along in your heart there's a song!
It's a wonderful, wonderful life.
It's a wonderful, wonderful life!”

Oh how wonderful and rewarding it is to have intimacy with God! If you want days of heaven on earth and a life that is full of realness, dearness, and nearness then start walking close to God. Enjoying intimacy with God transforms our lives!

1 Peter 1:8

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

It is glory just to walk with Him! I want this kind of life! How close are you to God these days? Are you in love with Him and experiencing the wonder of His person and presence in your life? Are you walking with God? Remember that He is as close as the mention of His name. God is waiting for you to pray to Him and express your desire to walk with Him so that He can begin to reveal Himself to you in a new and wonderful way. If you will take the steps necessary to draw near to God then He will draw near to you (James 4:8).

Revelation 3:20

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Although many use this as a salvation verse it is actually a verse directed to His people. It's a verse conveying God's desire to

fellowship with His own children. God wants to initiate fellowship in the hearts of His people. God does not need to save His people but He does want to sup with them. Eating meals together in Bible times and even today is a time of interaction and fellowship. God is saying to His people today, "It's supper time!" God wants to commune with His children. The great goal and longing of God is to have spiritual intimacy with His people. Oh the wonder of it all! God wants to fellowship with me! God is interested in my life and longs for intimacy.

Song of Solomon 5:2

"I sleep, but my heart waketh: *it is* the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying*, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, *and* my locks with the drops of the night."

We conclude this study with the words of Richard Mayhue who aptly remarked: "Our generation's greatest need is to reclaim a dominant sense of intimacy with God which will reshape our souls and redirect our lives."

"Thou, my everlasting portion,
More than friend or life to me;
All along my pilgrim journey,
Saviour, let me walk with Thee.

Close to Thee, close to Thee,
Close to Thee, close to Thee,
All along my pilgrim journey,
Saviour, let me walk with Thee."

May it be true in your life today!