

Our Calling - Intimate Fellowship

by Dennis Kinlaw

Dennis Kinlaw emphasizes the profound calling of believers into intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ, highlighting the transformative nature of this relationship.

Duration: 54:52

Scripture: Genesis 1:1

Topics: "Intimate Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, N.T. Wright addresses a group of seminary students and challenges them to spend four hours in unbroken communion with Christ through the Word. He compares this intimate connection with Christ to the experience of watching a significant movie, where the most meaningful moments come from deep intimacy. Wright then shares his experience speaking at a large evangelical convention and highlights the concept of adoption as being more intimate than justification. He emphasizes that being adopted by God means going home with Him, unlike being acquitted in a courtroom. Wright also mentions the story of Simeon recognizing Jesus as a baby and highlights the elusive nature of God's presence. He concludes by expressing Paul's concern for believers to realize their identity and live in fellowship with the unseen but real Jesus Christ.

Transcript

I want to read for you a passage at the opening of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. And I want to say before I start, I'm just getting started on 1 and 2 Corinthians. So what I'm going to do is give you some initial thoughts that are coming to me out of some time with it.

I don't know about you, but 1 and 2 Corinthians are two books that I've never felt I had any real control over. I knew there were great sections in them because some of the most magnificent passages in Scripture are in 1 and 2 Corinthians, like 1 Corinthians 13, or 1 Corinthians 15, or 2 Corinthians 5. They're these passages that are mountain peaks of Scripture. But it always seemed to me that I could never find anything to hold them and pull them together and make them one.

So it was almost as if it were a sort of scattershot operation. Yet down underneath I've had the feeling that that's not the way Paul operated, and I just never found the key to that. So what intrigued me was, I began trying to say, is there a key here to these two books that will help me to understand more of the word of God? And so I've been trying to live there.

Let me read the first nine verses of the first chapter of 1 Corinthians. Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God and Sosthenes, our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be Saints with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, both theirs and ours. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Let me stop at that passage.

Let me cite again, because this is what I want to take as my opening thought in these three sessions together. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. It is very obvious that as you will live with 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians for a little while, that Paul is writing to some people that he loved a great deal.

I'm sure you know enough about the life of Paul and the events recorded in the New Testament, particularly in Acts, that Paul was the one who came to Corinth and first preached the gospel there. So he is writing to a group of people that he himself was responsible for bringing to know Christ. He has now gone on his way, and he's heard some things that have distressed him, and so he is sitting down to write back to them.

As I lived with this, I began to think, you know, I never thought a great deal about it. I don't like to write letters, and I don't like to write, but can you imagine what it would be trying to write a letter in that century and in those days, when you've got to get a piece of vellum to write on and some ink and a pen and maybe an amanuensis to write it for you? And then when you write your letter, you've got to find somebody who can take it and carry it to the place, because there's no postal service, no UPS and no telephone. So it is a big venture that he is doing.

I mention that simply to indicate that Paul apparently had a passion burning in his soul and a sense of beauty that caused him to take the time and spend the effort to write to these people because he cared about them. And that care was profound, and that care was deep. He writes to them because he wants them, if I am hearing what he is saying, he wants them to remember who they are in Christ and what God has called them to be.

And so, concerned lest they miss the full will of God, he writes to them, and in this opening paragraph at the introduction, he begins to tell them what his burden is. I want to say I read this for many years, read this across the years, and I thought these opening lines were nice and sort of sentimental and an expression of Christian affection and so forth. But one of the things that came to me as I began to spend more time with it is, it seems to me that there is a key in verse 9 that gives us a clue as to what Paul really is concerned about, and it is something very applicable to me, and I think it might be applicable to you.

He is saying to them, I want you to know who you are as I understand you. So he says, God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, I had read through 1 and 2 Corinthians enough that when I went back and started again reading through, suddenly I found myself caught by that word, called.

In fact, if you will look at the 7th chapter, you will find that word repeated again and again. And if you will read this first chapter carefully and read it in the Greek as well as in the English, you will find that the word kaleo is the key word, and along with it is the word etikaleo, and so that either explicitly or implicitly what he is saying is, I want you to know who you are. You are a bunch of called people, and that is what distinguishes you from the rest of the world.

Now, very quickly I can point out three or four things in this first chapter that point to that. One of them is, he begins by saying, Paul, I'm called, and he says, I'm writing to you the church of God which is incarnate. Now, you know enough to know that the Greek word for church is the word ekklesia, which comes from that word kaleo, to call, and ek, out of, the preposition out of, so that the church in Paul's mind was a group that was called out of a larger body.

It was a group that was called out of the general body, politic, the general social group, social part of that world, wherever it was that he was addressing. Now, in addition to the church being a group that is called out, you will notice he says, to the church of God which is incarnate, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. So there you get the term again.

Now it's interesting, we can translate that. Sometimes you will find it translated that we're called saints, and other translations will say we're called to be saints. Now whichever way you do that, the thing is that we are called and our calling is that we are to be a holy people.

Now that backs us up to the expression which fits between these two brief statements here, to the church and to the called, called to be or called saints, called holy, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. Now you know enough to know that the word sanctify at its basic minimal level means to separate. So he is saying you are ones who have been separated from something to something, and the explanation of that separation from and to is found in that expression of being called.

Now if you'll go down a little later in the chapter, I found what to me was very interesting. Paul says there are only three groups of people in the world. They're the ones who are Jews, and they're the ones who are Gentiles, and then they're the ones who are the called.

Let me read the passage. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews, that's one class of people, they request a sign.

And Greeks, that's another class of people, they seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified to the Jews, the one group, the stumbling block, and to the Greeks, the other foolishness. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

That's very interesting that that's the way he tags us. If you're a part of the body of Christ today, from Paul's point of view, the thing that makes you that is, you've heard a voice and you've responded to it. You've heard a call and you've responded to that call.

And your brothers and sisters are those who've heard the same call and who have responded to that same call. Now, isn't it interesting? It's no problem identifying a Jew. In that ancient world, Paul had no problem because when he came to a new town, the first thing he did was look for the Jews.

He didn't have any trouble looking for the Jews. All he had to do was watch the people who didn't work on Saturday. And Saturday was a good day to make money, and Jews like to make money, but they quit on that day because this was a part of their custom.

They also, he looked for a synagogue, and they would attach themselves to a synagogue, which meant they were religiously different from the world. When you got them together, you could look at them and you could recognize from their faces that they were different from the Gentiles around them. And if you talked to them, their accent was different in that world.

And if you lived with them a little bit, their standards, their morals, and their customs were different. Jews were very easy to identify in that ancient world. Now, it wasn't too hard to identify the Gentiles because once you identified the Jews, the Gentiles were everybody that was left.

So Paul said, here we are, we've got these two great groups of people, but there's a third group. And it's interesting, there's no external sign on them, because what makes them who they are is not something tagged on to them that they wear. It isn't even something that they do.

It is something that they have experienced, in that they have heard a voice, they've responded to that voice, and that voice has been the most determinative thing in their total existence. And it is that experience of hearing that voice and responding to it that gives them their identity and makes them who they are. Now, you know, it'd be nice if you could put a sign on people and say, called, wouldn't you? And through the history of the Church, we've done that.

We've had a thousand signs. We've tagged on people, you know, to let them know that they were a part of that, let the world know, we do it, that we're a part of that. Now, but it's interesting.

What he's talking about is something that you can't see, it is intangible, and it is internal. Now, in that passage, verse 9, you will notice he says, we are called into fellowship with Jesus Christ. Now, when I got far enough in that business of the call to sense its internality and the fact that it's not tangible and obvious, I realized the fellowship might have more in it for me than I had thought, because it's interesting, the fellowship that they're called to is not the fellowship of the Church, except in a secondary way.

Now, you go to church, Paul went to the synagogue to find the Jews, you go to the church to find the Christians, but when you go to church, you can find a lot of people that aren't, too, because you'll find a hypocrite or two are in the crowd. Some of us have played that role at one time or another in our life. And we sat there just as piously as anybody else, but we didn't have the things that made a person a believer and a Christian.

Now he says, the people I'm interested in and the people that you are to be are a people who have heard the call and you have been called into something, and what you're called into is fellowship with Jesus Christ. Now what's more intriguing is, who's Jesus Christ? He's been dead for 25 years. And the pagan Corinthian looks at a Christian and believer and says, what is it that makes you who you are? He says, well, it's the guy I fellowship with.

And so the pagan says, well, now who is it that you fellowship with? Well, he said, his name is Jesus. Well, he said, where is he? Well, he said, he's a, that's a little, a little bit of a, he lived about 25 years ago. And so you mean he's dead? And they said, well, yeah, he died.

And you mean he's not around now? Well, yeah, he is around now, where? And then you try to explain where he is, and that's not an easy thing to do. It's not difficult for me to understand why the pagan thinks that you and I follow myths and fairy tales, because we live in a world where everything is measured in terms of whether you can see it, touch it, feel it, measure it, the tangible and the obvious. And what makes us who we are is something that we can't even prove to the pagan next to us that it exists, that it, let me say it, but it's he, exists.

And so Paul says, I want you to know who you are. You're the call people, and you're the people who are called into fellowship with Jesus Christ. Now, you know, it's very easy to get that, you and I immediately, we say, oh, yes.

But it's very easy to get to the place where we put other things in as the central thing, because the heart of what the Christian life is and the most important thing in any person's existence is the thing that nobody around can see and nobody around can be absolutely sure except you, the individual, and that is that you have come to know Jesus Christ in a personal, living way, and he's transformed your existence. And he not only has transformed it, but he continues to transform it. Now, it's interesting, that's not a new problem in the New Testament, because you will remember that in the ancient world, the pagans said, we know about these Jews because they talk about God, but they're really atheists.

You read the pagan literature of the first century world, and you will find that Jews were called atheists, and the reason they were called atheists was because they didn't have an idol that they worshipped. Their God could not be seen, he could not be touched, there was no representation of him. They said, there's one God, and he's invisible, and you can't see him, and nothing can represent him, but he's real, and he is the ultimate reality behind everything that exists.

Now, you will remember that, if I remember my story correctly, that was intriguing to Titus, because the Roman general, when he came to Jerusalem, finally breached the walls of Jerusalem. The place he wanted to go was to go to the temple. Now, I don't know, but one of the things that we do know about Roman generals was that they liked to bring trophies home to show through the streets of Rome, to show that they had won great victories and accomplished unusual exploits.

And one of the things they would bring home were the gods of the countries that they conquered. And you know, the gods were usually valuable, they were pieces of art, but more than that, they were covered usually with gold, and then they were bedecked with jewels, and they made a nice exhibit, you know, to run down through the streets of Rome to see what you'd captured. And now Titus goes into the heart of the heart of everything Jewish, passed the holy place into the holy of holies, and looks, and comes out and says, well, there's nothing here, because there was no image of their god.

Now, that's the problem with God, isn't it? That's always the problem with God. You know, there was a problem with Jesus when he showed up in the temple. You will remember that when he showed up in the temple, they'd been waiting two thousand years for him, and what made a Jew a Jew was the fact he was waiting for the Messiah.

And when he came, he didn't fit the pattern of what a god ought to be at all, or Christ as far as they were concerned, and Jesus turned and left, after rearranging the furniture much to their discomfort, and they said, he's a troublesome peasant from Galilee. And he was the one they'd been looking for for two thousand years, and his identity was what made them who they were, but they never recognized him. Now you will remember there was one man, though, in the temple one day who did recognize him.

His name was Simeon. Now the Jesus whom the priests never recognized, you will remember, had already turned water into wine. He had already cleansed lepers.

He had already cast the demonic out of people. He had already healed people and restored them, the lame to wholeness and so forth. And don't tell me those stories hadn't gotten to the temple.

But when he came, they said, no, he's a Galilean peasant. I've often thought about Pilate, who said, are you the king of the Jews? And he crucified him, and a criminal hanging on a cross next to him said, I believe you are. And the interesting thing is, the thief saw something that caused him to enter into a fellowship that moved right through death and into the next world.

Now Simeon, he was a babe in arms, and some way or other, Simeon looked at him and said, that's he, and recognized him. Now there's something elusive about God. If you're not sensitive, you can have him and he can be present and you not know he's there, or there's something elusive about him that you can think you've got him and you look around and he's gone.

And Paul says, my concern for you is that you realize who you are supposed to be. You are supposed to be a people who are in living fellowship, living fellowship with somebody the world can't see, but he's the most real thing in all existence for you, in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Now if we had time, I'd like to talk about places, how we find him and the places where he shows up, but that's not what I want to do today.

But isn't that one of the, isn't that part of the glory of preaching? One of the things that I never cease to get over is the glory that when the word is preached, when you're not looking, he shows up. And there he is. And if you know him, you know he's there.

And if you don't know him, you know something is there. And I suspect Christianity is moving from knowing something is present to knowing he's present. I've always loved the story of Mary Fisher here, who's teaching biblical theology in the seminary.

A pagan Australian journalist, totally secular, and called herself an atheist, found herself in a Christian colony that treated drug addicts. And she said in those sessions there, she said she experienced something she'd never experienced before. And she said, I found myself talking with a man who headed the colony, a rather quiet, humble little guy, unimpressive.

And she was in her exit interview with him, and she said, sir, I don't know what it is you've got here, but there's nothing in the world I wouldn't give to have it. And he looked at her and said, well, no reason you can't. And she said, well, I thought it was religious.

And he said, yes, it's very religious. Well, she said, how can I have it? I'm an atheist. He said, no problem, just tell him.

I love that. She sensed that something was there, and before it was over with, it was somebody. And her total life has been transformed, and now she's teaching biblical theology in Asbury Theological Seminary.

Now I think you will catch from that something of where I'm going. The most determinative thing in your life are those moments of immediacy. Those moments of immediacy when you are in his presence, you know you're in his presence, you've confronted him, he confronts you, and out of that comes everything significant in human existence, everything significant in human existence.

Now, as I read that and as I dealt with it, I began thinking, he wants to be in fellowship with me, and he wants me to be in fellowship with him. How intimate does he want me to be with him? Now I want to tell you just some preliminary thinking in my mind. I don't have this worked out extremely well at all, but just let me give you some pointers that may start some things working inside you.

They certainly have started some things working inside me. I began thinking about the scripture. How does the Bible describe the relationship that God wants with me? Now a year and a half ago, John Oswalt talked me into teaching an Old Testament theology class.

I had taught it once in 25 years, and I lived for, how many weeks was that, it seemed like an eternity. Fourteen weeks, one hour from disaster. You ever feel that way? If you're a preacher, have you ever been in that position? Well anyway, I found myself going back and trying to go through scripture, the Old Testament, to see the development in the Old Testament.

And there came to me again what I had seen and measured before, but saw it more fully than I had ever seen it before. You know, Genesis is the seedbed for it all, and it is an incredibly great, rich seedbed. And there are some things that can be seen more clearly there than anywhere else.

And as I dealt with the book of Genesis, I began to realize that a key word in the book of Genesis is walk, and that what God does, wanted with his creatures, was that they would walk with him. They would fellowship with him as friend with friend. You will remember that Isaiah speaks about Abraham, and he's the main character in Genesis.

Isaiah calls him the friend of God. Now, the Hebrew is the lover of God, but it is a Hebrew word that is used that way for friend, the one whom he walks and talks with. And so immediately, you know, I remembered that the climax of the creation is not a church service.

The climax of the creation is a conversation, and it is a conversation between God and Adam and Eve in the cool of the day as they walk and as they talk together. You will remember that the next thing we get along that line is where we are told that Enoch walked with God, and he was so acceptable to God that he stepped right beyond death and walked all the way into the next life with God. He was not because God took him to be with him.

There's not much in the book of Genesis about life after death, but what you do get comes those that are redeemed and no life after death, it comes out of walking with God. The person who walks with God is perfectly safe. Death won't be the end for him.

That will be the beginning of something better if he's walking with the Lord of life. You will remember it said about Noah that he walked with God, and then Abraham, that's what he did. Now, I've come to believe that you remember that's what Jesus did for three years with his disciples.

They walked together, and God wants this kind of relationship. But that's not all the scripture says. You find that that's an individual relationship, and then you come to the book of Exodus and you come to God choosing a nation or developing a nation that is developed, leading it farther into a better understanding of the covenant that he wants to establish with his chosen people, the descendants of Abraham.

And so out of Genesis 12 comes the story of Exodus, and you get to Exodus 19, and in Exodus 19, God says, I want this people, you are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a peculiar treasure to me. Now, at this point, you're getting a number of implications that are very different from the friendship of

Enoch walking with God with his friend or Abraham walking with his friend. You've got a nation involved, you've got a kingdom involved, you've got politics involved, you've got government involved, you've got law involved.

And you will notice that that's in chapter 19, and in chapter 20, you get the beginning of the law. You get the Ten Commandments and then the beginning of the legal structure of the Old Testament. You get now not only a king, but you get a king who plays the role of judge.

And so you get the basis of what is developed in the rest of the New Testament, or the rest of the scripture in terms of justification. And so you get to the New Testament, and you find the treatment, how can I stand before God who is a king and who is a judge, who is a ruler and who is a legal ruler? How can I stand before him justified? I have broken his law. I am a criminal against the king and against his court and against the country.

I am in trouble because I have broken that law. How can I be justified? And so you get the New Testament concept, and it's an Old Testament concept which became such a vital part of the Reformation that justification by faith is the line which all of us know and with which we are perfectly comfortable because of a Luther and a Calvin, and we know what it means to stand as if we had never sinned before God through faith in Jesus Christ, and our political legal status is clear. And we don't have to look at the king and the judge and feel incredible distance and great terror as we think about him.

Now I want to suggest something. I wonder sometimes if the Protestant Reformation hasn't taken that paradigm and used it in such a way that we have forgotten some other paradigms that may have some things to say to us that that paradigm doesn't, because there are other paradigms that are started in the Scripture and are developed that are much more intimate than that legal status of justifying a sinner whose sin has been taken care of, a criminal whose crime has been atoned for, and he can stand before the judge without terror and fear. I think you know where I'm going, because slowly there begins to develop in the Scripture the concept of the family.

Now, it's interesting how it develops. I wish I knew enough about the Scripture and could go through it and develop it, show it the way it developed. But you know, in the Old Testament, God is not a great emphasis and not placed on God as father.

And when you do get an emphasis, he is the father of Israel, and Israel is his son and it is a corporate thing. And then you come to David, and when you come to David, it gets more personal. And God said, this is my son.

And so David stands as a son before the Lord. And you get to the New Testament, and when you get to the New Testament, you find that every believer is a son of God. And the content begins to get filled in.

And so we find the concept of adoption. And you know, it's interesting, that's much more intimate than justification, isn't it? It is much more intimate than justification. Because you see, the guy in the courtroom and the judge says you're acquitted, at four o'clock the judge goes home.

But when the judge says, son, you go home with him. I remember, if we had time, anybody remember Henry Clay Morrison's sermon on his trial? You remember when he described how as a boy he broke the law, and they caught him and took him to court, and set him down in front of a blue uniformed policeman? And the policeman sat there to keep him in his place, and the judge sat on the bench, and he looked down

and said, Bud Morrison, who is your legal counsel? And he said, I don't have any legal counsel. And he said, well, the law insists that I assign somebody for your counsel.

So he looks at a row of lawyers here in point one and calls them by name and says, you serve as Bud Morrison's counsel. I'll never forget, I heard him preach this sermon. I heard him tell about how he looked at this person who was to plead his case, and he said, I was so grateful there was somebody to plead my case, because I needed somebody to plead my case.

He said, I watched him as he stood up, and he told about how handsome he was, and how graceful he was. He said, I fell in love with him before he got to me, and when he sat down next to me he put his arm tenderly around me and said, son, are you guilty? Oh, he said, I did a lot of things they never caught me at. He said, well, if that's true, and you did what they caught you at, yes, he said, I did what they caught me at.

Well, he said, we'd better throw you on the mercy of the court. He said, there was such a tender affection that oozed out of that young man that if I was going to be thrown anywhere, I was perfectly willing as long as he was the guy, throw it. And he said he began to plead my case.

In the middle of his plea, Morrison told about how he looked at the judge, the lawyer didn't, and he said, as he looked at the judge, he said, he began to plead, he said, you don't want to send this boy to jail. If you will give him to me, father, I will take care of him. And he said, it suddenly dawned on me that my lawyer was the son of the judge.

And he said, man, I knew I was home free. It was a magnificent description of an increasing intimacy of relationship and association. And when he got through, he said, you know that that wasn't a courtroom, it was a little Methodist church during a revival meeting.

And the big blue uniformed policeman was the Holy Spirit who caught me and brought me in guilty, and the lawyer was Jesus, and the judge on the bench was my father. But there's a difference between a judge and a father, isn't there, in intimacy? When I think about that, I always come back to the memory of, you remember, when the Union was hanging in the balance and Lincoln had his generals and his chief advisors around and they were debating whether the Union was going to survive, and suddenly the door swung open and Ted came running in, and the future of the Union waited while Abe took care of his boy, Ted. Now there's an intimacy in that that isn't, and you sense it when you begin to read, say, Wesley's hymn, My God is Reconciled.

Now that can be justification. My God is reconciled, his pardoning voice I hear. But now notice the next thing, he owns me for his child.

I shall no longer, I can no longer fear. With confidence I now draw nigh, and Abba, Father, Abba, Christ. Now that increasing intimacy, and he says we are to be his children, God's children.

Well if we're the children of the Father, isn't it interesting we're brothers and sisters of the Son? It gets more intimate as you go along. But then you begin to realize that there's another motif that develops in the Old Testament and runs through the Scriptures, and that is not of a child to a father, but is of a spouse to a spouse. And with this crowd, all I have to do is mention Hosea, and you immediately know that Hosea saw Israel's relationship to Yahweh as that of a spouse.

You read Ezekiel 16, where Yahweh sees Israel, an illegitimate child tossed out in the wilderness in her blood to be left to die, and he comes along and takes the babe and washes and takes care of it and raises it until she becomes a beautiful young lady, and he lays his cloak over her and claims her for his own, and he weds her to himself. And so the people of God are married to Yahweh, Israel is his bride. And you come to the New Testament, and that is developed far more extensively.

And I don't need to spend the time here in developing that, but you read in 2 Corinthians, and you'll find Paul saying about the Corinthian church, I've espoused you to one husband. You find him talking about adultery, you find him talking about prostitution, and he says, when you give your body to a prostitute, you are giving part of the body of Christ, because he says you are his bride, and the two of you shall become one flesh. And Paul in that passage in 1 Corinthians quotes Genesis 2, where Adam and Eve become one.

He says, and the two of you become one flesh, and he is speaking about, develops it more fully in Ephesians 5, but it's all latent here in 1 Corinthians, a relationship of to the eternal Son of God we are espoused. Now, it's interesting, the relationship with a parent is, in a sense, a relationship under, isn't it? But when you come to a relationship with a spouse, it is a relationship with, isn't it? Now, let me ask you, what more intimate personal relationship can ever be experienced than that? I don't know about you, but that's the most intimate relationship I've ever known. It's at times almost a frighteningly intimate relationship, isn't it? I remember after the wedding ceremony and Broadway Methodist Church in Schenectady, New York, Elsie and I went out and got in the automobile we had borrowed, and we started on our way, and I looked over at her and thought to myself, am I hooked to her forever? I remember how horrified she was when I told her that.

But I was just beginning to sense that, you know, there's something sort of frightening about that kind of intimacy, permanent, permanent, you know, okay. So that's developed. But what interests me is, when I got to that point, I'd gone through all of that, do you know there is a deeper intimacy that's involved here? Because it's not the intimacy of the spouse.

You know, Elsie takes me to the airport, and I get on an airplane and fly out in New Mexico, and she's in Wilmore, and I'm in New Mexico. And God says, if I understand Paul correctly, I want a relationship with you more intimate than that. So that if you're going to get on a plane and fly to New Mexico, I go with you, unless you're going on something I don't want to go on.

And when I get on the plane to go somewhere, I want you to go with me. It is a relationship not of spouse, but of inhabitation. You know, as I wrestled with this and as I lived with this, it began to dawn on me there's no religion in the world that has as high a view of a human being as the biblical did.

That we are made to be, what does Paul say, we're made to be temples of God. We're made to be dwelling places for him. And so he lives in us.

Now the intimacy of that is reflected, I think, in what you see in Jesus when he stands in the temple. And they say, what right do you have to do this? He said, strip this building down, in three days I'll raise it up. Because you see, the real temple is where God and man become one.

And when you punch him, you punch God, and when you punch him, you punch the best of man. And there is an intimacy here, a oneness. Now you and I are never going to have the oneness of the Incarnation, but every one of us can have the oneness of inhabitation, where he dwells in us, and lives

with us sixty seconds out of every minute, sixty minutes out of every hour, twenty-four hours out of every day, seven days out of every week, in unbroken communion.

Now you know, you're aware, I think, that we're dealing with metaphors. Now you know what a metaphor is. It's like when Jesus said to the woman at the well, you drink that water and you'll have to come back tomorrow.

But if you drink the water that I give you, you'll never thirst again. So the water in the well is a symbol for a reality. Now it's interesting, the reality is always better than any of the metaphors.

So when I've said everything I've said about these metaphors and the intimacy, what God is after is something far more intimate than our metaphors will explain. Now an aside for those of you who have an interest in theological things, I began thinking, do you suppose God had all this in mind when he created Adam and Eve? You know, for so long in my life I thought that sin was an afterthought to God and it caught him by surprise. But you know, the reality is the scripture says that Jesus is the lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world for the sins of the world.

Touch that person you've touched God, and when you've touched God, that person you've also touched the best, what we are supposed to be. I was interested, I listened to some tapes which Mary Fisher gave me of a New Testament scholar from Oxford, a fellow by the name of Wright, who said, you know, I no longer believe the resurrection is proof of the deity of Christ. He said, I believe fully in the deity of Christ.

But he said, in the resurrected Christ you see what Adam was supposed to be. And sin has damaged us. But we're incredible creatures, I began to think.

And you know, that helps explain something to me, that inhabiting us. I was in my 60s before I would even admit that these passages were in the Bible. But do you know that Jesus said one day, if they receive you, they get me, and when they get me, they get my father? Now you know that when you receive me, you get my father, and if you miss me, you miss my father, because my father and I are one.

And then he said, and if they receive you, they get me, and when they get me, they get my father, and if they reject you, they miss me, and when they miss me, they miss my father. Because he said, you and I are one. Now our oneness is metaphorical.

Our identity is metaphorical. His identity, God in Christ, is metaphysical, ontological. It has to do with his being.

But how one are we with him? You know, I think some of you have heard me say, I have a tendency to see great verses and skip the one before it and the one after it. So I remember when I was in a pastorate, I decided once to preach a series on great text before great text. And I know that led me to a series on great text after great text, because oftentimes the text before is a great, is an incredible text too.

Like for instance, you know that verse we all love, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. Any man hear my voice and open the door. I will come into him and will suck fellowship with him and he with me, family situation I suppose.

Do you know what the next verse says? To him that overcome it, will I grant to sit with me on my throne? When I, let me get the exact wording of it. To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on my throne as I also overcame and as I am sat down with my father on his throne. Now, I remember the first time I

really had Revelation 5 sort of open up to me.

You remember Jesus, the doorway has opened into heaven and John looks in and sees the throne of God and the four living creatures and the four and 20 elders throwing their crowns down and bowing before him and everything saying, holy, holy, holy. You will remember. And then he sees in the hands of the one sitting on the throne, the seven sealed book.

And he knows his future is in that and he's curious about that and they search out to find somebody worthy to open the seals and there's no one worthy. And as he weeps, one of the fellows says, don't shed those apostolic tears, there's one worthy. And the lion of the tribe of Judah is worthy and he turns to see the lion of the tribe of Judah and what he sees is an unusual lion.

It is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world, standing in the midst of the throne of God. I remember when that first came home to me. You know the thought that went through me? Mary's baby has come a long ways.

From a manger in Bethlehem to the center of the ultimate authority of all that exists, he's in the middle of the power of the throne. And then Jesus says to people like you and me, to him that overcome it will I grant to sit with me in my throne when I am sat down with the Father in his time. Do you know where we're headed for? Now I don't know enough theology to avoid heresy here.

So if I'm heretical at any point, you be patient with me and help me. But I said this to one person, he said, do you mean we're the fourth member of the blessed trinity? One thing about it is the text says we will sit. Now that explains something in 1 Corinthians.

You see, in Corinthians they had all the problems we've got in our society. I just came from a church that's been split right wide open by one member of the church, one group of people in the church filing a lawsuit against another group of people in the church. And you know all of my thoughts were, why can't we be pure like the first century church was? They were the real Christians.

Then I read 1 Corinthians and find in Corinth there was a bunch of them going to law with some of the rest of them. And Paul says, why do you do that? You mean you can't settle a church problem? Don't you know that you're going to judge the world? And then he goes further. He says, don't you know that you're going to judge the angels? Which means we are headed for the highest position in the creation and the greatest intimacy with God.

Now, why am I interested in this? Because it's encouraging, it's inspirational, it's a blessing in this kind of thought. Well, that's not why Paul wrote. Paul said, I want you to remember who you are and what he's called you for.

Because if you let any shatter come across that fellowship, all that God has planned for you will be lost. Because it's out of that intimacy that the significant things come. Now, I had a chance to speak to the annual convention of one of the evangelical denominations in this country last year.

It's one I didn't know extremely well, but I decided 8,000 people, that's a pretty good crowd to speak to, biggest one I ever spoke to. And it was interesting, when I walked up to speak, it was at night and they had a bank of these lights chained, I couldn't see the people on the front row. I'm not used to moving in that league, but I said something and it must have been funny and they laughed and I said, well, there are people out there beyond those lights.

But anyway, to get ready for that, I went back and read the life of the founder. I wanted to know something, what brought him into existence. It was a very interesting story, a man who said God converted him and he started into the ministry.

And as he preached and served Christ, he began to hear that there was a deeper, more intimate relationship with Christ. And he said, I believe that conversion was all that was necessary. And when they talked about a deeper experience of grace and talked about entire sanctification, he said, I knew that was heresy, so I preached against it.

And then he said, something happened to my wife. And he said, I found out that my wife had religion better than I did. And he said, that sort of shook me up because she'd been converted just like I was.

Now something had happened to her, she was living on a different dimension. And he said, a hunger began to grow in my heart, and I began to seek him. And he said, I came to a place of total surrender, death to my own interest, and I entered into an intimacy with God that I had never known before.

So you began to get entries like this. I slipped into the woods and spent three hours alone with Christ. You know, I lived in the ministry a long time before I found a preacher who had spent three hours alone with Christ.

He spent it with his people, or with what he wanted to do. But it's interesting, one of the strongest evangelical witnesses in the world today came out of the life of a very ordinary human being who learned what it meant to have that kind of intimacy. I was fascinated by something from this N.G. Wright and the tape that, as I said, Mary Fisher gave me.

Mary told me about this one, I didn't hear it, but if I heard her correctly, she said he looked at a group of seminary students, he said, do you mean you've never spent four hours with the Word in an unbroken communion with Christ? He said, you do that with a significant movie. If you can do that with a major movie, why can't you do it with the God of glory? And the interesting thing is, as I read church history, everywhere you find people, anywhere you find people, who get into that kind of intimacy with Christ, some start. Something significant, something eternally significant.

And there are many of us here today who are here because somebody had that kind of intimacy. You know, I believe there are many of us who have fellowship with the church that don't know much about it. We know far more about fellowship with the church than we do about fellowship with Christ.

Our identity is determined by the institution and our relationship to the institution. That can be true of a professor at Asbury Seminary or a president of Asbury College. After all, president of Asbury College, that's a rather self-respecting Christian, but if that's where my identity is or where a person's identity is, it is false.

Our identity is to be out of our intimacy with him. Because it's only when we get into that kind of intimacy that we hear. And when you get into that kind of intimacy, you hear all sorts of calls.

And the call oftentimes comes to break up the relationships we're in and get into a place where God can greatly use us and where we can be an instrument of blessing. Or it may be he wants you to go straight back into exactly what you're in. Go back into it with resources that you haven't had before, insight, strength, a word that you haven't had before.

So that's what these two days are for. They're not primarily for knowledge. It'd be nice if we learned some things while we're together that would be helpful to us.

They're not primarily for our fellowship with each other. We get strength from our fellowship with each other, and that's very precious. But the primary purpose of these two days together is that we can know we're called in to fellowship with him.

So that when we walk out on Wednesday, the life that we live over these next few months grows out of that personal relationship to Christ rather than any other single thing. Now that's where I wanted to begin today.

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