

CHIEF MINISTRIES

November 2015

Personal God

You know how it is to be driving down the road and have something in the far distance catch your eye? At first you struggle to make out what it is. Then, the closer you get, the clearer it is. We've experienced the same kind of thing, I hope, as we've examined our perspective on God, (last month). From a distance we could see that He stands out as the one, true God. Then it became obvious that He is much bigger and more powerful than we can ever imagine. Hopefully, you've discovered Him to be quite approachable (actually, He approached us!). And our close-up shot of Him only made us want to know Him more.

Knowing God in a personal way is actually the highest level of Emmanuel. He is not only God with us. He can and should be God with me. That is His ultimate goal; to be an intimate friend to each of us.

We do a song in worship perhaps you've heard it; "I am a friend of God", He calls me friend". I like this song. But we can't just get up on any given day and thoroughly mouth those lyrics. They may or may not be true of us at that particular time. Now, if the focus were, "I am a child of God" (another popular line in the new Bethel music song No Longer Slaves), then that would always be appropriate (if we accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior of course). Why the difference? Friendship with God is based on our present obedience, while a relationship with Him is based on our permanent adoption as His children.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ^{v16} The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ^{v17} and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8: 15-17 ESV)

It's sad to say, though, that even worship leaders and musicians, who sing and play for God (?) So often, may not know the Lord as their friend.

Recently, I searched several books and magazines on astronomy looking for a scientist's view on the wonder of the universe. I couldn't imagine how a person could constantly look into space and not be completely awestruck. Yet, all I found were hundreds of pages describing specific details of stars, where to find them, theories about how they were formed, and how to categorize them. I couldn't find even one statement about how amazing they are - and definitely no acknowledgment of the God who made them.

Could it be that those astronomers have grown so accustomed to the stars grandeur that they've missed the "galaxy for the stars" so to speak? In the same way, are we as worshipers merely going through the motions of "professional praise" without connecting on an intimate level with the One to whom the praise is directed? Friendship with a personal God is an absolute must for us.

Evidences of God's Friendship

No doubt some of you reading this are thinking, "But how can we know for sure that God wants to be that personal? Isn't it enough that He knows my name among those of so many Christians? Now you say He wants to get involved with every area of my life - where I work, who I hang out with, what comes out of my mouth? If I stubbed my toe, He actually wants to know and help? "C'mon, Chief, isn't that a bit presumptuous, even arrogant?" "Well, yes and no: Yes, He does want to be a part of every area of your life and no, I'm not presuming something that isn't true.

Consider these facts: First, He knows every hair on our heads (Matthew 10:30). Then there are the ravens and the lilies, Jesus said to consider how He cares for them; *They don't toil or reap, yet He provides for all their needs.* Since the Father does all that, Jesus assured us, *"How much more will He clothe you?.... How much more valuable you are."* (See Luke 12). The Lord even cares when the sparrow falls. Imagine how much more He takes note of us! (See Matthew 10:29)

Friendship with God is a biblical idea. In fact it was God who came up with it (of course!).

Still not convinced that God wants to be your friend? Then we'll dig a little deeper....

Read Genesis 3:8-13. *And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. v9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" v10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." v11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" v12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." v13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (ESV).*

Consider how Adam and Eve must have felt during their stroll with God each day before they sinned. Did you notice how natural God's conversation with them was? It's as though they had spoken many times before in that setting. Evidently God had already established a friendship with His new creation. Too bad Adam and Eve marred it through their disobedience.

In 2 Chronicles 20:7, Jehoshaphat called Abraham God's friend because God Himself called Abraham His friend (Isaiah 41:8). I imagine Jehoshaphat was also hoping that God would be the people of Judah's friend that day. The children of Judah recognized their God to be both fearful, powerful Elohim and relational, promise-keeping Jehovah. This was a good balance for them, and it's also a healthy description for us of what God has in mind for friendship with His people. We are never to view God as our 'buddy', our pal, or just someone we like to hang out with. Whether were on stage in front of 1000 people or alone in our homes, God is still Elohim, worthy of our fearful reverence. At the same time we can enjoy His intimate fellowship because He is Jehovah. He has chosen to reveal His personality to us. He obviously wants us to get to know Him.

Our most important and reliable revelation of God was, of course, the advent of His son. Who better than Jesus to teach us about friendship? He had many friends. Certainly He was good friends with His disciples. He spent considerable time with His siblings as well as with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Jesus was for all these *"a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* (Proverbs 18:24) In Luke 7:34, He is even called a *"friend of sinners"*.

Three lessons from Jesus

There are at least three lessons we can learn from Jesus about friendship with a holy God. Let's hear from Jesus now as He spoke to his disciples only a few days before His crucifixion. Please read John 15:13 *Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.* Jesus was about to prove his love for his friends by dying for them. Skip down to verse 16. *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* Who chose whom?

God initiates the friendship. In "Knowing God", J I Packer writes, "we do not make friends with God. God makes friends with us. Bringing us to know Him by making His love known to us".

The second insight from Jesus life is that some friendships with God are closer than others. I do not mean that some people get to be more "cozy" with God or that some might get "off the hook" with God for certain things while others won't. No, we will all stand before the impartial judge one day and give an account of our lives. *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves*

with fear throughout the time of your exile, (1 Peter 1:17 ESV). But there is ample evidence that Jesus was indeed closer to some people than others.

Please read John 15:15 and notice that, as Jesus' friends, the disciples were privy to special information. *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:15 ESV)*. He was especially close to three disciples. He chose Peter, James and John to see him transfigured. *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. v2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (Matthew 17:1-2 ESV)*. He hand-picked these same three disciples to accompany him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. *And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." v33 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled (Mark 14:32-33 ESV)*. Were these three more special for some reason? Not really. But apparently Jesus did trust them more. It could be that He saw in them more passion and loyalty.

One final lesson for us from Jesus' friendships is this. To be His friend, we must be obedient. Jesus couldn't have been more clear.: *"You are my friends if you do what I command." (John 15:14)*

My Daily Praise

Pray out loud even now, praising God that he is Elohim, the fearful and powerful One. Then thank him that he is also Jehovah, who wants to be your closest friend.

My Daily Surrender

Ask God what you need to do to be more obedient to Him. Willingly submit to whatever He tells you to do.

Byproducts of Knowing God

As we get to know God through our fellowship with and worship of Him, we begin to realize several benefits. Granted, we should worship the Lord simply because He demands, desires and deserves it. However, there are some fantastic perks to knowing and loving our heavenly Father. In [The God You Can Know](#), Dan DeHaan lists several of these benefits. Just try to wrap your heart around this list:

- Character development - Colossians 3:2 counsels us, *set your mind on things above, not on earthly things*. We always become what we worship. If we focus on the world or other individuals we'll become like them. If we focus on God, we'll become like Him.

Please read Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:18. Here's a great summary of this verse; "Gaze on Him and be transformed". As Dan DeHaan puts it, "Find me a worshiper of God and I will find you a stable man with his mind in control, ready to meet the present hour with refreshment from above." Now that's the kind of person that I want to be, don't you?

- Freedom from intimidation. Please read Colossians 2:6-10. Why do you think verse seven is so important to keeping us from falling into the trap described in verse eight? We should abound in our established faith. We should be rooted and built up in Christ. And because we are complete in Christ, His is the only standard we must compare ourselves to. After all, *"If God is for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)*
- Compassion – Rather than trying to "work up" a burden for non-Christians, we quite naturally develop compassion for them as we get to know God and gain His heart. After all, who has a greater desire to

see this world come to a saving faith in Jesus than His Father? He sent His son to live with us. Then God, the Father, watched as His only son was rejected and crucified. All that grief and suffering His son endured was necessary to buy us back and give us life. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake, He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.*” Yes, I’d say God is invested in those who do not yet know Him.

- True satisfaction - Please read Philippians 4:10-13 *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ^{v11} Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ^{v12} I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ^{v13} I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

True satisfaction is apparently a rare commodity today, even among ministers. Why do we always want bigger and better and more. If our motive is purely to build God’s kingdom, then striving for more can be a good thing. However, too often we begin to depend on our successes or other people’s opinion to fulfill us. More and more we base our contentment on something other than God. It’s no wonder that some become disillusioned with the church when they see the dissatisfaction of its leaders. Men obsessed with position or titles, climbing the corporate ladder of success according to the world and they drift farther and farther from the church.

All of these things can be avoided if we come to the right table to be filled. Jesus said “*you’re blessed when you hunger and thirst for God and righteousness. It is they who will be satisfied (Matthew 5:6)*” I’ve heard you should never go grocery shopping when you’re hungry because you will be tempted to make unhealthy choices. In the same way, once you feasted on the bread of God, nothing else is nearly as tempting (see John 6:33)

My Daily Praise

Say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for giving you such blessings and for the opportunity to know Him more.

My Daily Surrender

Paul said, “*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing his sufferings*” (Philippians 3:10). Commit yourselves right now to knowing God at all costs.

I’m praying we all become unified worshipers of the Most High God.

Chief

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Christ’s

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