

Intimacy With God

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[0:00] You know, over the past 30 plus years, I've had both the privilege and responsibility of serving on pastor search committees for Highland Park.

! Mike, we've been on together, among others.! Locating the person we believe to be God's man to shepherd our congregation.

And it is no small task. Now, 30 years ago when we served on these, the questions that we ask, in hindsight, seem to be very shallow.

Embarrassingly so. Very basic. I think we were a little tougher on Pastor Don. Oh, yeah. But I remember 30 years ago, we would say, well, do you believe in the Bible?

Oh, yeah. Okay. What's your plan for getting everybody in the world saved? You know, that was one of the questions. And you're not divorced, are you? Or do you drink alcohol and dance?

[1:18] You know, I mean, this was pretty much it. Alcohol, we can forgive. Dancing, I don't know. Yeah. If you're drinking while you're dancing, maybe we could do that.

We might ask them if they're a graduate of a Baptist seminary. That seemed to be important back yonder. But that just about covered it. Now, maybe it's a sign of old age.

Maybe a little bit of spiritual maturity. But I hope the questions that we ask now are a little more insightful and in-depth. One question I like, and I don't have any plans of ever serving on a pastor search committee again, because I plan on you burying me.

But tell me about your quiet time. Tell me about your quiet time. How often do you get alone with God and what do you two talk about?

Another thing I like to do, and you'll appreciate it, you'll appreciate it. I like to look at a pastor's library. You can tell a lot. I won't call a name, but five or six years ago I was at First Baptist.

[2:31] It was dismal. Oh my gosh. Not the guy they have now. He's solid. But talking about their quiet time, that's really where the rubber meets the road.

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

Believers should spend time with the Lord, but we've got to face up to the fact that time is probably the one thing in our culture that we have so little of.

We just don't have a lot of it. Solomon summed up the problem in Ecclesiastes. He said this, God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated.

I don't know what translation that is, but I like it. We've complicated ourselves. I again appeal to Martin Luther and others who said they could never get everything accomplished in one day unless they spent three hours in prayer.

[3:41] It is obviously important for pastors and ministers to spend time alone with God, but let's go further.

It's important that individual members of the church spend time alone with God, and I think the success or failure as church leaders is directly related to the amount of time we spend alone with God.

Something that I don't think was original with me, and I probably first heard this from Dr. Tozer, but humans are drawn to things that are deep. We like deep jungles, deep waters, deep caves, deep woods, and deep thoughts.

Once we experience the deep, we are seldom satisfied with things that dwell on the surface. Paul stated in 1 Corinthians, And in Romans, Paul spoke of deep things in chapter 11.

Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and unfathomable his judgments and his ways.

[5:00] The prophet Daniel said, God knows what's in the darkness. You ever get afraid of the dark? God knows what's in the darkness.

And the psalmist said, God's judgments are like a great deep. Now, as believers, we learn that deep things intrigue us, but soon in our walk with God, we discover that nuggets of gold lying in the spiritual depths cannot be discovered by natural means.

The natural mind can't mine, that's D and E, the natural mind can't mine nuggets of spiritual gold, or spiritual nuggets.

God reserves those discoveries to those who are completely his, 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, and that's our subtitle tonight, How to Worship the Lord, Intimacy with God. And there'll be some crossover from our previous lessons, but that's okay.

[6:22] Let me suggest that the age in which we live does not promote spiritual intimacy. Probably the age we live in could more be described as stampeding cattle.

You know, everybody is in a hurry. We've got to get there. I've got to get to work. I've got to get home. I've got to get back to work. Everybody has got this stampede mentality.

When was the last time, for the guys in this room, that any of us had time to lie down in green pastures, or to sit beside still waters?

And I've come to realize that God is not looking for the super intelligent, or really even the super spiritual. God is looking for some men that want to go deep.

And the question is, can we be such men? The Apostle Paul, and not Tom Holland, is the one we need to listen to.

[7:37] And he's going to do so by the power of the Spirit. But I read this verse in Philippians 3.10. A very familiar verse. But for reasons that made sense a couple years ago, I got it from the amplified version.

I don't normally read that or copy, but I did. 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 also share His sufferings as to be continually transformed in spirit and to His likeness even to His death.

Philippians 3.10. And we need to let those words sort of dwell in us richly. We need to mull them over in our mind, talk to God about them, maybe on your knees or on your face in your closet. Words like, that I may know Him. That I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him.

A word like perceiving, recognizing, understanding, and a phrase, being continually transformed.

[9:18] And you know, if we're not being continually transformed, then something else is going on that's not good. You know? Is there anything more important and less pursued in our day than concepts such as these?

We need to thirst for God. And I would suggest we are to thirst the same way the deer thirsted for water. Psalm 42. As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Boy, do we wake up thirsty? Do we get thirsty during the day? Do we go to bed thirsty for the things of God?

Are you thirsty for the Lord? Can you drink from the deep waters of intimacy with God? Again, we like to go to the deep things.

Think for a moment about the Apostle Paul. Boy, he had some impressive credentials, didn't he? This guy, he was impressive. Philippians 3, verse 5 and 6.

[10:31] Circumcised the eighth day of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal of the church, as to the righteousness which is in the law found blameless.

Paul had impressive credentials. Bear in mind, he wrote those words, by the way. But they were inspired words. He wrote what the Holy Spirit told him. That's quite a resume. That is quite a resume.

Who wouldn't be impressed with that resume? But Paul was not content to stop there. He wanted something more. And he wanted what we should want.

He didn't want it before the road to Damascus. But after the road to Damascus, and after he became Paul from Saul, he wanted this more than anything.

Verse 7 and 8. Whatever things were gained to me, and he had a lot, I personally think that he was on the fast track to be the high priest. And I think they had him on the management fast track to get there.

[11:53] Whatever things were gained to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss 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.

I don't know if you ever looked that up, but it's manure, dung, so that I may gain Christ. So that I may gain Christ. We can go deep.

We must go deep. the question then is how. And Chuck Swindoll is going to answer it for us. He's going to offer us counsel in this regard.

Dr. Swindoll writes of four disciplines that we can and should inculcate into our life that will take us into the deep things of God.

Now I have to tell you, I'm a visual person and I like to see things and I actually had a little display when I did this at VOM but I ran over it three or four times in the garage when we were through and so it's now in a dump somewhere so I don't have any more visual displays for you.

[13:24] But I built a little house with these four disciplines that Dr. Swindoll talks about. But the first thing he talked about was the discipline of simplicity.

Everything around us wars against the discipline of simplicity. Everything. We live in cluttered lives. Again, Solomon says we've made ourselves complicated and how complicated are we in this age that we live in. We live in a cluttered and a confused world and let me quickly add God is never the author of confusion and so if you wake up and things seem really confusing God didn't author that. He's not the author of confusion. If we're going to reorder our lives and that's really what we're talking about here, first thing I would suggest simplify.

Just simplify. If we don't do that, we're going to be far too exhausted to enter into the deep, to the silent recesses of our hearts and hear the voice of God as he communicates with us.

[14:50] Christian hearts are to be filled with God.

What are they filled with? The clutter of life. And when you have too much clutter your heart will grow cold to the things of Christ.

And you know, he says he won't have another God before him. And the God of clutter is out there. The God of things. the God of television and the God of computer and all these other things.

Paul, a brilliant man, said, 1 Corinthians 11, 3, I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and the purity of devotion to Christ. I think elsewhere Paul said don't pervert the simplicity of the gospel. It's not complicated. A child can understand and believe.

[16:30] We really should be seekers of the simple and the pure. Discipline your minds for that. Simple things, pure things.

And to do so, we must determine, I think, to slow down our pace of life. But we're in a hurry. Our culture's in a hurry.

We've got to get there. We've used this word in previous lessons. We've got to learn to be content, but not as the world defines contentment.

Don't let the world define that. Let Christ define it. Be content as Christ knew contentment. He knew contentment. We've got to battle.

We've got some battles to fight. We need to battle the sin of envy. How often do we want to be like the person next door in the next office?

[17:29] We want to be like the boss? Am I ever going to replace him? Is he ever going to retire? I'm sure I've got officers asking me that. Of course, they were born in 1992. I was born in 1948.

Or do we want to be like the guy down the street? He's got two cars, a boat. The desire to succeed is often driven by envy and envy is the enemy of simplicity.

Strive for simple things. In the Gulag Archipelago, Alexander Solzhenitsyn said these simple but very profound words.

Just think of the conditions he was in in the Gulag, Siberia. It is enough if you don't freeze in the cold.

That's pretty basic, isn't it? That's simple. It's enough if you don't freeze. And if thirst and hunger don't claw at your insides.

[18:43] And if your back isn't broken, if your feet can walk, if both arms can bend and 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. Even in the Gulag, they were envious of other people for whatever reason.

To go deep, it is essential that we practice the discipline of simplicity. simplicity. Let me also say that that practice is not automatic.

It's not automatic. It requires intense determination. You've got to determine that you're going to practice the discipline of simplicity.

And the second thing I want to mention tonight is the discipline of silence. silence. The discipline of silence. The psalmist said, be still and know that I am God.

[20:06] Several nights I'll go outside at my farm, turn all lights, including the outside security light. There's basically no natural light where I'm at, for all practical purposes.

So it's far off. boys, there's a nice sky up there you wouldn't believe. And I stand there and I see the glory of God.

I see the fingerprints of God and I see the silence. And I say that there's something interesting.

When you go home tonight or sometime, get on YouTube and type in the sound of the planets or the sounds of the stars.

They put out electromagnetic fields and their sounds have been recorded. You know what? They're beautiful. They're magnificent.

And I'm going to say this name and I'm probably getting it wrong. I don't know if you know him, but Louis Giglio. Is that his name? He's a neat guy. I don't think about him. but he's got several YouTube showing these things.

[21:23] And he does all the planets, including Earth. And they all have a different sound. And then he also starts talking about whales, whale sounds. Then he incorporates it too.

He says, here's what God hears. And he's playing all these stars and all these whales and it's like a symphony. It's the neatest thing. I never knew that.

I came across that by accident. the psalmist said, be still, guys, be still. God's speaking. And know that I am God.

You know, the world wars against such silliness. The world does battle with that. It says, that's absurd. I remember when I was at Phillips and they were debating whether to pay the bonus or not. Or do you give it to the highest ranking people or do you give it to the rank and file? I said, well, I think we need to give it to the rank and file.

[22:26] And I said, I think we should have a servant mentality. And the greatest servant that ever walked on earth was Jesus Christ. They looked at me like I was from Mars.

And they didn't follow my advice. Did that surprise anybody? The world says that's silly. We live in a world of noise, don't we?

It's all around us. On my farm, there are deep woods. And there is a beautiful outcrop of huge boulders, about as tall as this room, in those woods, surrounded by trees.

We took a group up there once, Mike, and had prayer. About the sun up. It was amazing. We could do that. In the fall and winter months, I go there to be alone with God.

I haven't done it in a while. I need to. I don't go in the spring or summer because the takes of sugars will carry you off and kill you. Right now would be maybe a good time.

[23:39] I don't know what this temperature is. I've been going to those boulders since I was a little child. Five years old, alone.

It was a fantastic place. It was my favorite place on earth. In the days of my youth, in the 50s, there were no man-made sounds that encroached there.

Highway 75 didn't exist two miles to the east, two and a half miles. What you heard were the sounds of God's creation.

You heard birds, turkeys, squirrels, and deer walking by. Now you can sit there and you're going to hear airplanes, train, going through Copan at a certain time, truck traffic on Highway 75, which is two and a half miles west.

Oil wells pumping, although mine is not pumping, and there's going to be some other noise pollution area. Our world is restless. The world is noisy, and the world is filled with action.

[24 : 55] Filled with action. And let me say it is no small task to go to a place of solitude and then once you arrive there to be silent.

But if we're going to develop a deep, intimate relationship with God, we need to seek those times of silence. Let the Lord talk to you.

Just meditate. Meditate on His Word. Quiet. Don't have to say anything out there. In the Hebrew language, the psalmist commands us to stop what we're doing and be quiet.

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.

Noise and busy schedules close our ears to the still small voice of our maker. Her world mitigates against quietness.

[26 : 11] Now in that regard I'm actually going to quote a Roman Catholic priest, it may surprise you, Henry Noen, that's what I'm calling him, I don't know if I pronounce that right or not. They're very insightful. Listen to what the good father has to say here.

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 whole cities with words, billboards. 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, kiss me, sleep with me. Now this is a Catholic priest.

[27 : 29] In such a world, who can maintain respect for words? Pretty insightful. Brothers, we need silence.

Get into your closet and be silent. Silent makes us sensitive to spiritual things. In silence, we can appreciate the presence of God.

In silence, you may feel his grace. I don't mean that in some type of weird sensation. Like the old Baptist preacher said, many of you go and pray and say, Lord, just touch me.

If he did, you'd faint of a heart attack. Who is that? Just touch me. In silence, we feel his grace. In silence, God will speak to our hearts.

In silence, we can go deep. And I think we'll only go deep in silence. So how do we experience silence in a noisy world?

[28 : 32] Boy, here's our question. Well, let me put it back on everybody else. That depends on you. That depends on you. It depends on me. We must build into our cluttered, busy, and noise filled lives a place of solace and silence.

And let me tell you one thing we're going to have to do. This may be the first thing. We're going to have to learn to say no. Got to say no.

We have to leave room to slow down, get alone, and pour out our deepest inward needs to our heavenly father. Now, there's some really good news here.

It may not sound like it, but there is. If you are serious about getting alone with God, he will listen and he will respond. He will help us.

But there is a trap. If we're going to wait for someone to do it for us, it's never going to happen. We've got to do this.

[29 : 43] If we are to achieve intimacy with God, we have to exercise the disciplines of simplicity and silence. There's a third discipline.

That's the discipline of solitude. A little different. Silence is best practice in solitude. Now, I do have a wonderful investment at my house, and Diane bought it actually.

Interesting, she bought it for me. For me to use. And it's those headphones where you can cut the TV noise. But I've almost stopped watching television.

I really have. I'm downstairs reading, so she wears them. And they're a great invention. I like it. One writer has called this cultivating serenity.

I kind of like that. We gain strength from companionship. When we come here together as brothers, we are encouraged and we are to make each other accountable.

[30:48] there is only one segment of spiritual life that we must also seek times of solitude, where we cultivate serenity deep within ourselves.

And that means being alone with God in your closet. And if you weren't here for those first couple lessons, a closet is a closet, a room, a house, a backyard, a forest.

It doesn't have to be a place where you hang closed. And I want to say this, since I'm talking to brothers, solitude is not a 15 second pit stop.

It's not where we fill our tanks and charge our batteries. What I'm talking about here is a quiet oasis oasis, where we meet with God.

And in this oasis, we leave behind our clutter, much as Christian was able to leave behind the sins that weighed him down in John Bunyan's great book, *Coat of Progress*.

[32:01] In solitude, serenity replaces anxiety. When you're alone with God in solitude, you will be less anxious.

Battles are fought and won on the field of serenity. Struggles occur there that no one else knows about. No one else knows about them.

It is in solitude that we're able to deal with things that no one else is aware of or should be aware of. But I remember hearing one guy say, remember whatever you're hiding from your wife and your church are not hiding from God, so deal with it with them.

It is in solitude that God opens our eyes to the things that need attending. And we all have those, don't we? Again, I hear the Catholic priest Henry Nguyen.

In solitude, I get rid of my scaffolding. No friends to talk with. No telephone calls to make. No meetings to attend.

[33:21] No 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 to run to my friends, run to my work, run to my distractions, so I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I'm 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, and I love this term here, like monkeys in a banana tree.

They all invade. Have you ever been there? They do. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly face.

purpose. The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of panting on my door and leave me alone.

[34:42] That may take a while. In solitude, we need to come before our God and examine every facet of our lives in Him.

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.

Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it. 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 everlasting way.

Wow, that's something. I heard one pastor say, you know, the Lord knows your thoughts down to your subconscious. Wow. Wow. We have a great example of solitude in the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35:56] 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 for a while.

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

How many times do we see Jesus doing that? Going to secluded place, going up on a mountain, separating himself even from the disciples. So we've seen these three things, and we're going to cover one more tonight and then he just missed.

And that's the discipline of surrender. Surrender to the Lord is only possible when we arrive at a point in our walk of total trust in what he wants to accomplish in our lives.

I'm going to read that again. I got two ordained ministers. That preached. Surrender to the Lord is only possible when we arrive at a point in our walk of total trust in what he wants to accomplish in our lives.

[37:23] Solomon said this, Proverbs 3, trust in the Lord with a little bit of your heart. Whoops, now he didn't say that. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight. He will do it. Now in some respects surrender sounds the easiest and in practice may be the most difficult.

I mean see you say oh yeah I surrender, no problem. And then we go out and start fighting our own battles. But one thing is certain when you make the conscious decision to surrender to the Lord in total trust, the war with the world and the devil will be joined.

Satan and demons and even your human flesh doesn't like the idea of surrendering and turning it all over to the Lord and trusting him. Surrender is barely a word in our vocabulary anymore.

we didn't talk about a lot in the service. Did we Oscar or Mike or others of you? We didn't talk about surrender. It's barely in our vocabulary.

[38:44] We live in a time of self-assurance and self-centeredness. You do not get ahead in life by practicing surrender. But God, I swear I'm going to write a book someday on, but God, but he, but the Lord.

But God desires and honors a life surrendered to him. And you know, you might be saying, we're Christians, we've all surrendered.

Well, I think we're talking about a different level here. God is fully trustworthy. I wish I knew that better.

I wish I understood that better in my life. I want to know that better. God can be trusted. We should have no fear in surrendering our life to him.

Don't fear God. We don't fear God. We can surrender to him. We can surrender to him. I told my brother-in-law when he was dying of cancer, I said, you know, my mom used to call me in and I never feared my mom's voice calling me in.

[40:03] None of us should ever fear God calling us home. We wouldn't. We can trust him. We can surrender to him. There you have some keys to intimacy that Dr. Swindoll and I put together tonight.

if we practice truly the art of simplicity, silence, solitude, and surrender, I think you will discover that you will be entering into the inner sanctum to be present with our Lord when you're in your closet.

We will become disciples indeed. We will be fit for the kingdom, fit for duty to the church. And then I'll close with this.

Perhaps in that secret place, you're alone with God, you surrender to him, you trust him, and then one day you will be able to pray, maybe today, maybe tonight, the greatest prayer of all.

Father, make me like Jesus. whatever it takes, take me, mold me, and make me like Jesus. Thank you.