

Intimacy With God

by J. Oswald Sanders

God desires to have an incredible degree of intimacy with each of us, and it is possible for ordinary Christians to have a deep and personal relationship with Him.

Duration: 37:59

Scripture: Exodus 33:7-13, Exodus 33:18, Exodus 34:6, Psalm 27:8, Matthew 6:33, James 4:8

Topics: "Intimacy With God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of spending time alone with God. He uses the example of Moses, who spent six days alone with God on the mountain and became radiant as a result. The speaker suggests that our lack of closeness to God may be due to not prioritizing time with Him. He challenges the audience to be willing to pay the price of spending time with God in order to experience intimacy with Him.

Transcript

I'd like you to read with me from Exodus chapter thirty-three. Exodus chapter thirty-three, we'll read from verse seven. Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting.

Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp, and whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrance to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance to his tent.

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to his camp, but his young aide Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent. Moses said to the Lord, You have been telling me, lead these people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.

You have said, I know you by name, and you have found favor with me. If I have found favor in your eyes, teach me your ways, so I may know you, and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.

The Lord replied, My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Then Moses said to him, If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people, unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked.

What did he ask? You notice what he said? Show me, teach me your ways. And the Lord said, I will do the very thing that you ask, because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name. Then Moses said, Now show me your glory.

And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.

That is to say, no one can experience a vision of the full glory and effulgence of God and live. There are people who had limited vision of God, but no one can see God and live. I think it's true to say that most, if not all, of us here present this morning would like to be more intimate with God than you are.

Are you satisfied with the degree of your intimacy with God? I'm sure most of us, like the preacher, would say, No, I am not satisfied with the degree of intimacy I have with God. And yet, it's gloriously possible for us to grow more intimate with God. I jotted down what Dr. Tozer said in this connection.

Listen, he said, God is a person who can be known in increasing degrees of intimacy as we prepare our hearts for the wonder. God can be known in increasing degrees of intimacy. Isn't that encouraging? The verse which you know and I know very well is, Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

That's not a promise, it's a statement of fact. It's a fact that every time I make a motion toward God in my heart, seeking to know him better, to be nearer to him, every time I draw near to God, he makes a reciprocal advance toward me. As I draw near to him, he draws near to me.

But the initiative is mine. I draw near to him and then he responds. Moses asked, Teach me thy ways.

The Lord said, I'll do the very thing that you said. Moses said, Show me your glory. And he said, This is my glory.

You see, God responds when we move toward him. And every desire that the Holy Spirit has kindled in our hearts will be met by the response of God. This desire for an increasing intimacy with God is expressed in a lot of our hymns.

Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to the cross where thou hast died. Nearer, still nearer, close to thy heart. Draw me, my Saviour, so precious thou art.

Let me come closer to thee, Lord Jesus. O closer, day by day. Here is just the expression of the heart of the hymn writer that expresses our desire.

We want to come closer to the Lord. And I want to say, make a statement that some of you may feel like challenging. And the statement is this.

Every one of us Christians is now as close to the Lord, as intimate with the Lord, as we have chosen to be. You notice that I used the word chosen to be. I didn't say every one of us is as intimate with the Lord as

we would like to be or long to be.

Because that desire is in our hearts. But it's not what I desire, what I like, what I long for merely. I would like to be able to play the piano the way your pianist does.

I would very much like it. But I didn't choose the hours, days, months, years of disciplined practice. Even if I had the musical gift, I didn't choose that.

I wasn't willing to pay the price. And I believe this is true with intimacy with God. God will respond to every motion I make toward Him.

But do I give Him the chance? Have I chosen to pay the price of intimacy with God? Because there is a price to be paid. But if I'm willing to pay that price, He will draw near to me. Now, it's very interesting that in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament, there are instances of four circles of intimacy with God which His people have enjoyed.

In the Old Testament, it is between Moses and the children of Israel and God. And in the New Testament, it's Jesus and His disciples. And perhaps if I take the illustration of Jesus and His disciples first, it will illustrate what I'm trying to say.

When our Lord engaged upon His earthly ministry, He chose seventy to go out and preach for Him. And He said He sent them out two by two to preach. And they went out and came back rejoicing.

Then, a little later, it says that after a night of prayer, He chose twelve, probably from among the seventy. Why did He choose that twelve? In order that they might be with Him. He wanted to accompany with them.

He was going to live with them. He was going to pour His life into them. So, He chose the twelve and had them with Him.

And He wanted to impart to them His Spirit, so that they might be of the same spirit as He was. You remember James and John, when the Samaritans wouldn't let them pass through their village, they said, Well, Lord, will we call down fire from heaven and burn them up? And the Lord says, You don't know what spirit you are of. He wanted them to, by living with Him, to partake of His Spirit and to manifest the Spirit which He showed.

So, there were the seventy, then there were the twelve. But as you read the Gospels, you'll find that from the twelve there emerged three who were specially intimate with the Lord. They seemed to take them with Him on occasions when the others were not there.

They were with Him when He raised Jairus' daughter. They were with Him when He was on the Mount of Transfiguration. They were with Him when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

They were with Him when He gave that great prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives. Yes, He had them with Him in order that He might reveal Himself to them. And in those four occasions when those three disciples were with Jesus, in every occasion He revealed some further facet of His glory and drew them yet to yet deeper fellowship.

Well, you've got seventy, you've got twelve, you've got three. But from among the three there emerged one who had a special place in the heart of Jesus. John, the beloved disciple.

What did he do? He laid his head on Jesus' breast. You couldn't get any more intimate with the Son of God than that, could you? As Jesus was reclining at the table, John leaned his head on Jesus' breast. It wasn't that none of the other disciples could have done that.

That place was vacant. That there was only one who availed himself of that place of nearness. And if Jesus loved John more, why was it? Because John loved Him more, that's why.

It was the Apostle of Love who had the place of closest intimacy with our Lord Jesus. Now, there were those four circles of intimacy. If you had to put yourself in one of those circles, which would you think you'd be in? Would you be among the seventy who were working for the Lord? Would you be among the twelve who were even more intimate and were living with Him, learning from Him, imbibing His Spirit? Would you be among the three who were admitted into special intimacy and the Lord led into a deeper experience? Would you be the one who appropriated the vacant place on Christ's breast? Rather challenging to think through, isn't it? But this morning I want to speak especially about Moses and the people of Israel.

The law was about to be given and God summoned Moses to go up to the mountain and he said, I'll come down upon the mountain. And he came down and it was manifested in smoke and fire and the Israelites at the base of the mountain saw the manifestation of God as a devouring fire and they were filled with fear. But God gave special instructions.

He said that the people were not to ascend the mountain. They were to stay at the base of the mountain. He told Moses to put barriers so that they wouldn't touch the mountain lest they die.

And the people really didn't want to go up the mountain to have closer intimacy with God. They weren't qualified for it and they didn't want it. You say, how do you know? I know because in a few days' time those very people were worshipping the golden calf.

Moses' strong, powerful influence had been withdrawn as he went up the mountain and while he was there they worshipped the golden calf and did dishonor to God. So they were neither qualified to ascend into close intimacy with God nor did they desire it. But then there was a second circle.

They were in the outer circle. There's a second circle you'll find in chapter 24 and verse 9. Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 elders went up and they saw the God of Israel. Here from among the whole nation, 70 of the leading men who were closer in fellowship with God, Nadab and Abihu and Moses and Aaron, 74 of them, they were able to go a certain way up the mountain, nearer to God, into closer intimacy with God.

And they had a vision of the glory of God. It was a real vision. It was a wonderful vision.

They saw God in all His glory and in all His transcendence. Look at what it says in that verse. There was under His feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone like the very heaven for clearness.

An emblem of the transcendence of God. God infinitely higher, infinitely greater, infinitely purer than us sinful men. But even although these men, Aaron among them, even although they saw God, they sensed His presence.

It was a real experience. Yet it didn't have any permanent transforming effect in their lives because Aaron was the one who led them in worshipping the golden calf. You know, it's very possible for us to have had in the past a real experience of God.

We've met with Him. We've seen His glory. Our hearts have been moved and our wills have been moved.

And we've dedicated our lives to Him. But yet it may not have been permanent. It's so easy to move back from an experience like that, even although it was real.

And I know this from experience. It may have been a real experience and yet it hasn't effected a permanent transformation. And now we're not too close to God.

That's something that is really possible and something that must grieve God's heart. Then there was a third circle of intimacy. You'll find that in chapter 24 and verse 13.

So Moses rose with his servant Joshua and Moses went into the mount of God and he said to the elders, "Tarry here for us until we come again." The crowd, 74, 2. My, it soon thins out as you get higher up the mountain into intimacy with God, doesn't it? Why was it that it should be Moses and Joshua? Why Joshua? How did he qualify above all the others? I'm glad that it was Moses an old man and Joshua a young man because that encouraged us to believe that young people can come as close to God as old people can. And very often young people draw more near to God than we older people because we've got used to things and we so easily get stuck in our Christian experience. And many of the young people are on more intimate terms with the Lord than we are ourselves.

And that should be a challenge to us. But why Joshua? What was there about him that especially qualified him for this intimacy with God? You'll notice that in verse 11 it said that the young man did not depart from, he did not leave the tent. The tent was the place where the Shekinah glory came, the pillar of cloud descended, the outward manifestation of the divine presence.

And it was in that tent that God used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. And young Joshua was there. I don't know whether he listened in, whether he had that privilege.

He may have had. He may have heard what God spoke to Moses and what Moses said to God. But at any rate, he was conscious of the awesome presence of God and that must have had a tremendous effect on his life.

It had such an effect that whenever he had free time, he spent it in the tent where God manifested himself. Has that got something to say to us? When we have free time that's not otherwise taken, do we often spend it in the place where God manifests himself? Or do we spend it in things that perhaps are not nearly so profitable? Isn't it easy to do that? I'm not suggesting that we're not to enter into the ordinary affairs of life. Of course we are.

I'm not suggesting that when we're free we're not to take relaxation and recreation. I'm not saying that. But how often there is time when if we chose to, we could spend it in the place where God reveals himself to men.

How often do we do it? Or do we spend it in secondary pursuits that have no spiritual value? Maybe this is why we're not as close to God as we want to be, would like to be. Although Joshua lacked the full vision of God, yet he drew nearer to God than any of the others. And then there was the fourth circle, chapter 24, verse 12.

The Lord said to Moses, Come up to me on the mountain and wait there. And Moses went up, and the cloud covered the mountain, and the cloud covered it six days. And Moses was alone with God.

That's an expression that is a very challenging one. Alone with God. How often are you alone with God? Nothing else, nobody else.

No distraction, just alone with God. Alone with God, shut is the door. Though sore and weary, tempered sore, how sweet to rest on bended knee.

As out to him our hearts we pour, shut in, alone with God. Now, I asked myself when I was preparing this message some time ago, I asked myself this. Now, supposing I were in Moses' position, and I had six days in a cloud.

No TV, no radio, no books to read, nobody to talk to, just alone with myself, my thoughts, and my God. How would I spend it? I think most of us would have a very difficult time spending six days alone with God. Yet, here was Moses.

He was the one who qualified for the most intimate fellowship with God. But it took preparation. He had to wait six days.

Now, I'm sure that the Spirit of God was working in his heart just as he was working in the heart of the disciples on the day of Pentecost, or before the day of Pentecost, when they had ten days waiting before the Holy Spirit came. There would be a great deal of heart searching. And sometimes it does us good if we could have some time to allow the Spirit of God to search our hearts.

But then Moses went up into the cloud, and he had fellowship with the Lord of glory. The people down below saw the manifestation of God as devouring fire. But when Moses was in the presence of God, he saw the glory of God in worship.

What a difference between the two. Now, what can we learn from this experience? There are several things. The first thing is, it is possible for ordinary Christians like you and me to have an incredible intimacy with God.

God has got no favorites. What he did for these people, he is willing to do for us. What he did for Moses, he is willing to do for us.

Notice that it says that God spoke with Moses face to face. Now, when you are speaking to somebody face to face, it means that there is clear communication. There is nothing between.

And God used to speak to Moses, and Moses was on sufficiently intimate terms with him to be able to talk with God who made the universe. What an amazing experience. But it says more than that.

He not only spoke with Moses face to face, but as a friend speaks to a friend. Now, what is the mark of friendship when you are talking together? I have had some wonderful friends, and one of the things about it was that I never had to worry about being misunderstood by them. Our friendship was uninhibited.

We could just open our hearts to each other and know that we would not be misunderstood. And here is God speaking with Moses as a friend with a friend. But there is something more in Numbers 12 and 8. It says this, which I think is even more wonderful.

My servant Moses, with him I speak mouth to mouth clearly and not in dark speech. Here God is saying, I reveal myself to Moses mouth to mouth. I don't speak in dark speech so that he can't understand it.

He understands what I say. I speak with him mouth to mouth. And Moses got the message direct from God's mouth to his mouth, and then he became the mouthpiece of God to the people.

My brothers and sisters, God wants to do this with you. He wants to talk with you face to face. As a friend speaks to a friend.

He wants to give you his message so that you can be his messenger, his mouthpiece, in passing it on to others. So it's possible, this passage tells us, for man to have an incredible degree of intimacy with God. Another thing, Moses said, Lord show me now your ways.

Show me how you, the principles on which you run the universe. Let me into some of the secrets of your heart. Show me your ways.

And what happened? The Lord said, I will do the very thing that you ask. There is a passage which assures us that the very, if our heart is going out in longing to know God better, as Moses' heart was, God says, I respond, you draw near to me, I'll draw near to you. I'll do the very thing, not something else, but the very thing that you ask.

And he did. And then Moses is encouraged to ask something more. You see, the more you get to know God, the more you want to get to know God.

So he said, well Lord, you've done that now, show me your glory. Let me see something of your greatness, your splendor, your majesty. And God said, all right, I'll respond to that too.

And you notice what he said. In verse 19 he said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you. He didn't give a blaze of light or something like that.

He said, my glory is in my name and my character. And then he opened up his character and said what he's like. He said, I am the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands.

That's chapter 34 and verse 6. Forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin, yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished. What a marvelous unfolding of the glory of God. God's glory is in His character and in His attitudes.

It tells us He's a compassionate God. And the word compassion is the same as our word sympathy. It's the Latin.

Sympathy is the Greek. It means to suffer together with. And God is a compassionate God.

He suffers together with us. When we are suffering, He suffers with us. He's a compassionate God.

He's gracious. He shows His kindness to those who don't deserve it. He's slow to anger.

God doesn't readily get angry with His people. He's not only slow to anger, but He's abounding in love. Not only He just loves, but He abounds in it.

He abounds in faithfulness. He'll never deny Himself. He'll always be true to His word.

He maintains love to thousands. He forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin. Those are the three main words that are used to describe sin in the Bible.

God says, I forgive every kind of sin. Wickedness, rebellion, sin. Whatever it is, I forgive it.

I'm willing to forgive it to those who come to Me in repentance. And then there comes the solemn word. Yet, He does not leave the guilty unpunished.

No, those who will not repent and hold on to their sin, then they receive the due reward of their sin. But here, God revealed to Moses His glory. He had a wonderful vision of the glory of God.

And God will reveal Himself to us in that way too, if we allow Him. A further thing, He had a great test in the realm of ambition. Israel, you'll remember, had bowed down to worship the golden calf.

And God had pronounced judgment on them. And He said to Moses, Now therefore, let Me alone so that I can judge these people. And He said, I will make of you a great nation.

God had been disappointed in Israel at every turn. And God is saying here, Moses, don't you try to restrain Me. I will judge this nation for what they deserve, but I'll start again with you.

They failed Me, but I'll start with you and I'll make of you a great nation. Why, if He'd been a man of carnal ambition, what a wonderful picture would come before Him. Why, I'm going to be the head of a great nation.

But such a thought never entered into Moses' head. It never took root for a second. He didn't say, Oh Lord, wonderful, thank you.

No, what did He do? He started pleading for the people. He said, Oh Lord, forgive them. And if you can't forgive them, then look, blot my name out of your book, and then forgive them and I'll be the one that will be punished instead of the people.

Whatever made Moses like that? Where did he get that kind of altruism? I'll tell you where he got it. He got it through intimacy with God. You see, some of the nature of God had been worked into him.

And instead of being interested in his own selfish advancement, as we so often are, he was interested in the welfare of his people. And how pleasing that would be to God as he saw in his servant this wonderful attitude. One last thing Moses experienced was that some of the radiance and some of the glory of God rubbed off on him.

You'll remember in chapter 34, verse 29, it says, When Moses came down, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had been talking to God. Moses wished not that his face shone, the King James says. He was unconscious of the radiance.

You know, it's unconscious radiance that is so attractive, not the conscious radiance. Moses didn't know. You know, the others saw it, other people saw it, but he didn't.

Would you like to have radiance? I said the morning of the previous service that this is something that Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden can't do. They can only put stuff on the outside. But this is something that came from inside.

It was an inner radiance. And we are told the reason. The reason was because he had been talking with God.

How much time do we spend talking with God? When we come out into the kitchen in the morning, first thing in the morning, are we radiant because we have been talking with God? Or do the other members of the family look to see which direction the wind is blowing from this morning? His face was radiant because he had been talking with God. My parents told me that at the beginning of this century there was an Anglican clergyman named George Grubb. God used him wonderfully to the conversion of thousands of souls.

He was a very attractive man. He was a tall man, six foot three. And he was coming out by boat from India to Australia.

And after breakfast, he was accustomed to walk around the deck and get a little fresh air. And he was doing this. And as he went by, he smiled at the people that were there.

They were in their deck chairs or so. And then a lady with a little girl came toward him. She was a sweet little thing.

And when they came near, he stooped down to her and talked with her and smiled at her and then smiled at the mother and then went on. And as they went past, the little girl turned to her mother and said, Mommy, was that Jesus? Was that Jesus? You see, the little girl had her idea from Sunday school and church of what Jesus would be like. And here was someone who matched her expectations.

Moses was radiant because he had been talking with God. George Grubb was like Jesus because he had come from the cabin where he had been talking with Jesus. Here is the secret of radiance.

Here is the secret of intimacy with God. But you see, there is a price to pay. I would like to be a fine pianist, but I haven't chosen to pay the price.

Would you like to be more intimate with God? All right. Are you willing to pay the price? Are you willing to spend time with Him? The young man did not depart from the tent. And I believe that the reason we are so little like Jesus in many of our reactions is because we spend so little time with Him.

And if we spent more time with Him, the Holy Spirit would be able to make us more like Him. Please turn the cassette over at this point for Mr. Sanders' next message on spiritual leadership.

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