

GROWING IN INTIMACY WITH THE FATHER

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Introduction:

Experiencing a growing intimacy with the Father is God's will and foundational for a holy and effective Christian life and ministry.

- Jesus said, John 15:5-8 (NIV) *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. [6] If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. [7] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. [8] This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*
- Paul said, Philip. 3:8-11 (NIV) *"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."*
- Psalm 84:1-4 (NIV) *"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! [2] My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. [3] Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young--a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. [4] Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Selah"*

God is calling us to *"take new ground."* Experiencing intimacy with the Father should be our highest priority in *"taking new ground."*

- Joshua 1:8 (NIV) *"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."*
- James 4:7-8 (Msg) *"So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him scamper. [8] Say a quiet yes to God and he'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field."*

The purpose of this teaching is to challenge all of us to a closer walk with God. Let's resist the spirit of condemnation that says *"you will never achieve intimacy in a way that will please the Father."* However, if there is an area in this teaching that brings conviction by the Holy Spirit, let's embrace the Spirit's work in our life.

Satan has various tools to render the church and leaders ineffective. Here are some major tools that he uses:

1. Keep people in the church from knowing what their calling in life is
2. Attack with discouragement
3. Hinder people from knowing what their spiritual gifts are
4. Cast up obstacles that keep people from having intimacy with the Father

A. THE MEANING OF “INTIMACY”

Webster: (Intimate) – *“marked by a very close association, contact, or familiarity; marked by a warm friendship developing through long association.”* (Intimacy) – *“the state of being intimate.”*

Biblically, intimacy speaks of a very close relationship with God. Read Psalm 63

Zeph. 3:17 (KJV) *“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.”*

B. THE BENEFITS OF INTIMACY

1. Produces peace and rest

Matthew 11:28-30 (Msg) *“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. [29] Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. [30] Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”*

2. Enables us to manifest the Father's glory to the world

2 Cor. 3:17-18 (NIV) *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. [18] And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

3. Experience protection from the accusers

Psalm 31:19-20 (NIV) *“How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you. [20] In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues.”*

4. Gives confidence, hope, and security

Psalm 91:1-5 (NIV) *“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. [2] I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” [3] Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. [4] He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. [5] You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,…”*

5. Gives pure joy

Psalm 16:11 (NIV) *“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”*

6. Inspires vision

Neh. 1:3-4 (NIV) *"They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.' [4] When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."*

7. Creates a sensitivity to sin

Isaiah 6:1-5 (NIV) *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. [2] Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. [3] And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' [4] At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. [5] 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."*

8. Inspires and releases faith

Numbers 14:24 (NIV) *"But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it."*

9. Sets us free from the bondages

Romans 8:5-8 (NIV) *"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. [6] The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; [7] the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. [8] Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."*

10. Develops compassion for the lost

Romans 9:1-4 (NIV) *"I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- [2] I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. [3] For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, [4] the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises."*

11. Gives clarity for our daily lives and ministry

Mark 1:35-39 (NIV) *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. [36] Simon and his companions went to look for him, [37] and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!' [38] Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' [39] So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons."*

12. Experience fellowship with the Father

Psalm 23 – This is a psalm for the living

13. Liberates from binding fear

Psalm 34:4-5 (NIV) I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.
[5] Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

Proverbs 29:25 (NIV) *"Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."*

Proverbs 29:25 (Msg) *"The fear of human opinion disables; trusting in God protects you from that."*

Romans 8:15 (NIV) *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"*

1 John 4:18 (NIV) *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."*

Also: Psalm 27

Additional notes: Ten characteristics and/or results of fear

1. Paralyzes us from accomplishing God's perfect will.
2. Causes us to make decisions based on what people want instead of what God wants.
3. Produces suspicion of people and circumstances.
4. Produces negativity. (Example of Children of Israel in Numbers 13)
5. Comes as a result of pride for operating in fear is a form of self protection
6. Kills trust and faith.
7. When left unchecked, it works like a cancer in one's life, growing step by step as one yields to it. The end result is a stronghold of fear.
8. Affects relationships.
9. Produces excessive anxiety which may lead to physical or emotional sickness.
10. Kills intimacy with the Father and others.

Steps to overcoming fear

1. Acknowledge it to God
2. Confess improper fear as sin
3. Investigate scriptures that speak about fear. Write the verses on cards, memorize them, and turn the promises that God says about fear into prayers. *"Lord, I thank you that you have not given me a spirit of fear.."*
4. Where fear has a binding power, take steps of faith to defeat it. For example, if you have fear concerning a person, take a step of faith to reach out to that person in a way that overcomes the fear.
5. Investigate scriptures that speak about faith. Fear is the devil' "faith." We overcome fear by faith.
6. Ask God for courage in areas where you struggle with fear.
7. If there is a stronghold of fear, seek special counsel or prayer in helping you to find deliverance from that stronghold.

For reflection: What are additional benefits that you have discovered from having an intimate relationship with God?

3. HOW DOES ONE GROW IN INTIMACY?

1. Choose daily to walk in intimacy
2. Cry out to God for this relationship
3. Walk in the light—be quick to confess sins to God and others
4. Live with a humble heart
5. Spend time in God's Word and meditate
6. Take time to hear from God
7. Live with integrity
8. Resist legalism
9. Embrace God's grace
10. Spend time in communion with God
11. Read books about persons who experienced intimacy with the father
12. Fast with the goal of knowing God more intimately
13. Grow in a variety of spiritual disciplines
14. Make necessary changes in our daily schedules

For reflection: What have I discovered is helpful to me in my search for intimacy with God? _____

What are two ways that I would like to explore further to grow in intimacy? _____

4. OUTSTANDING EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUALS WHO DEMONSTRATED A DESIRE FOR SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

1. Enoch – Genesis 5:24
2. David – Psalm 42:1-2
3. Mary who washed the feet of Jesus – Luke 7:36-50
5. Jesus – Luke 4:1-13
6. Anna in the temple – Luke 2:36-38

5. HINDERANCES TO INTIMACY

1. Overtaken by busyness

Solution: Evaluate priorities; consider what can be eliminated; make necessary adjustments; seek counsel in taking these steps; be accountable for new goals

2. Taking special time with God out of duty rather than desire

Solution: Acknowledge the struggle; look for creative ways to make the “quiet time” come alive.

3. Unconfessed sin

He who covers his sin will not prosper; create in me a clean heart O God

Solution: Daily confess all known and unknown sin and trust the blood of Jesus for cleansing.

4. Little or no desire to commune with God

Solution: Ask God to put the desire in your heart; evaluate why there is little or no desire.

5. Unforgiveness or bitterness

root of bitterness will defile

Solution: Be willing to release all offenses;

6. Excessive attention to T.V. or any worldly activity that one gives more time to than God

Solution: Evaluate what activities are standing in the way of intimacy; share your conviction with a trusted friend; if you feel convicted that sin has transpired,

confess your sin to God; set new goals; be accountable to another person who will hold you accountable

7. Unresolved anger

Solution: Seek discernment from the Lord, or from a qualified counselor, what may be the root of the anger; deal with unresolved issues from the past

8. Bad habits or addictions

Solution: Confess bad habits or addictions as sin; seek council on how to overcome them; depending on the depth of the problem, rehab may be needed

9. Compromise (*doing something that you know is wrong but you try to justify it as being right*)

Solution: Confess and acknowledge to God when compromises have been made; Ask God to give you an “undivided” heart.

10. Self-centeredness

Solution: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal where self is in control; acknowledge the sin of self idolatry; ask Jesus to be No. 1 in your life

11. Negativity or critical spirit

Solution: Confess this kind of spirit as sin; confess the spirit of pride that produces this spirit; seek to understand what other root causes there may be that produces these negative attitudes and critical spirit; ask God to build faith in your character; begin to see things through the eyes of Jesus

For reflection: What could suggest as additional obstacles to intimacy with God?

What are two obstacles that you would struggle with the most? _____

Conclusion:

Have we lost our first love? The Lord reminded the church at Ephesus their condition and he reminds us today.

Rev. 2:4-5 (Msg) *"But you walked away from your first love—why? What's going on with you, anyway? [5] Do you have any idea how far you've fallen? A Lucifer fall! "Turn back! Recover your dear early love. No time to waste, for I'm well on my way to removing your light from the golden circle.*

Rev. 3:15 (Msg) *"I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot!"*

The Lord of the universe stands at the doorway of our heart, waiting, and desiring an intimate relationship with his children. Will we accept the invitation?

Rev. 3:20 (Msg) *"Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you."*

For reflection:

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being little intimacy and 10 being high intimacy, where am I personally in terms of an intimate relationship with the Father?

2. Based on this outline, what are the two greatest benefits that I've experienced in terms of my intimate relationship with the Father?

3. What steps is the Holy Spirit asking me to take in order that I may grow more in intimacy with the Father?

5. To assist me in taking the steps I need to take, am I willing to be accountable to another person? They may pray for me, encourage me, and challenge me to keep my commitment. Who is this person? _____

We are living in days of growing spiritual warfare. The Bible warns us that in the last days, *"The love of most will grow cold"* (Matthew 24:12). In order to be effective leaders, we must seek an intimacy with the Father and with Jesus as never before. We don't do this out of religious obligation but out of a love relationship with the Father. As we *"remain"* in Him and commune with Him, we will have the spiritual strength to minister effectively and have fruit that will remain! ALL GLORY TO GOD!