

Prayer as Intimacy with God

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By Dave Butts

No one would argue that Christian service is important. Serving on committees and developing programs that help the church carry out its mission is vital. But we tend to be so activity-oriented that we often forget that the heart of Christianity is a relationship with a person, the person of Jesus Christ. This essential relationship often takes a backseat to our Christian service. Restoring this missing element in our prayer lives will rejuvenate us spiritually and enable us to carry on in our service to the Lord.

There is a lot of discussion today about burnout in the church. Among those who serve and care and give of themselves, there seems to be a point of breakdown. An exhaustion, physically and emotionally as well as spiritually, saps them of their strength to continue service. I believe that many of the problems relating to burnout can be overcome by a restoration of relationship of intimacy with God in prayer.

We are not the only ones who desire an intimate relationship. From Genesis to Revelation we read of a God who loves His people and desires to have fellowship with them. Since this is such an important matter to God, it also needs to be high on our list of priorities. As we commit ourselves to grow in intimacy with God through prayer, it is important that we examine biblical accounts of those who had this intimate walk with God. It will help us better grasp how special a close relationship can be.

How to Grow in Intimacy

David provides one of the best examples of intimacy with God in prayer. In spite of his sins and problems, David longed for intimacy with the Lord. Feel David's passion in this Psalm:

"O God, my God! How I search for you! How I thirst for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. How I long to find you! How I wish I could go into your sanctuary to see your strength and glory, for your love and kindness are better to me than life itself. How I praise you! I will bless you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. At last I shall be fully satisfied; I will praise you with great joy.

I lie awake at night thinking of you— of how much you have helped me—and how I rejoice through the night beneath the protecting shadow of your wings. I follow close behind you, protected by your strong right arm" (Psalm 63:1-8 TLB).

David cries out for God, expressing his desire for intimacy with Him. Could it be that we are not intimate with God because we don't want to be? Have we never gotten thirsty enough to desire Him and Him alone? Are our lives so saturated with things and activities that we have never really missed being alone with God? Perhaps our prayer needs to be, "God, create a longing within me for You! Make me thirsty for the living water that is in You."

How can we grow in this area of intimacy and develop such a passion for God? Here are some practical ideas to help us get started:

1. Spend more time with God. This may seem overly simple; however, how many of us, in our busy lives (including our service for the Lord), are willing to spend more time seeking to know the Lord in prayer? So often we rush into His presence with our long lists that are usually focused on us and those we know...and rush out again into the busyness of life. On a purely human level, when we are growing in our love for

someone, we want to spend more and more time with that person. It is the same with the Lord. The more we know Him the more we will want to be with Him. This relationship requires something of us – a sacrifice of time that allows love to grow and deepen.

2. Spend time with people who are in love with God. Wouldn't it have been great to spend time with David as he worshiped and prayed? In addition to learning from him, I think his passion would be contagious. That kind of passion shows in the lives of those, like David of old, who love the Lord, especially in the way they pray and worship.

3. Get to know God more in His Word. There's no better place to begin your walk of intimacy with the Lord than in the pages of His Word. The Bible is not just intended to give us facts and doctrine (though it does that very well). Its purpose is to reveal God. Jesus criticized the Pharisees because they studied the Bible, which spoke of Jesus, but would not come to Him.

- Use the Bible as a place of prayer. We need to allow the Bible to teach us more about our great God. As the Word of God teaches you something about the nature of God, stop and praise God for what you just learned about Him. Praying through the Bible should be one of the greatest experiences of your life.
- Pray John 17:26 This is a prayer request that will change your life! At the close of His great high priestly prayer, Jesus prays to His Father on behalf of His disciples: "I have made you known to them, and make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them."

How much does God the Father love Jesus the Son? We cannot even begin to imagine, can we? Yet, Jesus prayed that the love the Father has for Him would be in us. Because this is a biblical prayer, from the very lips of our Lord, we know that

it is a prayer according to God's will. And if we pray according to God's will, we know that He will answer that prayer. What a great prayer for us to pray every day of our lives: "Father, I pray that You will help me to love Jesus as You love Him, that Your love for Jesus may be in me." Imagine how our love for the Lord will grow as we pray this prayer and as God begins to answer.

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