

That I May Know Him

The Stepping Stone of Intimacy

By Steve Pruitt

A few years ago I was asked by my pastor to accompany him to a bible study he was doing for a college group of another church. My function in the meeting was to lead some worship songs and do a brief message on worship. I attended the study only a couple of times.

At the end of the last meeting the group began to make plans on how they could continue the meeting without our support. It was discovered that within the group was a young man who was very talented at playing the guitar and singing. If my memory serves me correctly he had not attended the first meeting that I had attended.

At the invitation of my pastor this young man and his fiancée attended a small group meeting being held in our home. During the meeting Gary had a powerful experience with the Holy Spirit. Later the couple attended our Sunday morning church service.

I began to realize there was something special about this guy. One evening my wife and I invited him and his fiancée (they are married now) over for dinner. As we sat around playing guitars and laughing it became obvious that a lot more was going on than just a cordial get together. The couple shared with us that they had been praying for another couple to have relationship with and believed God had put us together. Over the months and weeks ahead our relationship went from being acquaintances to being friends, to being intimate friends. Today he is one of the most treasured friends I have on earth.

Intimate friendships don't happen over night. They usually develop over a period of months and years and most of the time they come at great sacrifice.

The Apostle Paul knew something about great sacrifice when it comes to intimate friendships. In Philippians 3:5-6 Paul records his resume: *...circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.* He goes on to say that whatever he had gained he counted loss for Christ; that he suffered the loss of all things and counted them as rubbish that he might gain Christ (Philippians 3:7-8). Paul goes on to give a few reasons why he counted all his accomplishments as loss.

...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...

Philippians 3:10

The Amplified Bible renders *that I may know him* this way: *[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him – that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding [the wonders of His person] more strongly and clearly.*

There are three levels of relationship: acquaintances, friends and intimates. The American Heritage Dictionary defines acquaintance as knowledge of a person acquired by a relationship less intimate than friendship. An acquaintance is a person we see and have conversation with occasionally. This is someone with whom you would discuss general topics such as the weather, the price of gas, sports or your job. You might learn a few things about a person, but this type of a relationship never gets below the surface.

The next level of relationship is friend or casual friendship. A casual friend is a person with whom you would spend more time than an acquaintance. A casual friend is a person with whom you might work or attend school or church. You would feel

more comfortable discussing your opinions, ideas and goals in this type of relationship. There would be a higher level of trust in a casual friendship. Jesus noted this type of relationship when he said to his disciples, *No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.* (John 15:15)

The highest level of relationship is intimates. You can have an intimate relationship with a friend which would exceed that of a casual friendship; however, marriage should epitomize intimacy. Intimacy can occur only between two people whose lives are going in the same direction. An intimate is someone with whom you give your heart and you have theirs. The Shulamite in the Song of Solomon says it best; *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.* (Song of Solomon 6:3a)

Intimates almost become mirror images of each other because they share the same interests and have common goals. Intimates understand each other; they know how the other thinks and what makes them tick. This is why Paul wanted to have an intimate relationship with Jesus. He knew that the more time he spent with Jesus the more intimate he would be with him and the more like him he would become. He wrote, *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Most of us spend at least a few minutes each day in front of a mirror. What do we do in front of the mirror? Fix our hair, put on make-up, and shave. We generally make ourselves look better. When we leave the mirror most of us look better than we did when we first step in front of it. The same happens when we spend time with Jesus. We look differently each time we step away. We begin to look more like him. We mature as we get to know Christ because the more we are around him the more like him we become.

Paul's primary purpose was not to make money, rear children, have a ministry, to be successful in the world's eyes. He wanted to know Jesus. He didn't just want to know about Jesus or be an acquaintance that was familiar with his good works. Paul didn't just want to be good friends with Jesus. He wanted to know the wonders of Jesus' person by having an ongoing personal, intimate relationship with him.

As we climb up the hill to spiritual maturity we must ensure that the stones (experiences) we have along the way are used as stepping stones not stumbling blocks. One of those stepping stones to maturity is intimacy with Christ. Don't let it be a stumbling block.

Where are you in your relationship with Jesus? Are you a mere acquaintance, a casual friend or do you have an intimate relationship with him? Each Christian is at a different level of maturity. God is okay with what ever level we find ourselves. However, he doesn't want us to stay there. He wants us to keep climbing.