

Intimacy with God

By Santiago Lange



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. In that passage the patriarch was reminded of God's covenant of grace with him through a revelation, through a dream. This expression of God's loving, providential care drew Jacob into a closer fellowship with God. This was at a time when all of Jacob's plans had been foiled, things were not going well for him and he had only a stone for a pillow.

Understanding the intended meaning of her minister's sermon, Sarah Adams skillfully condensed that Biblical story into five stanzas writing the lyrics of the famous "Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!"

Adams wrote...

"Even though it be a cross that raises me; Still all my song shall be, Nearer, my God, to Thee. There let the way appear, steps unto heaven; All that Thou sends me, in mercy given-- Angels to beckon me Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee!"

Some touching stories have been told of how this hymn was used in the hour of crisis. For instance, William McKinley, the assassinated American President, whispered some of its words on his deathbed. And in 1912, as the "Titanic" sank into the icy waters of the Atlantic sending 1,500 people into eternity, survivors said that the band played, "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

How can a simple mortal enjoy friendship with God? What possible common ground could bring us together nearer in intimacy and friendship? These are vital questions that need to be answered for our very future depends on the answers. Intimacy with God is something all should desire. The thought of a human becoming friends with God boggles our minds. As small, weak creatures, what could we possibly have in common with the Almighty Creator of the universe? Amazingly, God does deeply desire that we know Him intimately.

Enoch, we are told in the Scriptures, was a man who walked with God. In the early chapters of Genesis, we read about Adam, about Seth and about Noah. Others are also mentioned. In each case the Bible text says that each man lived for so and so many years. Every man was said to "live" from the time he became a father to the time he was buried, except in the case of Noah and Enoch. Other persons mentioned in the early chapters of Genesis also "lived out" their allotted time, but Noah and Enoch, we are told, "walked with God". This is an important distinction and we should not simply gloss over it.

"Walking with God" is a common phrase in Eastern countries, indicating constant, familiar and confidential communion. It portrays intimacy and implies a situation of special nearness to God. When the Bible says that Enoch and Noah "walked with God," it means they both realized God's presence and enjoyed His communion in extraordinary measure. They cultivated a deepening intimacy with God, not an occasional stroll, but in a walk that covered a long time, and that in a godless environment.

Abraham, we read later was God's friend (see James 2:23). Moses had a special relationship with God. Before the tabernacle was built, he put up a tent on the outskirts of the camp of Israel. It was to this "tent of meeting" that he would go so he could talk to God face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. Moses' intimate communion with God was a result of not only his personal contact with Him, but his candidness and openness with God. Nothing was between them. Moses did not hold anything back or hide his feelings. This unrestricted, face-to-face dialogue with God does not surprise us because this is the kind of communication we would expect in deep friendship. Job experienced an intimate friendship with God. Job reflected on his life and recalled a time when he enjoyed special friendship with God.

A close intimacy with his Creator is what made David a man after God's own liking. David clearly enjoyed intimacy with God. One of the primary reasons David was intimate with God was because of the hours he spent in prayer in personal communication with Him.

The apostle Paul had an ardent desire to know God intimately. Intimacy goes beyond abstract knowledge of God or facts about Him but knowing Him personally and intimately. Paul was not referring to mere intellectual knowledge; he was talking about having a relationship with God on a personal level, enjoying friendship and communion, having a special intimacy with Him. Intimacy with God is the Christian goal.

When Queen Victoria reigned in England, she occasionally would visit some of the humble cottages of her subjects. One time she entered the home of a widow and stayed to enjoy a brief period of Christian fellowship. Later on, the poor woman was taunted by her worldly neighbors. "Granny," they said, "who's the most honored guest you've ever entertained in your home?" They expected her to say it was Jesus, for despite their constant ridicule of her Christian witness, they recognized her deep spirituality. But to their surprise she answered, "The most honored guest I've entertained is Her Majesty the Queen." "Did you say the Queen? Ah, we caught you this time? How about this Jesus you're always talking about? Isn't He your most honored guest?" Her answer was definite and scriptural, "No, indeed! He's not a guest. HE LIVES HERE!"

Source: Be Still and Know by Millie Stamm

In the book of James is a passage where God calls us near.

James 4:8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

James was writing passionately about Christians living close to God and having a warm, personal intimate relationship with Him. How is it possible for God's children today to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him? It is possible only through Jesus. John said that it is through

Jesus that we are given an understanding that makes it possible for us to have knowledge of God.

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

The word "know" in this verse means to go beyond intellectual apprehension, or information. "know" denotes knowledge gained by personal experience, close association and fellowship. A relationship is something that must be nurtured. The idea is that this relationship should grow, deepen and be dynamic. Our knowledge of God, must be cultivated. God wants His children to grow and mature in their knowledge of and relationship with Him.

2 Pet 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever.

Our Christian goal is to develop our relationship with God, get closer to and deepen our fellowship with Him as we continue to live our life of faith. But how IS intimacy developed? Does it come by accident? Intimacy is increasingly rare in our society. One reason is that intimacy is founded on trust and we live in a distrustful age. Faith is no longer fashionable, and the many wars and double-dealing in high places has eroded our confidence in institutions we once revered. The more trusting a person is, the easier it is for another to trust him in a personal relationship. Intimacy builds on trust, but an initial risk must be taken before trust can develop. It is so easy to misplace our trust. Even when a person is trustworthy someone must have enough courage to place their trust in the person. It is trust that connects us to God in friendship.

“Scripture emphasizes the importance of putting one’s trust in God. This trust, which is nurtured by an understanding of God’s revealed truth, finds expression in a life lived according to his purpose”.

Manser, M. H. (2009). Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies. London: Martin Manser.

Distrust alienates us from God. Distrust destroys personal relationships. Adam's and Eve's basic problem in the Garden was a lack of trust in God. Satan said, "You shall not surely die, ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Adam and Eve believed that God was withholding something good from them, they failed to trust. They also felt that their distrust was valid. "Since you are not willing to give me what is best for me (the forbidden fruit), I have a right to sever the relationship and take care of myself. We can be the masters and deciders of our own destiny. They no longer believed in God's goodness and trustworthiness and so they decided to take control of their own wellbeing. Sin is simply our effort to replace what we think are deficiencies in God's goodness. It is trusting our self instead of trusting God. We are interested in self-preservation, self-development, self-nourishment, self-care, self-expression, self-protection, self-enhancement. As we read in...

2 Tim 3:1-3 1 "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,

unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good".

Humanity's self-centeredness is not only alienating us from others but from God. It is no wonder that God seems distant. We continually question God's goodness. If you are a good God, we ask, why would you allow an airplane to crash and all people die for no apparent reason. We tell God: "Prove yourself! I doubt your goodness. Look at what has happened in my life and in the lives of people I love. Do you know what it's like living with a constant dread that something terrible might happen? Since you provide me with no guarantee that nothing bad will happen, you need to convince me that you are trustworthy."

Others cope by denying that God is involved in human affairs. Distrust gnaws at us from many different angles. The most basic source of distrust is our own pride. We have a tendency to rely on our own wisdom and strength rather than God's. Our society's preoccupation with security, comfort, and self-fulfillment also feeds distrust. The more we believe in providing for ourselves and trusting in what we have, the less we will believe in God's provision and trust in Him for our security. We put ourselves and our own well-being first. Then, to make things worse, we don't even recognize how self-centered we really are.

The tainted nature within each of us is built on a central lie: God cannot be trusted with the things that matter most. We pressure ourselves to make things happen (I've got to make these people see that they are wrong). We worry that we might fail (I don't know if I can get through to them). We develop bitterness over the lack of help we receive (I can't understand why God isn't doing more to change their minds and how no one else is terribly helpful either.). Sometimes we only trust God to take care of us. We expect Him to fill our needs. Any relationship flounders when we are only interested in what it has to offer me. When we are more interested in what God can do for us, than in what He can through us, the relationship flounders.

God speaks out through Isaiah a warning that is also relevant for us today.

Isa 58:1-3 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers".

We want our faith to make us happy or to heal us, or to make us wealthy and when it doesn't we seek to distrust God. But trust is basic for intimacy with God. Trust was the key to the faith of the great figures in the Bible. Intimacy and faith builds on trust. But we must be willing to become vulnerable. An initial risk must be taken before trust can develop. The risk is called an intelligent leap of faith. Once taken, the more one puts into a relationship in trust, the more commitment increases.

Daniel had trusted God when he was thrown in the lion's den, but that initial trust was what developed his intimacy with God. In order for God to accomplish his purpose in Daniel, Daniel

had to trust God. Intimacy with God was developed as he trusted God and allowed God to lead him through the lion's den.

Joseph's great intimacy came as God healed him and set him as second man in charge of Egypt. But it was Joseph's trust in God that developed intimacy. His faith was developed through the hardship of being sold into slavery and imprisoned for his innocence for seven years. We must trust God regardless, that's the message.

Hab 3:17-19 17 "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

Finding God in the midst of our difficulties is more important than finding relief for present conditions and feeling good about ourselves, etc. We must trust God before we can find Him.

To Israel God said in...

Isaiah 43:1-3 "But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead".

To the apostle Paul God said, "My grace is sufficient." Paul rightly responded by saying, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor 12:10)

To each one of us God promises:

1 Cor 10:13 "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it".

Christ too, has words of assurance for those who question the concern of the Father. He says, for example in Mt 7:11 "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

God is our Father! We have been made in his image, and it is therefore natural that he should care for His own. He is willing to do anything that is necessary for the sake of His children. I cannot imagine a father hating his son or mocking his son's hunger. Remember this: God is not evil. Jesus always pointed to the constant concern that the Father has for the birds of the air and questions, "Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt 6:26).

When questions arise and doubts creep into our minds because our fare has become the "bread of affliction," it is well to remember the many promises God has made.

The experiences of others prove God's concern. Did God not pledge his support to Jacob? Languishing in affliction in the land of Egypt, the sons of Jacob cry out to their God. And the God answered:

Ex 3:7 "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows".

"I have seen . . . I have heard . . . I know . . . and I have come down to deliver." God is concerned when his people suffer. And we can trust God to deliver. The Psalmist reveals a bit of personal history by testifying: "I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me." (Ps 118:13). There was no doubt about it as far as he was concerned.

Alexander the coppersmith did Paul great harm. Paul tells us of his first defense and how all men deserted him.

2 Tim 4:17-18 "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen".

The gift of God's Son declares His concern. God gave us the greatest gift of all. If He has already given the greatest token of His love, will He not give unto us the lesser gifts? What greater proof of God's trustworthiness. God graciously sent us a portrait of Himself in Christ Jesus.

We need to trust God for our salvation. Scripture records stories of ordinary people -- weak, stumbling, sinful people -- who found a path to God and stayed on it. Hosea proclaimed God's compassion even though his own heart was shattered by an unfaithful wife. The hatred of friends couldn't drown God's fire in Jeremiah's heart. And Peter was so thrilled with the memory of Christ's sacrifice he didn't, according to tradition, feel worthy to die in the same upright position as his Lord.

After Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded in the tower of London they found in his Bible these true and striking lines, written perhaps the night before his death:

***Even such is time, that takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
And pays us but with age and dust;
Who in the dark and silent grave,
When we have wandered all our ways,
Shuts up the story of our days.
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
My God shall raise me up, I trust!***

All the things of this world he had lost, but he had kept his faith; and faith spoke to him of a hope and life beyond the grave. **Source:** <https://www.bartleby.com/331/487.html>

Sometimes we as Christians need to stop along life's road and look back. Although it might have been winding and steep, we can see how God directed us by His faithfulness. When we face difficulties, we sometimes forget God's past faithfulness. We see only the detours and the dangerous path. But look back and you will also see the joy of victory, the challenge of the climb, and the presence of your traveling Companion who has promised never to leave you nor forsake you. □