

Intimacy with God

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[0:00] Over the last 30 plus years, probably closer to 35 years, I have had the privilege and the responsibility!

I have been working on several pastor search committees for this church. There are a number of people in here that have done that. That is a group that is charged with the responsibility of locating the person we believe to be God's man to shepherd this congregation.

It is no small task. The questions that we ask and the topics that we covered 30 years ago seem in hindsight to be very basic and embarrassingly shallow.

We would sit down with the candidate and we would say, do you believe the Bible? Well, what was he going to say? No, I study the Koran. I mean, you know, it is not going to happen.

How are you going to get everybody in the world saved? That was one of our favorite questions, Mike. Are you divorced? Do you drink alcohol?

[1:31] And Lord forbid, do you go to dances? That was pretty much it back 30 years ago. I think that's a good idea.

We might touch on seminary training, but that just about covered it. Perhaps it is a sign of age or, I hope, some degree of spiritual maturity.

But the questions that these committees ask now are much more insightful and in-depth. One comment that we often lead off with is, tell me about your quiet time.

How often do you get alone with God? And when you are alone with God, what do you two talk about? That's where the rubber meets the road, isn't it?

I don't think we can be spiritually successful, as God defines success, without spending an appreciable amount of time alone with the Lord on a daily basis.

[2:41] Believers should spend time with the Lord, but we must face the fact that time is the one thing we don't have very much of.

Solomon summed that up in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 when he said, God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated.

Perhaps we can learn from Dwight L. Moody and others have been attributed this as well, but one morning when he got up and quipped that he had so much to do that day, he wouldn't be able to get through the day without at least three hours of prayer.

Now, obviously, it is important for pastors and ministers to spend time alone with God.

But let's be honest and take it a further step. It is equally important that the individual church members do the same. We are all to do that, and I believe our success or failure as a church is directly related to the amount of time we spend alone with God.

[3:56] So this morning I want to talk to you about intimacy with God. While neither that title nor the content is original with me, I believe such a study is an ideal way to get us started for the week.

I hope that each of us will experience a freshness as we encounter Christ in the secret places of our heart. I hope this will happen here at Highland and everywhere we find ourselves the rest of our lives, and perhaps some will leave here today and will enter into an experience at a level of intimacy with God never before achieved.

Humans are drawn to deep things. We like deep jungles, deep waters, deep caves, deep woods, and deep thoughts.

Once we experience the deep, seldom are we satisfied to dwell again on the surface. Paul states in 1 Corinthians, the Spirit of God searches all things, even the depths of God.

In Romans chapter 11, Paul wrote this, speaking of deep things, Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, how unfathomable his ways.

[5:46] The prophet Daniel said, God knows what is in the darkness. I wish I knew that when I was a little boy. It's comforting now.

The psalmist testified God's judgments are like a great deep. As believers, we learn that deep things intrigue us.

My parents lived in Puerto Rico for 11 years. I used to go out to Isla Verde, the Green Island. You knew that, didn't you? I would go out there, and I would snorkel. You'd see beautiful fish, beautiful coral. And I would start at 2 feet and go out, and it would be 8 feet, and then it would be 15 feet, and then it would be 22 feet, and then it was black.

And I turned around and I started back. The black, Puerto Rico is the tip of a mountain in the Atlantic Ocean. The black, we went from 22 feet to 14,000 feet.

[6:55] Now, you can drown in two inches of water, but I didn't want to drown in 14,000 feet of water, so I'd go back where I could see coral. Deep, deep things.

We learn from deep things, and they intrigue us. But it doesn't take long in our walk with God when we discover that the nuggets of gold lying in the spiritual depths cannot be discovered by natural means, and it cannot be discovered by the natural mind.

God reserves those discoveries to those who are completely his, who sell out to him, whose hearts truly belong to him.

And when this occurs, it is a beautiful thing to behold it is then that we achieve intimacy with God. Now, let's be honest.

The age in which we live does not promote spiritual intimacy. We are more like stampeding cattle or a herd of sheep going our own way.

[8:16] When was the last time any one of us had time to lie down in green pastures and to sit beside still waters?

God is not looking for the super intelligent. That's comforting to me. God is not looking for the super spiritual, another comfort to me.

God is looking for some men and women that want to go deep. The question is that you need to ask yourselves this morning, can we be such men and women?

Can we be those people? If we are, I promise you Highland Park will be changed forever. The Apostle Paul and not Tom Holland will set the tone for our study.

He will do so by the power of the Spirit who wrote these words. And I'm going to do something a little different this morning. I'm going to read this out of the Amplified. I don't do that very often. But in Philippians chapter 3, verse 10 in the Amplified, for my determined purpose is that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection, which it exerts over believers and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed in spirit into His likeness even to His death.

[10:16] Let those words dwell in us richly. Mull them over in your mind. Today, this week, talk to God about those inspired words on your knees that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving, recognizing, understanding, and being continually transformed.

Is there anything more important and less pursued in our day than concepts such as these?

We need to thirst for God in the same way the deer thirsted for water. As the deer pants for the water brook, so my soul pants for thee, O God, so my soul for God thirsts.

I thirst for the living God. Ask yourself a question this morning. Are you thirsty for the Lord?

Can you drink from deep waters of the intimacy with God?

[11:35] Think of the Apostle Paul. He had very impressive credentials. Philippians 3, verse 5 and 6.

Circumcised the eighth day of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, blameless, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness of the law found blameless.

That's quite a resume. That's quite a resume. Who wouldn't be impressed with such a resume? But Paul, after he, through a name change from Saul to Paul, he was not content to stop there.

He wanted something more. He wanted exactly what everyone in my hearing who was a follower of the Lord Jesus should want.

Again, Philippians chapter 3, now verse 7 and 8. But whatever things were gained to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[13:02] More than that, I count all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.

Paul was serious about those things that came before. That's the Greek word from newer and dung. And he says, all those things are rubbish.

Now I just focus on gaining Christ, knowing him intimately. We can go deep, my friends.

We must go deep. I want to mention to you four disciplines that can help us take this walk into the deep things of God.

The first of these is the discipline of simplicity. The discipline of simplicity. simplicity. Everything around us wars against the discipline of simplicity.

[14:22] We live cluttered lives. Again, Solomon says we've made ourselves very complicated. We live in a cluttered and confused world and we know that's not God's purpose because God is never the author of confusion.

If we're going to reorder our lives, and that's really what we're talking about here, it is time to simplify. If we do not, we will be far too exhausted to enter into the deep, silent recesses of our hearts and to hear the voice of God through his word as he communicates with us.

Christian hearts filled with the clutter of life grow cold, very cold to the things of Christ. Again, we heed Paul's words this time in 1 Corinthians.

I'm afraid, didn't know that Paul had some fears, did you? I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your mind should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

It's simple and it's pure. It's devotion to Christ. We should be seekers of the simple and the pure. To do so, we must learn and determine to not be as the world is.

[15:59] We must know contentment with Christ. I heard John MacArthur once said in 40 years of ministry, he never had anyone walk up to him and say, you know, I'm really content this week.

I'm really content. He said, he's never had anyone do that. We must battle the sin of envy. How often do we want to be like the person next to us or the boss or the guy down the street?

The desire to succeed is often driven by envy and envy is the enemy of simplicity. In the Gulag Archipelago, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who spent a lot of his life in the prisons of Siberia, he said these very simple but profound words.

It is enough if you don't freeze in the cold and if thirst and hunger don't claw at your insides. If your back isn't broken, if your feet can walk, if your arms can bend, if both eyes can see, if both ears can hear, then whom should you envy and why?

Our envy of others devours us most of all. To go deep is essential that we practice the discipline of simplicity.

[17:28] But that practice is not automatic. it requires intense determination. Determine to seek the discipline of simplicity.

Second, we should seek the discipline of silence. Seek the discipline of silence. God said in the Psalms, be still and know that I am God.

That is profound. Slow down, be still, and know that I am God. Our world wars against stillness.

We live in a world of noise. on my farm are deep woods with a beautiful outcrop of huge boulders.

They are surrounded by trees. In the fall and winter months, I go there to be alone with God. I don't go there in the spring and summer.

[18:42] The ticks and chiggers own those woods. But after a hard freeze, they are mine again. And I go there to be alone with God. I don't go there enough, but I do go there.

I have been going there since I was a child. And I can tell you, it is my favorite place on earth.

In the days of my youth, there were no man-made sounds there. You heard no man-made sounds.

You did hear the sounds of God's creation.

You heard birds. You heard turkey, squirrels. Every now and then deer would walk by. Now I go down there and there are the sounds of progress.

I have that in quotation marks in case you can't see. I sit there and I want to hear silence, but I hear airplanes and trains and truck traffic on Highway 75, which is two miles away, oil wells pumping, and other noise pollution.

[20 : 03] The modern world. our world is restless, noisy, and filled with action. It is no small task to get to a place of solitude and then be silent, be still.

But if we're going to develop a deep, intimate relationship with God, we must seek times silence. In the Hebrew language, the psalmist commands us to stop what we're doing and be quiet. I don't know why the translators in English didn't just say that. That's what it says.

Stop and be quiet. And if we truly want to go into the deep things of God, we must practice the discipline of silence.

One writer has said this, being silent before God sharpens the keen edge of our souls, sensitizing us to those ever so slight nudgings from the Father.

[21 : 15] Father. Noise and busy schedules close our ears to the still small voice of our maker. And our whole world mitigates against quietness.

In that regard, I'll read you the words of a theologian I doubt seriously if any of you ever heard of him. I hadn't. Henry Nolan. But I found these to be quite insightful.

There was a time not too long ago without radios and televisions stop signs, yield signs, merge signs, bumper stickers, and the ever-present announcements indicating price increases of special sales.

There was a time without the advertisements which now cover the whole city with words. He goes on. Recently I was driving through Los Angeles and suddenly I had the strange sensation of driving through a huge dictionary.

wherever I looked there were words trying to take my eyes from the road. They said use me, take me, buy me, drink me, smell me, touch me, and kiss me.

[22 : 35] In such a world who can maintain respect for words? Beloved, we need silence before God.

Silence makes us sensitive to spiritual things. In silence we can appreciate the presence of God. In silence we can feel his grace.

In silence God will speak through our hearts through his word. In silence we can go deep. We can go deep. So how do we experience silence?

in a noisy world? How are we going to do that? Well guess what? That depends on you and I.

Depends on us. We must build into our cluttered busy and noise filled lives a place of solace and of silence.

[23 : 41] And you may say well I don't have a farm I don't have an outcrop of rocks with trees I can't find a silent place do you have a closet? For one thing though if we're going to do this in this world we're going to have to learn to say no.

We're going to have to learn to say no. We must! Leave! room to slow down get alone and pour out now there's good news here if you are serious about getting alone with God he will listen and he will respond he will help you but there is a trap if you're going to wait for someone to do it for you it will never happen if we are to achieve intimacy with God we must exercise the discipline of simplicity and the discipline of silence well there's another the third one the discipline of solitude and you may be thinking didn't we just cover that not really silence is best practiced in solitude one writer calls this cultivating serenity we gain strength from companionship when we come together as the church we are encouraged in our fellowship together we are made more accountable but that is only one segment of spiritual life we must seek those times of solitude where we cultivate serenity deep within ourselves we must be alone with

God and may I say to you this morning that solitude is not a 15 second pit stop to fill our tanks and to charge our batteries that's not what we're talking about the solitude of which I speak this morning is a quiet oasis where we meet with God in the oasis we leave behind our clutter much as Christian in Pilgrim's Progress was able to leave behind the sins that weighted him down in solitude serenity replaces anxiety anyone ever been anxious here you know I've noticed something about anxiety what we're anxious about at three in the morning when our eyes pop open is not near as bad as three in the afternoon so just wait 12 hours it'll be okay

I love what Dr. MacArthur says people come in all the time and they're anxious and they're upset and they're worried and he says look don't worry about your present problems they're going to go away and be replaced with something worse in this life you will have tribulation but be of good cheer Christ has overcome the world so be of good cheer battles are fought and battles are won on the field of serenity struggles occur there that no one else knows about but you and God right only

you and God know what's going on it is in solitude that we're able to deal with things that no one else is aware of and that no one else should be aware of it is in solitude that God opens our eyes to the things that need attending again

I appeal to the music to entertain, no books to distract, just me, naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken, nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants me to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions.

[28:52] So that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I'm really worth something. But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree.

I'm glad to read that. I thought I was the only person that ever happened to. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly face. The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone.

And once that happens, solitude comes. In solitude, we need to come before God and examine every facet of our lives in Him.

Paul said examine yourself. We should do that frequently. We should examine every facet of our life. The psalmist understood this in Psalm 139. O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up. Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways.

[30:29] Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all. Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the path in the everlasting way. Let me tell you the great champion in the Bible of solitude was the Lord Jesus Christ, the very one in whose image we are being recreated.

In Mark 6, we read this, the apostles gathered together with Jesus, and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught, and He said to them, Come away by yourselves to a secluded place, and rest a while.

And then He adds, For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.

How many times do we read of Jesus? He went up on the mountaintop alone to pray. He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane just hours from death, and He separates Himself from His followers, His disciples, and He prays.

[31:51] He championed solitude, just as we should. Well, now we come to the last discipline. It is the discipline of surrender.

Surrender to the Lord is only possible when we arrive at a point in our walk where we have total trust in what He wants to do with our lives and what He wants to accomplish through each one of you in this room that are believers.

It will only happen when we come to that point of walking in total trust. Total trust.

I used to tell the Lord, I don't want to be a missionary. I don't want to be a preacher. I don't want to be a youth worker.

Nothing gets youth. I just didn't have the patience for it. It was me, not them. Then I started trusting the Lord.

[33:09] Two out of three. I'm still praying about that third one. I used to say, Lord, don't send me to Africa. I've been there 20 times. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Don't lean on your own understanding. acknowledge Him continually. He is the one that will straighten your path.

In some respects, surrender sounds the easiest. In practice, it may be the most difficult. But one thing is certain.

When you make the conscious decision to surrender to the Lord in total trust, you can mark it down in your mind and in your heart. The war will intensify in your life.

The world and the devil war against all four of these disciplines. And it will, the battle will be joined.

[34:23] Surrender is barely a word in our vocabulary anymore. And it has, doesn't it, a negative connotation. We live in a time of self-assurance and self-centeredness.

You do not get ahead in life by practicing surrender. When I used to work for a local oil company, I knew all the board members, all the senior managers, they weren't people who went around and

practiced surrender.

The only boardroom you'll probably ever sit in if you can live the surrendered life is in the heavenly sanctuary. Not too bad a trade-off. God desires and God honors a life surrendered to Him.

God is fully trustworthy. We should have no fear in surrendering our life to Him. Well, my beloved, there you have the keys to intimacy with God.

God, if we practice truly the art of simplicity and silence and solitude and surrender, you will find yourself one day dwelling in the inner sanctuary.

[35 : 52] You will be in the inner sanctum and you will be present alone with the Lord. and when that happens, He will speak to your heart and He will say, you are my disciple indeed and you now are fit for service in the kingdom.

Perhaps in the secret place, the deep place, alone with God, surrendered to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ, we will one day be able to pray the greatest prayer that we could ever pray in this lifetime.

Father, make me like Jesus. Thank you.