

Intimacy with God

Lesson #1: The Four Circles of Intimacy

I. Introduction

Mark Twain described the River Platte as being "a mile wide and an inch deep". Too often, that is also an able description of our modern Christianity. There is little depth to the "walk with Christ".

- A. "Ordinary" Christians versus the "Great" Christians
- B. Participation in the resurrection life of Christ...on ANY calendar day!
- C. Knowing God versus Knowing about God (Knowing God by J.I. Packer)
 1. One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of Him.
 2. One can know a great deal about godliness without much knowledge of God.
- D. Knowing God **intimately** is:
 1. A personal matter

"You can have all the right notions in your head without ever tasting in your heart the realities to which they refer." (Knowing God, p. 34)

Ps. 34:8 "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him."
 2. Emotional as well as cognitive

The believer rejoices (Acts 11:23), he cries (Ps. 119:136 he is transported through joy (I Pet. 1:8).
 3. Ultimately, the intimacy is based on GRACE

"We do not make friends with God, God makes friends with us." (Knowing God, p. 36)

Gal. 4:9 "But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces^[a]? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"

Ex. 33:17 God knows Moses by name

Jer. 1:5 Jeremiah is known before birth

John 10:14 The good shepherd knows His sheep
 4. The DEGREE of intimacy is determined by us

Unfortunately, "the qualifying conditions are more stringent and exacting than we are prepared to meet, so we settle for a less demanding level of Christian living."
(Enjoying Intimacy with God, p. 11)

II. Intimacy

A. Definition: Marked by close acquaintance, indicative of one's deepest, innermost nature, marked by privacy.

1. Cognitive / intellectual intimacy
2. Experiential intimacy
3. Emotional intimacy

B. The spiritual parallel to the physical experiences of life

"All the things that we experience when we fall in love are evidence of what happens when we are loved (by God) and saved." (Five Smooth Stones, Peterson, p. 60)

Look at the Song of Solomon...the first word in Hebrew is "Yissaqent" which means "Kiss Me!" It is a demand for intimacy.

Intimacy is a requirement of wholeness...physically and spiritually.

Jer. 31:3 "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

III. The Circles of Intimacy as seen in the Old Testament: Moses and the children of Israel (from Enjoying Intimacy with God, J. Oswald Sanders)

A. The Outer Circle: The Entire Nation See Ex. 19:11-12

Limitations: The people could only approach the mountain, not ascend

Vision: The glory of the Lord was a consuming fire

Impact: Very little "Come make us a god who will go before us" (Ex. 32:1)

B. The Second Circle: The "Elders" See Ex. 24:9-11

Limitations: They had to worship at a distance (see Ex. 24:1)

Vision: Limited to a glimpse of a theophany

Impact: No permanent transformation. They participated in the golden calf

C. The Third Circle: Joshua See Ex. 24:13-14

Limitations: Only two qualified for this level of intimacy, Joshua and Moses (see Ex. 33:10-11)

Vision: Joshua was present when Moses saw the Shekinah Glory of God

Impact: Joshua becomes Moses' successor (Joshua 1:1-9)

D. The Inner Circle: Moses alone See Ex. 24:15-17

Limitations: None...Moses "saw" God "face to face"

Note: This is not a violation of the principle laid out in Ex. 33:20, John 1:18 and I Tim. 6:16. Moses is seeing a form or similitude of almighty God.

Vision: The GLORY of God (His "afterglow")

Impact: God's glory impacted even Moses' countenance..."the skin of his face shown..." (Ex. 34:29)

IV. The Circles of Intimacy as seen in the New Testament: The disciples and apostles

- A. The Outer Circle: The Seventy See Luke 10:1-20

Limitations: Not many, they ministered in His name" He that hears you, hears me..." Luke 10:16

Vision: They sat and heard directly from Jesus

Impact: They were able to accomplish the mission they were sent out to do (Luke 10:17)

- B. The Second Circle: The Apostles See Matt. 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, Luke 6:13-16 and Acts 1:13

Limitations: Not many, they traveled with Jesus for three years.

Vision: They saw and heard regularly from the Son of God. He meticulously trained them!

Impact: Trace their ministries through the book of Acts. History records that each died a martyr's death proclaiming the gospel.

- C. The Inner Circle: Peter, James and John

Limitations: None! They had intimate contact with Christ. They experienced four special events that the others did not:

1. The Raising of Jairus' Daughter (Luke 8:51)
2. The Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:2)
3. From the Mount of Olives, the prediction of the ends times (Mark. 13:3)
4. The prayer time in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37)

Vision: Their intimacy with Christ motivated them to serve Him.

Impact: Look at Peter in Acts 2, look at Peter and John in Acts 3 and 4, and see James in Acts 12.

V. In which circle are you living? What can you do to deepen your intimacy with Christ? (Increased communication, deeper awareness, avoid "games")

- A. "Ya gotta want it!"

"Lord, I do not want to languish on the outer edges of Christianity. I want to sit directly at your feet."

B. "Ya gotta go for it!"

"Lord, I will not remain a "second class" believer. However 'impressive the acts of God and however exalted the truths of God, they are not too great or too high to be experienced by ordinary people in the minutiae of the everyday". I seek intimacy!"

Discussion Questions:

1. When you think of being "intimate" with the Lord, does it make you comfortable or uncomfortable?
2. How does your understanding of what prayer is (and is not) impact the "level" of your intimacy with Christ?