

**Christ Community Covenant Church
Intimacy According to God
Pastor Dave Scherrer - October 16, 2016**

This is a two part sermon series on intimacy, and we will have two follow-up studies; one tomorrow - Monday night October 17th and then again on Monday night October 24th. Both of these Monday studies will be a more straight and hard look specifically on physical intimacy and the personal, spiritual and cultural consequences of love and sex gone wrong (ECC papers available). We know that this material is important to God from our study in this letter to the Corinthian church. Issues of intimacy and sexual purity and up-righteousness are big deals to God and His church.

Discussion: So what is intimacy?

So what exactly is intimacy?

"Intimacy is not spatial but relational. We all know what it's like to be sitting right next to a person with whom we feel *distant* and we can feel *close* to a person who is four thousand miles away."
~ John Piper, Pastor

Let's try this:

Intimacy is what we call the experience of knowing someone in spirit and truth and being known by another person in spirit and truth.

And then we can take this conversation to the next level by looking at the subject of knowing God intimately. Sometimes I think we draw the conclusion that since God is infinite and mysterious that He is too 'big' to know in any real manner. And in a way all that is true. But the truth is, though God is indeed infinite and glorious beyond human conception, that doesn't mean He can't be meaningfully known. And the reason is He wants to be known. Christians maintain that the Bible, written over 1,500 years AGO by more than 40 authors, actually is the inspired Word of God, which sets forth His purposes and plan for history. It reveals everything that can be known about Him until we meet Him face to Face. And this same Bible describes God as all powerful, (Jeremiah 32:17); all knowing, (Psalm 147:4,5); present everywhere in creation, (Jeremiah 23:23,24); eternal, (Genesis 21:33); unchanging, (Psalm 102:27); sovereign, (Ephesians 1:21); loving, (I John 4:8-11,16); holy, (Romans 3:25,26); merciful, (Psalm 103:13); longsuffering, (Romans 9:22); gracious, (Ephesians 1:5-8). We actually have a lot of head knowledge about God and the reason we do at all is that **He longs for us to know Him intimately**. That is the first of four important truths I want to reinforce with you this morning.

The first of four important truths: *God longs for us to intimately know him!*

Jeremiah 29:13

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Jeremiah 33:3

"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

Still, if God is so set on us knowing Himself intimately, why does it seem like God is often so mysterious and distant that I can even doubt that he cares for me. **How did it go so wrong?**

How did it go so wrong?

That brings us to the second of our important truths;

The second of four important truths: *Sin has hidden the face of God*

I think you will remember this story . . .

Genesis 3:6-10

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Isn't it interesting that the first consequence of the first sin was the realization that humanity was naked and that reality shamed them and so they hid. This fallen state made their sexuality an embarrassment to them and they felt that their most intimate physical attributes had to be covered. Intimacy with God was the first cost and I want to say the most costly consequence of the first sin. And the rest was downhill fast from there.

They hid their bodies from God. Instead of knowing only intimacy and constancy, they now knew fear and shame and embarrassment. So they hid. And we have all been hiding since.

Isaiah 59:2

Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

The Heart of Intimacy with God is Trust

What makes us feel intimate with another person? While there are many ingredients to intimacy and each intimate relationship we have has a different recipe, common to all of them is trust. We cannot be intimate with a person we don't trust. **Trust is at the heart of intimacy.** The more we trust someone, the *closer* we let them get to us. The degree to which trust is compromised in a relationship is the degree to which intimacy evaporates. And the only way to reestablish trust is to recognize the breach of trust, take responsibility for that breach and then clean the slate by saying you are sorry. That brings us to the third of the four important truths of this morning. **Intimacy is preceded and restored by cleansing.** Always!

The third of four important truths: Intimacy is preceded by cleansing

James 4:8

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

So far we know that intimacy can be forfeited but happily we have learned that it can be restored and it is restored by cleansing. Repentance. Saying you're sorry. That is the magic word we learned in kindergarten – Sorry. But you got to say it like you mean it, don't you!!! This is true with God and it is true in our relationships with each other.

We cannot replace cleansing with knowledge. **Intimacy is more than knowledge.** Does it seem true to you that we can have knowledge of someone but not be intimate with them?

One common mistake is thinking that nearness to God can be achieved through knowledge accumulation. I think I can say with confidence that never in the history of the Christian church has so much theological knowledge been available to so many people as it is today. The American church enjoys perhaps the greatest amount of this abundance. We are awash in Bible translations, good books, insightful articles, recorded sermons, interviews, movies, documentaries, music, and more. And much of it very good. It is right for us to be very thankful.

But America is not abounding in people who are walking deeply with God (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). Why? Because knowledge is not synonymous with trust. That's why Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, some who possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture -

John 5:39-40

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40)

Biblical knowledge is far better than gold when it fuels our trust in God, because that in turn fuels our intimacy with God. But when biblical knowledge replaces our trust in God, it is replaced with self-pride.

And we have to be careful on another front. That is regarding emotional experiences.

We have a tendency in our high octane culture where we long for roller coaster excitement. Churches I think are trying at times to imitate true encounters with the Holy Spirit. Some pursue this in high liturgical environments designed to inspire an experience of transcendence and mystery. Others pursue it in contemporary worship events designed to inspire an experience of immanence. If we truly trust God, such environments can encourage our intimacy with God, but none of them inherently possesses the power to conjure God's nearness to us. This kind of intimacy is available when we set all our heart and mind and strength on knowing God.

Think of it like this: A candle-lit dinner with romantic music may encourage a sweet moment of relational intimacy between a husband and wife, but only to the degree that the environment encourages and deepens their already existing mutual trust and love. If there's relational distance between them due to a lack of trust, the red wine and fancy clothes have no power to bridge the distance. Only restoring the trust will do that.

And here is the most amazing thing - **God longs to forgive us! He loves to forgive us!**

Micah 7:18

Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of the survivors among his people? You cannot stay angry with your people, for you love to be merciful.

Isaiah 43:25

"I, I am he
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins.

With all this in mind here is a sobering thought . . .

You are as intimate with God right now as you want to be. ~ J Oswald Sanders

And so the criteria for testing your progress in intimacy with God is evaluating where your mind is set.

"The first fruit of love is the musing of the mind on God. He who is in love, his thoughts are ever upon the object. He who loves God is ravished and transported with the contemplation of God. David wrote of this - "When I awake, I am still with thee." The thoughts are as travelers in the mind. David's thoughts kept heaven-road. "I am still with Thee." God is the treasure, and where the treasure is, there is the heart. By this we may test our love to God. What are our thoughts most upon? ~ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential*

The secret to drawing near to God and having him draw near to us is revealed clearly in the Bible. We have access to our Holy Father God through faith in Christ who alone gives us access to him *BUT* in order to trust someone we have to know them. We have to have enough time with them that we have learned that they are indeed who they say they are and that they will keep their promises. It is only then that I have the hope of intimacy.

Isaiah 26:3-4

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.
Trust in the Lord forever,
for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.

This brings us to the fourth of our important truths . . . Discipline deepens trust and intimacy.

The fourth of four important truths: Discipline deepens trust and intimacy.

We have to discipline our minds to not wander off . . .

While we know that intimacy begins with cleansing, discipline of heart and behavior deepens intimacy. You have to be disciplined in this distracting world. Satan is trying to misdirect your attention. Don't let your heart wander – put up boundaries before you even encounter temptation. Practice those things that help you to know God. The disciplines of prayer, study, fasting, generosity, service - these will help you discipline your mind.

The more I know God the more I trust him and the more I am willing to be intimate with him which inspires me to be even more honest about my sin which releases God's forgiveness and delight in me. Do you see the cycle? **One last idea and that is that intimacy begets liberality.** The fifth of our four important truths.

Intimacy begets liberality

Or said another way, the more you know someone the more you experience the deeper joys of intimacy. The more trust we have the less suspicion we have. The more trust, the more I am willing to share more of myself yet. This is why marriage is so important to God. It is a mirror, a living word picture of God's desire for intimacy and gives us a sense of what delight we can have with God. When going well, marriage is the perfect petri dish for intimacy. With this as our experience, we can then enjoy again the garden blessing of being naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25).

God wants intimacy with you. Christ has done all the hard work in the cross to make it possible. All he requires is that you believe in him. He wants you to trust him with all your heart.

God is available to you. Intimacy with the Father is as accessible to you as God's promises. And God's invitation to you is to enjoy intimate fellowship with him. Especially during the hardships of life!

Resolve to know Him deeply and trust Him recklessly.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!
~ Horatio G. Spafford