



UP-CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Intimacy was never part of my worship experience in the past. Worship for me was about being silent and reverent in God's house. Reverence is important to me. God deserves my respect and awe, but He is also a personal God. God is love. He cannot be distant and uninvolved or "transcendent" (above everything, uncommitted and neutral). And that's not how Jesus portrayed God for us.

When I read about Jesus' life on earth, I see a caring and involved God. Someone who wants to be one with me. Jesus depicted a close relationship within the Holy Trinity. He said to the Father, "You and I are one. You are in me and I am in you." His desire and goal for us is to be one with Him (**John 17:21**). Because of who God is and what He is really like, He wants to be close to His people. Intimacy is His idea. He's the one who wants it. So, we need to move beyond the reverent to the intimate level of relationship with Him.

God told His people, "If you're going to be intimate with another person, be intimate with me first. I made you, I designed you to have a close relationship with me. All of your relationships get their meaning from your relationship with me. If you worship other gods, if you give priority to other things, your relationships will be meaningless and unsatisfying."

God wants to be intimate with me not for His own sake. While He is worthy of my worship, He wants me to come close to Him, not because He needs to be worshiped, but because He wants to love and bless me in a way that's up-close and personal. Jesus modeled the relationship that God wants with me by the way He related to His original twelve disciples. He spent most of His time with them, pouring Himself into them. Sure, He taught the multitudes and He healed the sick, but He spent most of His waking hours up-close and personal with His disciples.

Intimacy with God is about loving. Jesus told His disciples, "I have loved you in the same way the Father loved me. Stay in that relationship with me because I want you to experience what God planned for me as well as for you. Through intimacy with me, you will experience loving like me. You will love each other the same way I loved you. You will give up your lives for each other." (**John 15:9-13**) When you spend time in God's presence – being open to receive His love – you will become what God predestined you to be – a loving person like Christ.

How do I develop a relationship with God that's up-close and personal? **First, I must develop a dependent relationship with God.** Jesus said that without Him I can do nothing (**John 15:4-5**). I must come to the point where I am truly convicted that Jesus is all I need, He is all I want, and He is all I have. This dependent relationship

makes me delight in the Lord. I want to be with Him, I want to serve only Him, and I want to please Him. He is the joy in my life and I am at rest in Him. And He gives me all the desires of my heart (**Psalms 37:4-5**).

I must also develop a passion for living with Christ. I cannot have an intimate relationship with Him without passion or fervency. As a true worshiper I will be passionate in praising and honoring God. I will be fervent in seeking God's presence and will for me every day of my life (**Psalms 63:1**).

Brother Lawrence, a 17th Century Frenchman who became a Carmelite monk at age 50, discovered the joy of living in the presence of God. Even though his main duty for 30 years was only to wash pots and pans in the monastery kitchen, he became up-close and personal with God through simple concentration and passionate contemplation. He wrote in his journal, "I make it my business to continue in His holy presence. By a simple attention I keep myself focused on the presence of God and a tender affection toward God. It is a habitual, silent and secret conversation of the soul with God." (from *Practicing the Presence of God*)

I must also devote time to be still in God's presence. I cannot be intimate with another person without giving up something. But I don't give up something for the sake of satisfying some requirement. I give it up because an intimate relationship demands it. And if I truly value intimacy with Christ, I cannot help but give up valuable time – special, exclusive quiet time – for a deeper fellowship with Him.

Madame Jeanne Guyon, a 17th Century woman of French nobility, was imprisoned for her radical writings about being intimate with Christ. She learned to be up-close and personal with God through regular quiet times with Him. God's presence was not just something mystical to her. It became real and unquestionable to her everyday. She wrote, "Make use of the Scripture to quiet your mind. First read a passage of Scripture. Once you sense the Lord's presence, the content of what you have read is no longer important. The Scripture has served its purpose: it has quieted your mind and brought you to Him." (from *Experiencing the Depths of the Lord Jesus Christ*)

So, what will it be for you? What will it cost you to enter into a relationship with Jesus that's up-close and personal? If Jesus were here today, standing before you, what would He say to you? What would He point out to you as the obstacles to intimacy with Him? Have you found a place (or time) with God that you yearn for? Do you have a place where you know God dwells and waits for you?