

Pursue His Presence

One evening my husband, Gene, and I were at home alone. He was working a crossword puzzle, and I was reading a book. Neither one of us was saying a word. In fact, we had been silent for a long time, so engrossed were we in what we were doing.

Suddenly Gene said to me, "You know, it doesn't get any better than this." I had to agree with him. Intimacy doesn't get any better than just being in the presence of the one you love.

Before we were married we probably would have defined intimacy as sexual passion and romance; however, we have learned in the 40 years of our marriage that intimacy is not defined by emotional highs but by the comfort of another's presence. True intimacy is rooted in ongoing relationship that enables us to know one another so well that neither words nor feelings are needed to communicate. Presence is enough.

The biblical word for intimacy is "knowing." "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived" (Gen. 4:1, NKJV). But contrast Adam's experience with David's one-night stand. The Bible says that David "lay" with Bathsheba (see 2 Sam. 11:4).

David shared a moment of passion with Bathsheba, but he did not "know" her, for they had no ongoing relationship. They were not intimate in the biblical sense of the word.

God's desire for man from the very beginning has been for us to know Him and to walk in intimate fellowship with Him. He proved this by forming the body of the first man, Adam, with His own hands and breathing life into him face-to-face rather than simply speaking him into existence as He had all other created things (see Gen. 2:7). He did not distance Himself from Adam until Adam sinned. At that moment God set into motion His redemptive plan, designed to bring fallen man once again into the intimacy He had intended.

The apostle Paul understood God's desire and considered everything in his life a loss other than the privilege of knowing Christ. He wrote: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all I may know Him" (Phil. 3:7-10, emphasis added).

Clearly, Paul was seeking a level of relationship with God that cannot be attained through intellectual activity, religious works or temporary emotional experiences. He was seeking intimacy. He wanted to know the width, length, depth and height of God (see Eph. 3:18).

Such intimacy does not just happen. It is something we must pursue, both in our marriages and in our relationships with God. But how do we do this? Here are three simple guidelines:

1. Avoid substituting religious activity for relationship. This was the mistake the Israelites made. They came to believe that their religious works were the same as their relationships with God. Isaiah condemned them for practicing only outward religion with no corresponding relationship (see Is. 1).

Jesus preached repeatedly about this error. He warned against practicing hypocrisy as the Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day, did. They worshiped God with their mouths, but their hearts were far from Him (see Matt. 23). He also rebuked those who were prophesying, casting out devils and performing wonderful works in His name but who did not know Him (see Matt. 7:21-23).

I learned early in my marriage that service done for my husband, such as cooking his meals, washing his dirty laundry and so on, had nothing to do with intimacy. These acts of love, as wonderful as they were, did not lead to intimacy between us and could not be substituted for intimacy. In fact,

sometimes I was so exhausted from serving him I had no energy to pursue intimacy!

We must beware of making this error with God. We should serve God, but service must be preceded by relationship.

Enoch is a good example of someone who lived by this principle. In fact, we don't have a record of anything he actually did for God. Yet in the book of Hebrews, he is lauded as a man of great faith (see Heb. 11:5-6). Why? Because he walked with God (see Gen. 5:22,24). Enoch sought relationship with Him, and God was pleased with that.

God is more pleased to have us walk with Him in relationship than He is to have us serve Him. This is not to negate the importance of service. But we must be sure that our service is born out of relationship.

2. Seek the presence of God in His Word. Intimacy can never be established outside of presence. Unfortunately, as Christians we aren't always sure how to enter into God's presence.

Many times we seek experiences that move us emotionally and cause us to feel a sense of closeness with Him. But we can't expect to have such experiences on a daily basis. So how can we enter His presence regularly in the midst of our busy lives?

One way is to learn to hear His voice through His Word. When God first created Adam and Eve, they were able to fellowship with Him directly. Genesis 3:8 tells us, "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (KJV). God's presence was His voice walking in the garden.

Today, God's intimate presence with us is still His voice. We

hear it in a variety of ways—through signs, gifts of the Spirit and other such experiences; and whenever God speaks directly to our hearts. But one aspect of His voice that is always available is His written Word, the Bible. Even when we don't feel His presence, His voice is with us in His Word.

Jesus Himself pointed out the role of His Word in establishing relationship. “‘If you love Me, keep My commandments. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him'” (John 14:15, 21, NKJV).

The presence of God in His Word is the way He daily establishes intimacy with us. It is the way we come to know His innermost thoughts and ways.

As a wife, I listen for the voice of my husband and appreciate the words he speaks to me. It is a high priority for me to set aside time every day to be with him.

Can I do any less as a Christian and still have an intimate relationship with God? We must take time very day to fellowship with God as He speaks to us intimately and personally through His Word.

3. Commit yourself to God. We can never achieve intimacy through a casual encounter or an on-again, off-again relationship. The Bible teaches us that sexual experience without commitment is fornication. Let us beware lest we become fornicators in our relationship with God, seeking only pleasure and experience without commitment.

The Israelites fell short on commitment, and they never entered into fullness of relationship with God (see 1 Cor. 10:5-11). Intimacy with God cannot be realized by attending church for a few hours on Sunday morning or going to conferences and seminars once in a while. We can know God only to the extent that we commit to Him.

In the final analysis, faith is not concerned with what we believe. The essence of our faith is whom we believe. The what of faith can be known by study and even experienced by emotions. The whom of faith, on the other hand, must be encountered through intimate relationship.

Let us pursue intimacy with God. Let us serve Him because we know Him. Let us determine that we will seek relationship, not experiences. Let us know that all we really need is the ever-present voice of God in His Word.

I have been a Christian for 45 years and Spirit-filled for 30 of those years. Take it from me: It really doesn't get any better than this.

Read a companion devotional.

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