

spiritual growth Intimacy
SG Series #2
S-1682
Sunday Morning, August 21, 2005

STORY: Ex-con pastor in San Jose, 46 years old. Getting married for first time. Asked him, "How did you propose?"

Took her to church at 11 pm. after a date. Told her to be obedient: Go into the restroom and take off your nylons. She did it. Took her up on stage and turned on spotlight. Took out a basin of water and a towel and began to wash her feet.

"Most humble service Jesus ever did was wash their feet. I want to wash your feet. I want to serve you for the rest of your life." She was crying.

Put down towel and took out a ring, looked up into her eyes and asked, "Will you marry me?"

How many of you women would like to be proposed to like that?

How many wish for a husband like that?

SLIDE #: Intimacy is someone who enters into our world and feels what we feel, and experiences what we experience, and knows us like we know ourselves.

SLIDE #: [Jesus washing disciples' feet]: John 15:15: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Is that intimate or what?

SLIDE #: GOD WANTS TO HAVE AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH US.

SLIDE #: God blessing Abraham. God is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 18:16-32: "When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

SLIDE #: Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (18:17).

Then ensued the long discussion with Abraham pleading to save Sodom if 10 righteous men can be found.

SLIDE #: Genesis 5:22-24: And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

SLIDE #: Exodus 33:18: Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

SLIDE #: [light passing by] Exodus 33:21-22: Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by."

SLIDE #: Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

SLIDE #: Proverbs 3:32: "For the LORD detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence."

SLIDE #: Psalm 139:3: "You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar (caringly involved) with all my ways."

In John 17:3 Jesus, who was only hours away from crucifixion, shared the truth of intimacy with God:

SLIDE #: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Most Christians do not define "eternal life" like Jesus. Eternal life for many describes how long we live. We live forever. We get to live in Heaven forever. Jesus, however, described eternal life in terms of a deepening intimate relationship.

SLIDE #: Our relationship with God matures as we close the gap in our spiritual journey.

In 1 John 2:12-14 we see not just a progression in spiritual growth; but also a progression in the depths of our intimacy with God.

SLIDE #: 1 John 2:12-14: And so I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name. I write to you, fathers, because you've known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you've overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

OVERHEAD: Spiritual Children: Experience the beginning of a relationship of knowing God. (acquaintance, casual friend)

Spiritual Young Men and Women: Experience the heart of God through the revealed life of Jesus Christ () as unveiled in the Bible. (close friend)

Spiritual Mothers and Fathers: Experience the infinite depths of the Person of God Himself. (intimate friend)

The whole idea behind this passage is that God wants to have a relationship with us.
Doesn't that just scream out to us from this passage?

I have a different message for Christians and for those who have yet to find Christ.

SLIDE #: To Christians I say over and over again, "Grow up to be like Christ. Pray to be a spiritual mother or father at any price."

SLIDE #: To those yet to find Christ, I say again and again, "God wants to have an intimate relationship with you."

SLIDE #: [space at the bottom so I can draw a line graph of the journey.] I am saying the same thing to both groups. It just depends on where they are on the spiritual journey. The destination is the same: A deep intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

SLIDE #: GOD HURTS FOR ME WHEN I HURT.

My youngest daughter, Bronwyn, spent a year in Germany as an exchange student. It was not an easy year. Julie and I were in London in January so Bronwyn flew over to spend the final week of her Christmas break with us before returning to Germany. We knew the previous six months overseas were hard—but not how hard. Three weeks before Bronwyn arrived in August the father of her host family was tragically killed in a chain saw accident. Can you imagine the hurt and grief in her adopted family? Her first week she traveled with her new family to Norway as they picked out a casket and prepared for the funeral. They needed the time and energy to grieve; but, the exchange went ahead as planned. In a third-floor hotel room near Victoria Station we learned what a hard time she was having.

We tried hard to talk our child into coming back home with us. But she steadfastly refused: "I will finish what I started." We admired her courage; but grieved over her hurts.

We boarded different planes in London: She to Hamburg; we to America. We wept as we waved good-bye.

We were sitting in our seats, waiting for the cabin door to close; Julie was still crying. "I am sorry," I said to Julie. "I know this is really hurting you. It was so hard to watch Bronwyn walk back into the fire—and not get on this plane, going home, with us. I know the pain in your heart is incredible."

Julie dried the tears and said, "No, I am not crying about Bronwyn. I was overwhelmed because I felt Jesus weeping for me."

SLIDE #: "No one really knows me until they know me in my pain."

Do you agree?

The people who know me best know me in my pain.

SLIDE #: Who knows you well enough to weep for you?
Who really cares about you when you hurt?

SLIDE #: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

SLIDE #: What if your relationship with God were so close that you sensed when He was crying for you in your hurts and pains?
Who wouldn't want a relationship with God like that!

SLIDE #: I HURT FOR GOD WHEN HE HURTS

Now, let's go deeper. Healthy relationships flow two ways. Not only does God intimately know the hearts of spiritual mothers and fathers, He allows them to know His heart. We like it when God knows, understands and comforts our hearts. Did you ever stop to think that God might like it when we know, understand and comfort His heart? Is this not what friends are for?

I was flying recently to Orlando: girl on airplane: Celestine Prophecy: spiritual search. Why? Stillborn baby: I am going to tell you what she said, it is integral to the story. Comfort Catholics. What I am about to share happens at times in every church. RCC priest refused to baptize child. "I am so sorry." Comforted her. She broke from anger to hurt to sorrow.

"Four miscarriages." What do you think I am thinking? (Don't try any more.) No. I'm thinking, "I bet she endured all four miscarriages alone. We husbands can be so clueless. So, I said to her, "I bet he had no idea what you were going through. You carried that baby. You were already getting close to that child. our husband just kind of blew it off. He had no idea what you were going through." She got real quiet. "I am so sorry." Comforted her. What was I doing? "I was ministering to her aloneness. She endured some of life's toughest events—alone.

I would have baptized her baby. Took her from where she was to where she needed to be.

"Your baby is OK. What about you?" Went straight to the resurrection and shared Christ and how she could forever.

Time to minister to God. He was broken hearted over the pain and confusion in her life. Then rejoiced with God as she heard the true message of Christ.

SLIDE #: Does God have feelings? Yes. Love, Anger, pain, joy, grieve (Ephesians 4:30)

God can grieve and have His feelings hurt. Moses recorded one such instance in as God examined the wickedness of man:

SLIDE #: Genesis 6:6: “The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.” What do grieving and hurt people need?

SLIDE #: Jesus told us in Matthew 5:4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Hurting people need comfort.

Jesus is longing for comfort when He is hurting. Listen to him in the Garden of Gethsemane as He mourned aloud, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow unto death” (Matthew 26:28). This is deep grief. So He asked them to pray for Him. He returned to find them all asleep. “Could you not pray with me for one hour?” Do you hear the resignation—the disappointment—in His voice.

He begged again, “Watch and pray.” He returned to His place of prayer and while pleading for another plan the capillaries in His sweet forehead burst and His sweat mixed with His blood. God sent angels to comfort Him. But, who was supposed to comfort Him? His friends! He wanted them to put their arms around Him and minister to Him in His sorrow and grief. But they fell asleep. Thank God for angels—but sometimes it is better to have friends.

If you were in the Garden with Jesus when He was pouring out His anguished soul in grief, wouldn't you have wanted to put your arms around Him and comfort him? Sure, you would.

Can't you imagine the empathy you would feel in your heart for him as you watched Him weep? Can you picture yourself comforting Him? “I am so sorry you are going through this. I know you're in agony. I wish it wouldn't have to be like this. You are not alone. We are here with you. We love you. We are praying for you.” Your tears intermingled with His.

“But,” you say, “Jesus is not here. I can't do that for Him.”

Sure you can. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25:34-40:

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

SLIDE #: INTIMACY WITH GOD IS NOT ENOUGH. WE NEED OTHERS TO CLOSE THE GAP PROPERLY.

Burned out Phoenix G6 story.
Not good for man to be alone.
Need God—need others too.

Over the years of Christian history the spiritual journey is often characterized as a lonely experience undertaken by only a few. It is time to change that notion.

SLIDE #: No one goes on the spiritual journey alone. The ranks of Christendom are filled with Believers who are longing to grow up at any price. We need to associate ourselves with others who are longing to quench their spiritual hunger and thirst.

SLIDE #: Even Jesus needed help to carry His cross on His spiritual journey to Golgotha.

Let me describe Julie's childhood relationship with her grandfather. She remembers the acceptance, affirmation, approval, appreciation, encouragement, security, respect, and love that she received from a grandfather who knew her well. Her grandfather-granddaughter relationship is a reflection of the intimate relationship between spiritual mothers and fathers and Father-God Himself. Julie remembers:

SLIDE #: My earliest memory of meeting Jesus was in the family laundry room. The washer was warm, so I would perch atop the warm dryer lid and peruse my picture books. One particularly large glossy volume of Bible stories caught my eye. I looked into the warm brown eyes of Jesus as He was holding two little children in His lap. My heart was strangely warmed. Although I couldn't decipher the words on the page, a voice deep inside my head said, 'You can come to me, Little One. You can lay your head on my soft shoulder and I will keep you safe.' In my three-year-old heart of hearts, I believed Him.

James Fowler in *Stages of Faith* wrote that the earliest baby steps of faith are formulated in two ways: mystical impressions and personal modeling. My experience with Jesus and the picture book was a spiritual impression. The modeling came from Grandpa. My paternal grandfather, nicknamed "Boy" by my eldest cousin, looked more like God to me than just about anybody. Boy took me to the zoo every Friday while my parents worked at their construction business. After taming the wild beasts for his granddaughters, he spent the better part of a day peeling peaches for homemade ice cream for me and my sister, Kathy. When I played hide and seek under the coffee table I often had to move his open Bible and Sunday school study guide. Grandpa Boy saw his little granddaughter bouncing to music and promptly bought me a toy piano. He played in John Phillip Sousa's band and proudly proclaimed that he knew a budding musician when he saw one. Boy believed in me. He listened to my childish prattle. He accompanied me to Vacation Bible School and shared my Kool-aid and cookies. When I thought of God, I thought of Grandpa Boy.

I remember visiting Boy for the last time. He was hospitalized with emphysema and could barely speak. He wanted to chat about heaven. Boy said, 'Julie Girl, sing Amazing Grace with me one last time before I go to heaven.' If there is any glimpse of the

Almighty that a child could experience on this earth, I saw God in my grandpa.

Need others to grow. ABS

SLIDE #: Albert Fox, Dorothy Fox, Ray Burns, Brother Baker, Jim Albright, Lonzo Roberts, Russell Johnston, Don and Gladys Myers, Howard Lee.

VIDEO: Kristine Welter

TESTIMONY: Roger and Kevin Phillips

ROGER: Introduce Kevin, 31 years old. Newest staff pastor at Casas. Taught school, 4th and 5th graders for the past 8 years. God called him here. Home grown, met Christ at high school camp. Began 2 months ago.

You have very specific job responsibilities. What do you do at Casas?

KEVIN: Help young people, college and young professionals get involved in a community to experience Christ.

God gives everyone something of value. We come together and share it all with each other to better experience God. Together in a community we put all the pieces of the puzzle together.

I am here to help Casas reach the next generation.

ROGER: The next generation is important. Every generation is important. We have a double gap now at Casas. We have an age gap and a cultural gap, don't we?

Kevin: Not reaching the 20 somethings to early thirties young adult age groups.

My growing up friends don't come here anymore.

My job, in a good and tactful way is to help young adults find their place here at Casas. Culturally, most churches are like museums. Young people come to see what culture was like 30 years ago.

ROGER: I like museums, but I don't want to be one.

KEVIN: The gospel has not changed. It is always relevant. But how we communicate it culturally is constantly changing.

ROGER: How can we a little more age mature folks help you?

KEVIN: Pray for young adults.

It is hard to be a Christian in this day and age.

They claim there is no god. Only emotionally dependant people make up a god.

The church is not helpful.

We need to pray and reach back to this generation because young adults are important.

ROGER: Albert Fox, Jim Albright were Bible Fellowship leaders who reached me. I call their names in reverence.

Kathy Young mentoring Kristine
Who will one day call your name.

KEVIN: Invite young adults to ABFs. All age groups are important. All of us need the fellowship and community of Bible Fellowships.
Go to the table in the Plaza and get info today.