

# Our Relationship With Christ

by J. Oswald Sanders

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*Our relationship with God is the foundation of the Christian life, and we can choose to be closer to God by seeking a deeper understanding of His character and being willing to pay the price for a deeper relationship.*

**Duration:** 55:20

**Scripture:** Exodus 33:7-11, Exodus 33:18, Exodus 34:5-7, Matthew 6:33, Mark 3:14, Luke 10:1-2

**Topics:** "Relationships"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking intimacy with God. He uses the example of Joshua, who sought the presence of God in the tent and was able to ascend higher into the mountain than his contemporaries. The speaker also mentions the four circles of intimacy in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, which grew out of a clearer revelation of God's character. He highlights the need for a divine perspective and for allowing God to work through us in our service to others.

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## Transcript

I was asked to speak about our relationship to God, and that will be the main theme of the messages I bring you. Now I would like you first to read with me from Exodus chapter 33. Exodus chapter 33, and we'll read from verse 7. Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting.

And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose up, and every man stood at his tent door and looked after Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses.

And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud descending at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship every man at his tent door. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, the servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent.

Moses said to the Lord, See, thou sayest to me, bring up this people, but thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, show me now thy ways, that I may know thee,

and find favor in thy sight.

Consider too that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. And he said to him, If thy presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here, for how shall it be known that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, This very thing that you have spoken I will do.

For you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name. And I will give you rest. Moses said, I pray thee, show me thy glory.

And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But he said, You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.

And he said, I cannot see my face. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock. And while my glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen. I think every one of us will agree that there are some Christians who seem to experience a much closer and deeper intimacy with God than others. They seem to enjoy a kind of holy familiarity with God.

Not a cheap familiarity, but a holy familiarity. I wonder why it is. Are they God's favorites? Does he have some people whom he treats in a special way? Is there an element of caprice in God's dealing with people? Well, I know that none of us would think that is the case.

Or is it possible that there are some people who in some ways qualify for a deeper intimacy with God than others? Are there some secrets which we may learn that would bring us into a deeper fellowship and a closer intimacy with God? If so, should we not give ourselves to find it? I'm going to say something that you may not agree with. I'm not very concerned whether you agree with it or not. I believe it's true, and it's this.

That both Scripture and experience teach that every one of us is as close to God as we have chosen to be. Do you challenge that? I didn't say that we are as close to God as we would like to be or as we sometimes want to be. What I said was I believe that every one of us is as close to God now as we have really chosen to be.

At times we've had aspirations and desires to be nearer to God and to be more like Christ, and yet when it comes to the crunch, we haven't been quite prepared for the price that has to be paid for that privilege, and we've settled for a lower level of Christian living. I think that probably is true with some of us. Well, what are we going to do about it? I believe it's true to say that everything in the Christian life flows from our relationship with God.

If somehow or other we are wrong there, if we are out of touch with God, it means that all the rest of our life is out of gear. And if we're going to no real blessing, we need to get back into the place where we are in a right relationship with God. And even though this is a navigator's group, it's not impossible that some of us here are here and yet we're not really in close touch with God.

We ought to be, we want to be, and yet perhaps we're not. And I think with all of us there is a great distance that we can travel with him. Now I'm not speaking as an expert, I'm speaking as a fellow traveler, as a slow learner, because this is something that takes time and it takes cost to know God in a deep way.

Now in both the Old Testament and the New Testament there are examples of four circles of intimacy. The Old Testament ones have to do with Israel and Moses. The New Testament four circles of intimacy have to do with Jesus and his disciples.

And we'll take the Old Testament ones first. In every case, the deepening intimacy with God grew out of a clearer revelation of the divine character. Dr. Elder Cumming was one of the great old Scotch divines, and this is what he said on one occasion.

He said in almost every case the beginning of a new blessing is a new revelation of the character of God, more beautiful, more wonderful, more precious. And is that not true? If you look back at the deep and life transforming experiences in your life, you'll find that most of them have been when there came to you a new revelation of God, a new revelation of Christ, a new revelation of the Holy Spirit. It's as we get to know God in depth that we are able to draw nearer to him and enjoy more intimate fellowship with him.

There were several occasions, I think seven, I'm not sure, but I think seven, on which God called Moses to go up into the mountain, but on two of those you'll remember that he stayed 40 days and 40 nights. On this occasion, God called to him and told him that he was going to come down and visit his people. And in the scriptures that I've read and a little earlier in Exodus we have the account of that experience.

And you find that there were four separate circles of intimacy with God that developed. Now the outer circle you'll find in Exodus chapter 19, verses 11 and 12. And there it says, On the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people, and you shall set bounds for the people, saying, Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain.

Here God said, I'm going to come down, I'm going to visit my people, but Moses, you tell the people they can approach the mountain, they can come to the foot of the mountain, but you set bounds there and don't let them cross those bounds lest they die. And so here you have God manifesting his presence away up on the top of the mountain. And the people at the bottom, they can see the manifestation of God's presence.

They can approach the mountain, but they can't ascend the mountain. That's the outer circle. Why was it? Why did God not want them to come near him? Oh yes, he wanted them to come near him all right.

But the people neither desired nor were qualified to draw near. You remember afterwards they said to Moses, Oh Moses, you speak to us, don't let God speak to us again. They were afraid of God.

And so there they were, the outer circle, able to approach but not to ascend the mountain. In chapter 24 and verse 2 of Exodus, the Lord said, Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, the others shall not come near. Now there is no one, there is no Christian that the Lord doesn't want to invite into the most intimate and deep fellowship with himself.

There is no limit on his side. But yet he won't allow us to come near unless there is in our hearts a preparation. This exclusiveness on God's part was because the people were not qualified.

They didn't want to draw near and they were not fit to draw near. You remember what it says, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. And the people didn't have clean hands and pure hearts.

They were foolish. They did have a vision of God, they saw the fire and the smoke, but all that they saw filled their hearts with fear. It didn't draw them near to him.

Then the second circle, you'll find that in chapter 24 of Exodus, verses 9 to 11. It says, then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel went up and they saw God. They saw the God of Israel and there was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stones like the very heaven for clearness.

Now here you have a group of seventy four, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders. And they are able to go through the barriers and they go a certain distance. And they were granted a limited vision of God.

They saw God. And they had a wonderful vision of God's transcendence. Under his feet there was, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone like the very heaven for clearness.

This group got a wonderful vision of God. They weren't fearing the fire up there. They were seeing God as he was revealed to them partway up the mountain.

God didn't manifest himself to them. But what happened? It effected no permanent transformation. They had an experience of God.

They saw what the people down below did not see. They were conscious of God's presence. And yet it didn't effect a permanent transformation.

They didn't qualify to go up any higher up the mountain. You know it's possible for us too to have had experiences of God. We've seen the Lord.

We've had experiences when we've seen him in his transcendence, the Lord high and lifted up and his train filling the temple. And yet that experience has been transitory. It hasn't transformed us.

These people, although they saw God before very long, most of them were down in the valley worshipping the golden calf, although they had seen God and ate and drank. This is rather solemnizing, isn't it, that we can go a certain way and draw much nearer to God than other people and have experiences with him that others don't have, and yet not press right on and right upward as the road gets steeper and rockier. So that is the second circle.

The third circle, Exodus chapter 24 verses 13 and 14. So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God, and he said to the elders, Tarry here for us. So now you see two.

There's the whole nation, seventy-four, now it's two, Moses and his servant Joshua, and they ascend higher still. Why Moses and Joshua? Why not others? Isn't it amazing how they've thinned out? Well I believe we're given a slight clue as to why Joshua was included. You'll find it in Exodus chapter 33 and verse 11.

It says, Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent.

I'm very glad that that's put in there.

Here you have the old man Moses, but you see the young man's not excluded from intimacy with God, a deepening and growing intimacy with God. But why was this young man able to go higher than any other in the nation except Moses? What was the reason? It says he did not depart from the tent. What was the tent? The place where God manifested his presence.

What a privilege it was for this young man. The Lord used to descend. And it says he used to talk with Moses.

This was his habit. It wasn't just an occasional visit. This was regular.

He used to talk with Moses. And Moses had his servant there. And Joshua was able to sit in on these conversations.

I don't know whether he heard them or not. Quite probably he did. But in any case, what must it have been for that young man to be in the presence of God as he talked as friend to friend with Moses? And what effect did it have on him? I've no doubt that Joshua had plenty of jobs to do for Moses as his servant.

But this verse gives the indication that whenever he had a spare moment, he did not depart from the tent, the place where God manifested himself. Do I need to spell out the lesson? Where do we go? Where do we resort when the pressure is off? This condemns me. I don't always do what I ought to do when the pressure is off.

But if I want to walk closely with God, I won't depart from the tent. I'll be seeking the place where God will manifest himself, just as Joshua did. And I believe it was because of that that he was able to ascend higher into the mountain.

He fell short of the vision which Moses had. He wasn't able to go right to the very top, but he was far ahead of God. Any of his contemporaries, it must have been lonely for Joshua.

Then you have the fourth circle, Exodus chapter 24, verses 15 to 17. Then Moses went up into the mountain of God, and the glory of God settled on Mount Sinai. You remember the people down below saw the fire and the smoke, and they were filled with fear.

But as Moses draws near, what does he see? The glory of God. The glory of God settled on the mountain. And the cloud covered it six days.

And on the seventh day, he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Just think into that for a moment. Seven days, six days.

In the midst of the cloud, nothing to read, no TV, no radio, nobody to talk to. God at the top of the mountain, and Moses there alone in the cloud for six days. I wonder what he thought about.

I wonder what we'd think about if we were in that position. I'm sure that there must have been a great heart-searching and a great longing and yearning in his heart, such as the disciples on the day of Pentecost must have experienced during those ten days when they were awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit. During those six days, Moses was being prepared for this wonderful revelation of the glory of God.

And then the voice came to him out of the cloud, and he went up into the immediate presence of God. Now I'd like to bring out some of the things that Moses experienced during this time. The first thing was there was a deepening experience of communion with God.

You just think of what was said there in Exodus 33 and 11. God used to speak to Moses face-to-face. A friend comes to you.

You haven't seen them for a long time, and there you are. You're face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball. And you're friends.

There are no inhibitions. You just pick things up where you were before, and they're face-to-face. You have face-to-face communion.

Well, this is what God did with Moses. It was so intimate that it was face-to-face. And it was so relaxed that it was as a man speaks to his friend.

What a wonderful picture of intimacy with God. There must be the reverential awe. There must be that if we're in the presence of God.

But here there is a relationship of friend-to-friend. Isn't that something that is very winsome? God says, I don't call you servants now. I call you friends.

And what's characteristic of a friend? I think one of the most wonderful things about a friend is you don't have to explain yourself. You don't have to produce any reasons. You're absolutely uninhibited, and you can open your heart and not feel that you'll be misunderstood.

Isn't restful to be in the presence of a trusted friend? And God says, I want to be like that to you. And with Moses, that was his experience. I've no doubt that Moses would share with God the burdens that he was experiencing leading Israel, and God would share with him his thoughts about it.

But he spoke with him face-to-face, friend-to-friend. But there's something more. In Numbers 12 and 8, listen to what it says.

This is God speaking, and Moses, with him I speak mouth-to-mouth, clearly, and not in a dark speech. My, God speaking with man mouth-to-mouth. The words coming from his mouth to my mouth.

Isn't that a picture of what we want in our service for God? That when we're talking to others, we're not conjuring up things out of ourselves like a spider spinning its own web. That we've got something that comes from God's mouth to our mouth, and then through our mouth to others. You can't get anything much more intimate than face-to-face, friend-to-friend, mouth-to-mouth.

And that's what Moses experienced. On that occasion. The second thing, Moses shared the divine perspective.

He began to see things from God's viewpoint, and that is very essential if we are going to be his representatives on earth. It isn't my viewpoint that's the important thing. It isn't my views, my opinions.

How does God view this situation? Well, Moses felt the need of this experience and so in that chapter in Exodus 33 that we read, he said to God one day, I pray you, show me your ways. And what did he mean? It was a very daring request, but he was asking God to share his purposes with him. Let me know the

inner workings of your mind and your heart.

Let me know not only what you are wanting to do, but why you are wanting to do it. What a daring thing for a man to ask of God. And yet what did God say? I will do this very thing that you've asked.

And if I can understand anything from that passage, it's just this. God is longing to share with us his plans, his purposes, the things he wants to do in the world. I will do this very thing that you ask.

It was a daring request, but it met with a wonderful response from the Lord. God opened his heart to Moses and he revealed him. You know that before ever he reached the ground level, he knew that God is friendly and kind and told him that they were worshipping the golden cow.

There was this intimacy of communion between them. When Moses reached down below, he didn't need anyone to tell him what had happened. He was able to deal with the situation because his friend had told him.

And then a third thing. He experienced a searching test in the area of ambition. When the nation turned to worship the golden calf, it caused God's wrath, his holy indignation against sin.

Not his bad temper, but his holy indignation against sin to rise. And he says to Moses, now let me alone that my anger may burn hot against him. That's right, that's rather a strange thing.

Let me alone. Here is the indication that Moses had such influence with God that he was holding him back. And God says, let me alone that my wrath may burn and that I may consume them.

And God says, Moses, I'll consume them, but I'll make of you a great nation. And in another place where this incident is referred to, God said to Moses, I'll make you a greater nation than Israel. Why? What a wonderful opportunity for Moses.

Now in those days, to be the head of a clan or the king of a nation was something that was tremendously highly esteemed. And here's God saying to Moses, Moses, these people have disappointed me at every turn. I've borne with them all along.

Let me alone so that my wrath may consume them. And Moses, I'll start again with you and I'll make of you a greater nation than Israel. Why? There's an opportunity for ambition, isn't it? To be the head of God's nation, the nation through which he was going to fulfill his purpose in the world.

But Moses' spiritual stature is never seen so highly, so clearly as in this place. What was his reaction? His immediate reaction was to pay no attention whatever to God's suggestion. Instead of that, you find this great man of God saying to God, but now if you will forgive this people.

And then there's a dash in the book. He said, but if not, he says, blot my name out of the book which you have written, if only my people may live. What a man.

No self-interest there. He was prepared to have his name blotted out and himself cut off from Israel if only the nation might be saved. What marvelous intercession this was.

Where did Moses get this great power of intercession with God? He got it through his fellowship with God. It caused Moses to be the mighty intercessor. But he never asked for a moment that he might have any place, but only that the people might be spared.

A fourth thing, he got a surpassing revelation of God's glory. You see, his growing communion with God made him dissatisfied. It always does.

It's a paradox. But the more satisfied you are with God, the more dissatisfied you'll be. Because your growing intimacy leads you into something so wonderful that you want to know more.

That's why Jesus said, blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled. Well, but you'll be hungry and thirsting tomorrow again. You go on.

And here Moses, he daringly asked, Lord I beseech you, show me your ways. But now he asked for something more. Show me your glory, your majesty, the greatness of your person.

God wasn't offended that he asked for that. And again, God cooperated as far as he could go. Of course, he could only go a certain distance because man cannot see God in the fullness of his glory and live.

But the very interesting thing is the way in which God answered his prayer. How did God show him his glory? It wasn't that experience by the cleft of the rock that was the main part of it. Turn back to Exodus chapter 33, verse 18.

Moses said, I pray thee, show me thy glory. And how did God answer? He said, I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Then turn over the page to 34, chapter 34, verse 5. It says, And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. Moses said, Show me your glory. God said, My glory is seen in my character, in my goodness and in my name.

And then God expounded himself. He said, This is what I am like. This is my glory.

I'm gracious. I show mercy. I'm slow to anger.

I abound in steadfast love and faithfulness. I keep steadfast love for thousands. I forgive iniquity and transgression and sin.

You notice there that God goes into detail about our sin. The three main words used in scripture for sin are sin, iniquity and transgression. Sin, the missing of the mark.

Iniquity, moral crookedness. And transgression, stepping over and disobeying the law of God. And God says, I'm a God who forgives every kind of sin.

This is my glory. And so the way in which God manifested his glory to Moses was to reveal his character. And God can't do anything higher than that for us.

And when you think of these named merciful, tenacious tenderly pitiful, gracious, long-suffering, no end to his patience. He's full of goodness and truth, plenteous in goodness and truth. He's just.

He will by no means clear the guilty. He is endless patience with our weaknesses and with our confessed sins but unjudged sin. He must punish.

He will by no means clear the guilty. And so this was the kind of vision which God gave to Moses. And he had a new idea of the glory of God.

And then he also gave him the other experience. He said, I'm going to pass by. I'll put you in the cleft of a rock.

And as I go past, you'll see the afterglow. You can't see my full glory but you'll see the afterglow as I move away. And there was Moses.

Can you put yourself in his place? Think of the awe. Think of the glory of it. And God passes by and he sees the afterglow.

What a new vision of God he had. Do you wonder that afterwards some of that glow was seen on his face? Another thing, some of God's glory rubbed off on him. You read in that passage that his face was radiant because he had talked with God.

There's a secret of radiance. Alina Rubinstein's not in it. He was radiant because he had talked with Jesus.

Isn't that a secret that we could make more use of? As we talk with him, some of his glory rubs off. Now at about the beginning of this century, there was a very godly Church of England clergyman. He came out to Australia and New Zealand.

He held evangelistic crusades but it was quite different from the type of crusade we have today. My father and mother were in it. That's how I know about it because it was before I was born.

But they told me that in the city of Dunedin, when he came to this crusade, they had no committee. They had very little publicity. They had for their meetings a big drill hall with a platform right across it.

And when you went in, there was a little table with a Union Jack on it. And there was a man sitting here with a little harmonium. And when Mr. Grubb came in, he walked across the stage, nobody to introduce him.

He knelt down and prayed and then he got up and said, we'll sing him songs. That's the way the campaign began. And there were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds were converted.

In Sydney, some years after he'd been there, the Church of England diocese had a minister's meeting and somebody asked, how many ministers here were converted under G.C. Grubb when he was here? And there were over a hundred of them. Well, this man, he was a very attractive man. He was six foot three and he had a beaming face.

And when he was coming across to Australia from India he'd been, he was traveling by ship. And those of you who don't know the joys of ship life, after the meal you generally have a few walks around the deck. Six times around is a mile or so and everybody or most people go up, go out.

And he was going around this morning with others and as he went past people he would just smile at them and beam at them. And as he went past mother and little girl, the little girl looked up at him and then she said, Mommy, was that Jesus? Was that Jesus? You see, she had her own idea of what Jesus would be like. She'd heard about him in Sunday school.

Have you ever been mistaken for Jesus? I know I haven't. But how wonderful. Some of his glory had rubbed off on G.C. Grubb.

You see, he was radiant because he had come from talking with Jesus. Well, there were the different circles, four circles. The crowd the 74, the two, the one.

In which circle would you put yourself? I know where every one of us would like to be. In which circle will you choose to be? Now let's think for a little while on the New Testament example of our Lord Jesus and his disciples. From his early followers, you remember there were the 70 whom Jesus chose and he sent them out two by two to preach for him.

From that 70 he chose 12. They were to not do so much to go out to preach for him, they were to be with him. It says that he chose 12 that they might be with him.

It was a kind of a navigator set up. They were to be with him for training. He wanted them to partake of his spirit primarily, but also he wanted to train them in the art of fishing for men.

I will make you fishers of men. And he did it by keeping them with him for three and a half years. But within that group of 12, that second circle, there developed a third circle of three, Peter and James and John.

And these three were admitted into special intimacy with Jesus and they went to places with him that none of the others were permitted to go. And within the circle of the three, there was one. And that one used to lay his head on Jesus' breast.

He chose the vacant spot on Jesus' breast which was open to the whole 12, but none of the others availed themselves of it. And so you have again the 70, the 12, the 3, the 1. Were the three God's favorites, Christ's favorites? Did he pick them out and say, now I'm going to give you special treatment? There's nothing to indicate that that was so. Each of the disciples chose how near he would be to Jesus.

And these three obviously chose to be nearer to him than the others. They responded more to his love than to his training. And that was why they were able to enter into his fellowship in a deeper way.

Poor old Mary could have got into that group, but she was a woman. And in those days, women were not very, given very many privileges. But undoubtedly, she was one who had the insight that would have qualified her for it if that had been possible.

But here are these three men who were admitted into special experiences with Jesus. The first one was the raising of Jairus' daughter, Luke 8, 51. And in that incident, these men, these three, were permitted a preview of Christ's power over death.

They saw him exercise power over death. And also, they experienced the exquisite tenderness of the Lord as he dealt with the little girl. The second experience was on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew 17, verse 1, where they saw the Lord in his glory.

You know, Jesus said, Don't tell anyone about it. Don't tell them. But afterwards, when John was writing about it, you can almost hear the awe as he says it.

He said, We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And Peter, when he speaks about it, he said, We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. It made an impression on them that they never forgot.

And while they were there with the Lord Jesus on the mountain, they were given a preview of his death. Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus. And what was the subject of their conversation? They spoke of his decease, of his exodus is the word, of his departure, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

And they were given a preview I won't accomplish my death, I'll suffer it. Jesus accomplished his death. And while the three were speaking there, here are these disciples, conscious that they're in the presence of God in a unique way, and also with visitors from the other world.

It must have been a terrific experience for them. And Peter, James, and John were among those. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

The third instance was on the Mount of Olives, Mark chapter 13 verse 3, when they marveled at our Lord's prophetic insight, where he gave them a preview of his world purpose, because that's exactly what he gives in that passage, the vast sweep of the divine purposes. And then the fourth one in the Garden of Gethsemane, where they came and glimpsed, they had a preview of the sufferings of the Son of God when he bore our sins. They saw a little more of the cost of their salvation.

Well those were some of the privileges to which these four in the third circle experienced with the Lord. Could any of the twelve been in that favored group? I believe with all my heart that they could have. And it was because they did not choose.

They weren't prepared to pay the price of closer fellowship with the Lord, either consciously or unconsciously. They disqualified themselves. And it's a sobering thing that we are as close to the Lord as we choose.

Did he not say, draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. He will draw as near to us as we draw to him. It's over to us.

He can do no more. He's open. And it's to our own loss that we choose.

If we don't avail ourselves of it. Now, what excluded some disciples from the inner circle? What was it? If perfection was the criterion, then there were some disciples who wouldn't qualify. Well, Peter wouldn't, would he? You'd hardly say he was perfect.

And James and John? Oh, I know that later on John became a wonderful man, but remember what James and John did when the Samaritans wouldn't let them go through the city? Lord, will you have us call down fire from heaven on them? Lovely spirit, wasn't it? Make a good disciple. Well, if it's perfection, Peter and James and John are out. So that's encouraging for us, isn't it? They were imperfect disciples and yet they were admitted to the inner circle.

If temperament were the qualification, well, again, Peter was out. He was so volatile, suffering from foot and mouth disease. Oh, no, Peter would never get in, and the stern James probably as well.

And yet they were included. Temperament won't exclude us from getting into the inner circle. Why did John have primacy? Why was it that he was the one who drew nearest to Jesus? You know the way he describes himself in John's gospel? He doesn't say the disciple who loved Jesus.

He says the disciple whom Jesus loved. Here was a man who accepted in fuller measure the love of Jesus and responded to it more than the others. And that's why he got the place of intimacy.

You know, while he was there with his head on Jesus' breast, the other disciples channeled their questions through him. If they had a question for Jesus, it was John they approached to put it to Jesus. Here was a man in the closest possible intimacy with God.

He loved them all with an equal love, but John alone appropriated the inner place. If Jesus loved John more, it was because John loved him more. It would seem that admission into the inner circle of deeper intimacy with God was the outcome of deep desire.

You take with Moses. He said, I beseech thee. Here he's pleading with God.

I beseech thee show me your glory. Open your heart to me more. Let me see more of your greatness.

And so is it with the disciples. The one who longed most was the one who got closest. And even dear old Peter, when the Lord was speaking to him after the resurrection, you remember what he said.

He didn't refer to Peter's service or his qualifications or anything else. The one thing he asked was, Peter, do you love me? And you know, if you're going to be intimate with anyone, love is the essential factor. The more I love him, the closer I will come to him.

But there is a cost. There is a cost. And what is it? It means if I want to have the deepest intimacy with God, all other intimacies must take second place.

If there are other intimacies which I conceive to be of more value than intimacy with God, I can never press on into the inner circle. But the wonderful thing is that the place on Jesus' breast is still vacant. It's available for any one of us who chooses to pay the price.

Any one of us to whom this is the pearl of great price. Let us remember that we are now the pearl of intimacy. And we will be in the future only as intimate with God as we choose to be.

Now we just bow and wait quietly in the Lord's presence for a moment or two. With his voice he'd speak in calm and angry seed. Yet he said that one day we'd do greater things than he.

He forgave the men who nailed him to the tree. And just to think that his spirit now lives inside of me. Now he's walking in my shoes, singing with my voice.

He's reaching out with my hands, helping someone make the right choice. He's smiling with my face. He's showing me the way.

And I'm so glad that I can be a part. He's living in my heart. Now he's walking in my shoes, he's singing with my voice.

He's reaching out with my hands, helping someone make the right choice. He's smiling with my face, showing me the way. And I'm so glad that I can be a part.

He's living in my heart.

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