

TRUE INTIMACY WITH GOD How important is it?

2023

The Bible says, “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.”¹ In essence, Jesus came on this earth to pay the price for our sins, and reconcile us to His Father, so we may live eternally in His presence. And as we read about His life, it is evident that He was fully committed to carrying out His mission to the end. His three-year ministry was marked by a perfect obedience to His Father’s will. The crowds that followed Him marveled at His teaching. They said He taught as one having authority, not like any of their spiritual leaders. No doubt, the numerous miracles He performed were the primary reason for His popularity. Thousands of people were miraculously fed, and many were healed. The lame walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard and the mute spoke. The demon-possessed were delivered, and the dead were brought back to life. However, there was more to Jesus’ life than meets the eye...

Prayer was a vital part of His daily life, which was mainly observed by a small group of His closest disciples who lived and followed Him wherever He went. He was seen coming down from a mountain where He had spent most of the night in communion with His Father. At dawn, they saw Him go alone to a quiet place to pray. Immediately before His suffering, He prayed for Himself, for His disciples alone, and for those who would believe in Him through their message. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He was seen sweating blood, and asking His Father, if it was possible, to take away from Him the ‘cup’ that He had to drink on our behalf. The ‘cup’, of course, symbolized the suffering He would be required to undergo in the horrible death that awaited Him. But, even in those moments of agony, He persevered in prayer for the fulfillment of his Father’s will, which ultimately led to His most astonishing miracle of all: His own resurrection.

As the Son of God incarnate, Jesus made it a priority to stay in constant communion with His Father. And what is amazing is that through the gift of salvation, we, His redeemed children, are given the privilege of enjoying the same real spiritual communion with our heavenly Father. However, can we honestly say that we faithfully follow Jesus’ example?

Some forty-five years ago when God touched our hearts, my husband and I began a new life. As the Bible says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”² That’s when we understood the real meaning of the term, ‘being born-again’. In other words, what started as a spiritual awakening, evolved into a totally transformed life for us. Like newborn babies, we began to feed on the ‘milk’ of God’s Word. As we dug deeper into His Word, our knowledge of Him as well as of His will for us grew exponentially. The spiritual seed that God had sown in our hearts had blossomed into a wonderful Father/daughter, and Father/son close relationship. In fact, God’s saving grace through His Son, Jesus, made this closeness possible. And as it progressed, our love for Jesus grew, which changed everything in our lives.

We were eager to get involved in any mission God had for us. It wasn’t long for the pastor of the church we attended back then to see our total dedication to the Lord. And after he noticed my husband’s leadership and organizational skills as well as his business experience, he invited him to join the church committee, which he accepted immediately. At one point, he attended a Full Gospel Business Men Fellowship meeting, and eventually became the president of one of their chapters. Later on, he agreed to plan and organize a gospel crusade for a high-profile televangelist. He also appeared on a few gospel television programs to share his personal testimony. All the while, he had a full-time job as a real estate agent, which meant he often worked evenings and weekends.

During that time, I was a stay-at-home mom, trying my best to raise our two young boys. At one point, I was so exhausted that I began to neglect my time with the Lord. I always had a valid reason or a good excuse to postpone or put aside my Bible reading and prayer time, convincing myself that He would understand... In fact, little did I know back then that I was starving myself spiritually, which eventually brought fear, worry and anxiety into my heart. All this to say that we both got caught up in an unstoppable whirlwind of activity that ended up causing a lot of stress for our family. One evening, however, something unexpected happened that changed everything...

Our oldest son, who was about four years old at the time, asked his dad to spend some time with him before he went to bed. With sadness in his eyes, his father told him that he couldn't because he had to leave and work for Jesus. I still remember our little boy's face... Disappointment was written all over it. He had heard these words from his dad many times before, but he never said anything. That time, though, he spoke up and said, "I don't like Jesus!", and quickly ran to his bedroom. At first, my husband and I were in total shock! But then, it became clear that even if we thought our love for the Lord had not changed, we needed to make some significant changes to our lives.

A few days later, after much praying and searching for the Lord's will, my husband knew what he had to do. He had to make time for his family, but most importantly, he needed to spend time alone in prayer. So, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, he resigned from the Full Gospel Business Men Fellowship, and declined the offer to organize another gospel crusade. As for me, I returned to my Bible reading and prayer time, which brought back the amazing peace of God in my heart. You see, the Lord's desire is to have and develop a personal, intimate relationship with us. And on that day, He used our son to teach us a valuable lesson...

In chapter one of the book of Revelation, the Apostle John presents a rather fearsome depiction of Christ as He appeared to him during his exile on the Island of Patmos. So much so that John says he fell at His feet as dead... But immediately the Lord puts His hand on his shoulder, and tells him not to be afraid. He then instructs him to write down what He sees in His church, and to send letters to the seven churches.³ And as we read these letters, we realize that in His great love for us, Christ comes to purify His church and correct His people as He searches their hearts and minds.

In chapter two, for instance, Christ commends the Ephesians for their hard work, patience and discernment. They hated evil, and they stood up for His cause. Through the years, they labored diligently in doing good works, but they were no longer intimate with Him. The Ephesian church had abandoned the love that characterized its early history. What remained was devotion to the truth, but not devotion to Him. Their commitment to truth was a good thing, but unless it's motivated by love for the Lord, that obedience is not fully pleasing to Him. His powerful presence was missing, and the reason for His rebuke. "I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent."⁴ In essence, Christ was making clear that their service, worship and works, all had to do with His presence.

In the same way, God is pleased when our desire is to serve Him with all our heart. But above all, He seeks true intimacy with us. And if we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, shouldn't we also yearn for it? God assigns different missions to His children in order to accomplish His eternal purpose. However, in order to know His will for us, we must sit in His presence, and wait for His guidance on how to serve Him most effectively. Only then, will we bear much fruit for His Kingdom. Jesus confirms this when He said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."⁵

And as we spend time alone with the Lord in prayer, we worship Him, and give Him all the praise and honor He deserves. We open our hearts and minds, ready to learn and obey His Word, as well as listen to what His Spirit has to say. We express our gratitude for His saving grace, for being part of His kingdom, for His promise of eternal life in His presence, and for all the blessings He gives us so generously. We surrender our hearts and lives to His will, and seek guidance, discernment and wisdom to live a life that He would approve of.

In essence, these moments of intimacy with God provide important spiritual nourishment to live out our Christian life. Our knowledge and understanding of His Word increase. Our love for Him grows, and our faith is strengthened. And we are transformed more and more into the person He designed us to be. Our Savior and Lord becomes our focus, our goal, our chief desire, our best friend and companion. In maintaining a habit of constant close communion with Him throughout our day, we place Him at the very center of our lives; in our thoughts, actions, words and service to others. And everything that we do, we do for His glory alone; not ours.

Oh, it's so easy to get distracted from what our primary focus should be, isn't it? Many people and things compete for our attention. Our busy schedule and circumstances in life often interfere with our personal time with God. We can also get so busy doing His work that we begin to go through the motions. Our motivation is not based on the love of and for God, but rather on the works themselves... This is why Christ, in His great love for us, speaks to us and warns us today with the same urgency we see in His letter to the Ephesians.

He commands us to return to our 'first love', which is the zeal and ardor we had at salvation when we realized we loved Christ because He first loved us. In essence, He's saying that our service to others, ministry, mission and works, all have to come from our time together... This is the only kind of love that fuels our compassion and service to others; that gives us the boldness to be His witnesses to those around us, and the power to carry out the good works God has for us to do. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."⁶

As believers and followers of Christ, do we understand the significance of staying close to Him at all times?

With love,

Beth ☺

¹John 3:16 ²2 Corinthians 5:17 ³Revelation 1:9-19 ⁴Revelation 2:4-5 ⁵John 15:4-5 ⁶Ephesians 2:10