

Intimacy with God

January 7, 2024

Introduction

Let me ask you a question, “Who is the most important person you’ve ever met in your life?” When I think about that for myself, my first thought is my encounter almost 50 years ago with the king of golf, Arnold Palmer! It was at a professional golf tournament here in Hartford. I was a young boy looking for an autograph, and to make a long story short, I ended up getting yelled at by Mr. Palmer and became a Jack Nicklaus fan from that time on! Arnold Palmer is by far the most famous person I’ve ever met.

But my question was, “Who is the most important person...” In our world, we tend to think of the rich and famous when we think of importance. But really the most important person is the person who has had the greatest impact on your life. For me, I immediately think of two men: Garth Johnson, who led me to Christ and disciplined me for three years, and, of course, Rich Ainsworth, the pastor before me, who has mentored me in so many ways as a spiritual father for over 30 years. Who’s the most important person you’ve ever met?

Now, there is one more difference between my experiences with Arnold and Garth and Rich. I met Arnold, but I never knew him personally. Garth and Rich, on the other hand, are intimate personal friends. I know them, and they know me, very well. The difference is intimacy. The same is true with Jesus. In my youth, I went to church and knew about God, but I didn’t really know Him personally. As a result, my life was not radically impacted by Jesus in those early years. But once I surrendered my life to Jesus, He actually has become the most important, impactful, intimate person in my life. How about you? Do you know ABOUT Jesus or are you intimate with Him? That’s what we’re going to be focusing on this month: **(LCD) intimacy with God**. But how are we supposed to be intimate with someone we can’t see? As we start this new year, I encourage you to come along and experience the richness of what we were made for: intimacy with God!

What is Intimacy?

When you hear the word ‘intimacy,’ how do you respond? Is that a word that makes you feel uncomfortable? Does it make you feel all warm and fuzzy? Are you turned off by it? What exactly IS intimacy? Believe it or not, an Australian national health agency called Better Health gave what I think is an excellent definition of intimacy: **(LCD) “Intimacy in a relationship is a feeling of being close, and emotionally connected and supported. It means being able to share a whole range of thoughts, feelings and experiences that we have as human beings. It involves being open and talking through your thoughts and emotions, letting your guard down (being vulnerable), and showing someone else how you feel and what your hopes and dreams are.”** Notice some of the keys to intimacy here: emotional connection, being supported, sharing thoughts and feelings, being vulnerable, sharing your hopes and dreams. In a word, it’s relationship. Intimacy is relationship as God meant it to be: open, honest, safe, shared love.

Isn’t this what we see in the beginning of the story of humanity? Turn with me to Genesis 2, this chapter gives the details of God’s creation of humanity. It culminates in the first marriage God ever performed in verses 24-25, *“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to*

his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” This is intimacy: open, honest, safe, shared love. It’s beautiful. Then of course in the next chapter, Satan tricks Eve and she and Adam end up sinning against God. The result? Verse 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. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”* Do you see what happened? Sin opened the door to separation and shame. But that isn’t what God desires. He is the one who walks in the garden in pursuit of us. The saddest words in the Bible are “Where are you?” Our decision to turn away from God has resulted in hiding, lying, fear, and shame instead of open, honest, safe, shared love. Let me ask you...are you out in the open with God and others or are you hiding in fear, shame or guilt? God is saying, “Where are you?” What is your answer?

The Invitation to Intimacy

There is a famous quote from the great, early church father Augustine of Hippo. He said, **(LCD) “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in You.”** That is so true. And that rest begins with accepting Jesus Christ as Your Lord and Savior. Previously, I mentioned that Adam and Eve experienced separation from God because of their disobedience, their sin against God. That separation created a God-sized void that can only be filled with God Himself. We can try to fill it with jobs, money, fun, family, friends, sex, on and on, but only God Himself was meant to fill this hole.

However, accepting Christ only opens the way for Him to fill our emptiness. It’s up to us to enter into the rest that He provides. This is described in numerous ways in the Bible. For instance, **(LCD) James 4:8 gives us the invitation, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” In John 15:5, Jesus Himself says to His followers, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”** God desires intimacy with us. He is a God of love. Creation is an overflow of the love between the three persons of the Trinity. God invites us into this circle of love and it is through faith in Jesus Christ. So, if you’ve never accepted Christ as your Savior, you need to. Until you do, you are separated from God. If you have accepted Christ, we become His children; but like in any family, to experience the blessings of the family, we must enter into intimate relationship. How? That’s what we’ll talk about next. For now, ask yourself, “Am I drawing near to created things or to God to fill the God-sized hole in me?” Let’s draw near to God in intimacy and experience the blessedness of His rest!

Our Spiritual Guide: The Holy Spirit

Have you ever visited Gettysburg? It’s incredible! As someone who loves history, it was such a joy to finally make the pilgrimage to this hallow ground where thousands of young men died in the cause for freedom. However, as inspiring as our visit was, it was also overwhelming! There are thousands and thousands of markers and signs everywhere. It’s mind-boggling to know how to visit the place! I’m so glad that dear friends encouraged us to hire a guide to take us through the battlefields by car and explain to us what we were seeing and why it was important.

The same thing is true with the kingdom of God and intimacy with the King. He and His kingdom are vast!! We can’t possibly understand all that God has for us – it’s overwhelming. So

God has provided a spiritual guide for us: the Holy Spirit. I love how the Holy Spirit's role in our intimacy with God is expressed in The Message in 1 Corinthians 2, (LCD) **"No one's ever seen or heard anything like this, Never so much as imagined anything quite like it—What God has arranged for those who love him. But you've seen and heard it because God by his Spirit has brought it all out into the open before you. The Spirit, not content to flit around on the surface, dives into the depths of God, and brings out what God planned all along."** Wow! If we're open to Him, the Holy Spirit can and will guide us into the depths of the person of God, into a deep, intimate love relationship that blows away our widest dreams. We can't go there on our own any more than I could understand the vast Gettysburg battlefields on my own. We need a guide - and that guide is the Holy Spirit.

How are you doing with interacting with the Holy Spirit? Do you realize He is a person? I like how He is described in the New City Catechism, (LCD) **"The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power or an ethereal, abstract energy. The Spirit is personal in every sense of the term. He has a mind and thinks (Isa.11:2; Rom. 8:27). The Spirit has a will and makes choices regarding what is best for God's people and what will most glorify the Son (Acts 16:7; 1 Cor. 2:11). The Spirit, no less so than the Father and the Son, enters into a vibrant and intimate relationship with all whom he indwells (2 Cor. 13:14)...His primary role in us...is to direct our attention to the person of Christ and to awaken in us heartfelt affection for and devotion to the Savior (John 14:26; 16:12-15)."** Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into intimacy with God. Right now, invite Him to reveal the depths of the love of God to you. Be friends with the Holy Spirit!

The 6 P's: Place

Recently, it had become obvious to me that not everyone understands what I or anyone means when we talk about having a quiet time or devotions with God. I think we just assume that people know how to be intimate with Him. So I'd like to have us walk through a tool that I've created from my years of walking with God. It is called (LCD) **the 6 P's** – how to have time alone with God. Each of these are elements that are helpful in enabling us to connect to God intimately. Let's walk through them one at a time. The first P is (LCD) **"Place."** Even Jesus had a special place where He met with the Father: (LCD) **"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."** Jesus went off to a solitary place. Intimacy requires privacy. We aren't meant to be intimate in public. All intimacy requires privacy and safety to expose the depths of oneself. Even Jesus met with the Father privately. Intimacy requires privacy.

You may want to consider having a special place set aside for your daily time with God. It can be somewhere in your home or at your work or in your backyard. Whatever is most conducive to quieting yourself and focusing on God. Also, the time of day isn't important. Choose a time that best fits you and your schedule. For me, it's (LCD) **my living room first thing in the morning.** That works best for me. How about you? Where can you create a special place to intimately meet with God? One of our elders recently showed me a special place he has created in his basement near the heater system. He has a chair, carpet, pictures, and a Bible there. How about you? Where can you meet regularly, intimately with God?

The 6 P's: Pockets

The first P is "Place." Intimacy with God requires privacy. The second P is **(LCD) "Pockets."** Intimacy with God requires removing distractions. And the two biggest distractions are what we carry around in the pockets of our hearts – **(LCD) concerns and confessions.** Have you ever tried to talk to someone who was distracted? Constantly looking at their phone or the clock. You can't really connect to someone until they are focused and give you their undivided attention. So, before we can enter into intimacy with God, we need to remove the distractions of the things we're concerned about and the sins that we need to confess to Him.

God invites us to give Him these distractions. **(LCD) "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."** I begin my time with God by going over what I am concerned about – a work deadline, a family issue, my health, whatever it might be. I consciously say, "Lord, I am anxious about X. I cast this concern upon You because You care for me. Thank you." Next, the Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Because of God's love and Christ's sacrifice, our sins are forgiven. However, if we are to experience the freedom of forgiveness, we need to regularly confess the sins we commit that interfere with our intimacy with God. So I take time to let God examine my heart and then I confess to Him, agree with Him, regarding anything that is sinful.

So let's do this right now. Take a moment and quiet yourself. Is there anything that you're concerned about? Any sin that the Spirit is pointing out? If so, cast your concerns and confess your sins to God. Let Him free you up so that you can move into a place of intimacy with Him!

The 6 P's: Praise

The first P is "Place." Intimacy with God requires privacy. The second P is "Pockets." Intimacy with God requires removing distractions. The third P is **(LCD) "Praise."** Intimacy with God requires centering our hearts and minds on God. Once you've unburdened yourself of concerns and confessions, take time to recognize who you're meeting with – the King of the Universe! Adore God, sing to Him, thank Him, humble yourself physically before Him. All of these and other acts are ways to posture our hearts and minds to hear God with humility.

Now I know that for some of us, praise and adoration can be hard. We often fall into thanksgiving, praising God for what He's done for us. That's fine! But we need to also adore God for who He is – His person. Think of someone who is beloved in your life. A spouse, a child, a best friend. You don't enter into intimacy with them by reciting their resume to them! We enter into intimacy by telling our beloved what we appreciate about them – their kindness, their patience, their care, their grace. How much more can we do that with God!

One way to praise God, center on Him, is by going through the alphabet and adoring God for His attributes: "God I praise You that You're almighty! I praise You that You're beautiful. I praise You for being caring! Etc... Another way to praise God is through **(LCD) music.** Music has the power to reach into the deepest parts of our souls. You can sing, or meditate on the lyrics of rich hymns, or play worship songs on your phone. You might want to go through the **(LCD) PRAISE** handout that I got years ago from Pastor Jack Hayford. Whatever you choose, seek to center Yourself on God – who He is – so that you can be intimate with Him.

The 6 P's: Prayer

The first P is "Place." Intimacy with God requires privacy. The second P is "Pockets." Intimacy with God requires removing distractions. The third P is "Praise." Intimacy with God requires centering our hearts and minds on God. The fourth P is **(LCD) "Prayer."** Intimacy with God requires two-way communication. Prayer is a two-way conversation between you and the Living God. God speaks to us through His perfect and living Word and the Holy Spirit. We speak to Him in prayer. Think of your own relationships. Is there anything worse than someone who goes on and on? Good intimacy requires giving and taking. That's true with God too. It's **(LCD) two-way reading and responding.** As we hear His heart and mind through His Word, we can respond to Him in prayer. This is all part of God inviting us to know Him intimately as the Spirit of Jesus says in Revelation, **(LCD) "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."** What an invitation to know God!

As for reading the Bible, let me encourage you to look for a **(LCD) SPECK in your reading.** Take note and even write in your Bible whenever you see a Sin to avoid, a Promise to claim, an Example to follow, a Command to obey, or Knowledge to retain. Ask God to pinpoint which one is most important to focus on right now in your life. Take time praying specifically about this SPECK to apply it to your heart. I know that for me, I try to remind myself of this SPECK throughout the rest of my day. The bottom line – the Bible is a living document. The Spirit can bring it to life in us as we read it with faith and humility. Let God transform you versus simply informing you!

The 6 P's: Pause

The first P is "Place." Intimacy with God requires privacy. The second P is "Pockets." Intimacy with God requires removing distractions. The third P is "Praise." Intimacy with God requires centering our hearts and minds on God. The fourth P is "Prayer." Intimacy with God requires two-way communication. The fifth P is **(LCD) "Pause."** Intimacy requires careful listening. After you've read the Bible, take two or three minutes, to let God speak to your heart. Sit quietly, focus on the presence of the Living God, and listen to the Holy Spirit's voice. Be open to receiving a word, a picture, a phrase, a verse, a song, whatever God might want to communicate to you. Don't limit God's interaction with you.

I love the example of the prophet Isaiah regarding careful listening, **(LCD) "The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed."** Isaiah realized that he needed to do more than just study God's Word, he needed to hear personally from God. For instance, in Isaiah 20, the prophet is told by God to march around Jerusalem naked or at least nearly naked for three years as a warning of impending judgment. Trust me! If Isaiah had only studied scripture, he would never have known that this was a word from God! Isaiah, however, had become intimate with God and knew when God was calling him to do something out of the ordinary. We too need to develop our ability to discern God's voice and it requires taking the time to be silent before God to allow Him to whisper His heart and mind to us.

The 6 P's: Practice

The first P is "Place." Intimacy with God requires privacy. The second P is "Pockets." Intimacy with God requires removing distractions. The third P is "Praise." Intimacy with God requires centering our hearts and minds on God. The fourth P is "Prayer." Intimacy with God requires two-way communication. The fifth P is "Pause." Intimacy requires careful listening. The sixth P is **(LCD) "Practice."** Intimacy requires walking in synch with God. Remember that your time with God is not meant to simply be a few minutes in the morning and then off to do whatever you want! Take whatever He's shown you during your personal time with Him into your day and live it out.

The ultimate form of worship is obedience. In John 14, Jesus gave us an incredible promise, **(LCD) "Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." Did you hear that? Jesus promises intimacy for those who obey Him, walk in synch with Him. How do we do that? Galatians 5:25, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."** Seek to walk in the light of God's presence and Word throughout the rest of your day. One way I do this is by seeking to practice God's presence throughout the day. Talk to Him, refer to Him, in everything you do – whether work, play, eating, sleeping. Everything. And to that end, I'd like to sing one last song this morning to encourage this whole life intimacy with God.

Sing "Everything"

Thanks for joining me today in this journey of intimacy. Don't forget the **(LCD) 6 P's** and may we all draw near to God intimately so that He will draw intimately close to us.