

# *Intimacy with Jesus*

## **1 Introduction**

I've just completed six consecutive years serving as an elder of Grandview, and I've been enormously blessed. One doesn't seek to be an elder in order to be blessed, but in my experience that is what happens. We, the elders of Grandview, have seen many good times and a few very difficult times, but in all of them, we had a strong sense of God being at work, and using us, unworthy as we may be, as a gift of his grace.

There have been some things that the Lord has impressed on me as being particularly important about our relationship with him, and today I have been given an opportunity to share them with you.

## **2 Intimacy**

I came to faith in the Lord Jesus when I was 21 years old while at university. In my first year there I met a girl who claimed to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I had never heard of such a thing, and what little I knew about Jesus did not suggest that it was even possible. Yet it became clear to me that Jesus did make a big difference in her life. Through her I met a number of others who claimed the same thing, and as I observed their lives, which were tremendously attractive, I had to conclude that they really believed that they had a personal relationship with Jesus. One of those Christians was my university swimming coach. I had a long conversation with him one evening, and I became convinced from his witness that Jesus was who he claimed to be, that he was alive, and that it was possible to know him personally. I committed myself to him. That was 51 years, 6 months and 2 days ago, and I do know him personally.

I rarely hear the expression "personal relationship with Jesus" anymore. That's a shame. I think it is a very apt description. I have heard occasionally "intimacy with Jesus". That means the same thing, and perhaps it is more understandable in our culture today.

Everyone wants intimacy with someone. I often hear that loneliness is more prevalent in our society than in any other society that has ever been studied. I haven't heard many Christians say that they have intimacy with Jesus. It may be because they simply don't talk with others about it, or it may be that they aren't on intimate terms with Jesus.

The elders and staff recently studied a book together, "Faith for Exiles". It contended that the main reason why so many young adults who have been raised in evangelical churches have turned away from the church is that they have not experienced intimacy with Jesus, nor have they observed it in their parents, their leaders, or their peers.

Paul thought that intimacy with Jesus was not merely desirable, but greater than anything else.

In Phil 3:7-15, he wrote, "But whatever... All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things."

Paul had intimacy with Jesus, and he wanted more and more of it. He also thought this was for all Christians.

I am convinced from Scripture that Jesus intends that every one of his brothers and sisters have intimacy with him. So why isn't intimacy with Jesus evident in most of us? I think I know, at least, a big part of the answer, and that's what I'd like to share with you today.

But before I do, I need to make a disclaimer. I am not speaking about intimacy with Jesus because I believe that I have advanced farther than any others here. I don't put myself forward as an example to follow. Where I have deepened in intimacy with Jesus, credit goes to him rather than to me. Where intimacy has been hampered, the fault is mine alone. I'm still working at consistently practicing the things I'm sharing today.

### **3 Four truths**

There are four truths that we need to know and embrace deep within us. They are foundational to the New Testament, and they form a foundation for intimacy with Jesus. They don't represent a recipe to follow, but if you are missing any of them, it is hard to see how intimacy with Jesus is feasible. These truths are rarely taught directly because they form the context more than the content of what is taught. Each runs counter to deeply held ideas in our prevailing culture, so much so that our culture makes it difficult for us even to hear them, much less put them into practice in our daily lives.

The first truth to be embraced is so fundamental that few of us would deny it. Even Satan and his demons admit it. Jesus is Lord!

### **4 Jesus is Lord**

What does it mean that Jesus is Lord? I used to think that it was an affirmation of his deity. I understood that "Lord" was a synonym for God. That isn't wrong, but it misses the main point of the word.

I remember very vividly, when I was about a year old in the faith, reading in 2Peter where there are repeated references to "our Lord Jesus Christ", and a picture flashed in my mind from my Grade 9 history text. (Lest you get the wrong impression about my memory for history, I'm not sure I recall anything else from those Grade 9 classes.)

The picture was of an English serf in the middle ages swearing fealty to his Lord. The Lord was sitting on his throne, and the serf was kneeling before his Lord, his hands placed in his Lord's hands. And I knew in an instant that picture was telling me about my relationship with Jesus. He is Lord, immeasurably greater than any feudal Lord, and to acknowledge him as Lord is to recognize that he has the right to rule over everyone and everything.

Once my eyes were opened, I saw in every book of the New Testament that Jesus was affirmed to be Lord of all.

For example, Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

And “you [the Father] granted him [the Son] authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.”

Paul wrote, the Father “put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.”

And “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

In Revelation we are told of Jesus, “On his robe and on this thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

Jesus is Lord! That is the truth. It was true before creation. It was true when “all things were created through him and for him.” It is true right now, and it will be true for all eternity. Jesus is Lord. He is the only legitimate ruler over everyone, over me, over you.

But not everyone responds with joy that Jesus is Lord. In fact there is within each of us a deep aversion to submitting to Jesus as Lord.

Some deny it. They don’t think Jesus was any more than a man who died and stayed dead. I was once one of those. But the contrary evidence is overwhelming if fairly considered.

Some rebel against Jesus as Lord. The spirit of our age is “I did it *my way*,” which of course, means I rejected his way. That’s rebellion.

For some their rebellion is more passive; they simply ignore that Jesus is Lord. “Whatever,” they say. Try that with a traffic cop. How much less will it work with the one who really is Lord over everyone!

Some try to manipulate Jesus. They follow the rules scrupulously, and then they expect that Jesus will be obligated to treat them favourably.

Some treat it as optional. They want Jesus to forgive them for all their sins, past, present and future, but then they see no need to obey him as Lord because they think they’ve already been forgiven for continuing to do as they please. I can find no warrant in Scripture for Jesus being my saviour if I will not submit to him as my Lord. Paul specifically rules this out in Romans 6.

But look. All of these responses to Jesus as Lord have this in common. They focus on self, not on Jesus. “I am going to do what is best for me.” “I’m going to set my own rules.” All of these are doomed to failure...

...because Jesus is Lord, and I am not.

If you believe it is the truth, say these words out loud with me, whether here or at home, “Jesus is Lord, and I am not.”

I suspect for many of us, it was easier to say “Jesus is Lord” than “I am not.” If you want to have intimacy with Jesus you have to accept both sides of the statement deep within yourself.

Intimacy in any relationship has to be founded on truth, and the truth is that Jesus is Lord, which necessarily implies that I am not. If I want intimacy with Jesus I must acknowledge who he really is, and who I am.

That's the first truth: Jesus is Lord, and I am not.

The second one is the only reasonable response to the first: Jesus is *my* Lord.

## 5 Jesus is my Lord

This response is to acknowledge the truth that Jesus is Lord and to trust him as Lord.

This response is founded in faith. It's important for us to recognize that we can never take credit for our faith; it comes from God, not us.

Dr. D.A. Carson (who is one of the top evangelical theologians of our day) has defined faith as "the God-given ability to perceive certain things that are true, and to trust your whole life to them, and to him who establishes their truthfulness."

Faith always starts with God. He gives it; we never generate it within ourselves. Faith is about what is true, what is already true. It is never about wishful thinking, what we wish were true. Faith involves perception; we are enabled to see what is true that many are not able to see. Faith is not merely intellectual; it always results in a change in our whole selves. Finally faith completes the circle by linking us back into God. He is the source of our faith and the goal of our faith. In a sense it is not even "our" faith but "His" faith on loan to us.

So the response of faith is this: "Jesus is my Lord." But what does that really mean? I had just said that Jesus is Lord over everyone. Isn't that clear enough? Well, yes and no. Saying "Jesus is my Lord" doesn't change who he is, but it does show that my attitude and status have changed. I am giving myself to him. I am acknowledging his rule over me.

It's like the serf pledging fealty, but much more. I commit to Jesus, and he accepts responsibility over me. I am now his, and we are both agreed on that. My role is to obey. I want to obey Jesus. By faith I know that obeying Him is also much better for me than anything I could come up with on my own.

Now you might say, "I don't have to obey Jesus because salvation is by faith not by works; he takes me just as I am." But that confuses cause and effect. We aren't saved because we obey, but we obey because we are saved. However, don't take my word for it. Let's hear what Jesus said. Let's look at John 15:9-11.

Jesus has been talking about how we draw our life from Him. He uses the image of a vine and its branches. Then we read, "Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Abide in my love." Heart-warming! What more could we ask or want?

But get ready to be jarred. Jesus then says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love."

That sounds like conditional love, although it isn't really. Jesus is my Lord. He expects me to obey Him. I am obligated to obey Him. If I don't obey him, then Jesus isn't my Lord. He might be my friend or advisor or even my hero, and I wouldn't have to obey. But because He is my Lord, I must obey. That is what being Lord means.

But that isn't the end of the thought. He continues, "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." Now let's put it all together.

Jesus loves us just as He is loved by the Father. Because He loves us, He requires us to obey Him. As we obey Him, we experience His love, and we are filled with joy. That is so because what He commands is also what is best for us. Jesus is my Lord, and He expects me to obey Him. Jesus is my loving Lord, and what He commands is for my good. As I obey, I am filled with His love and joy.

Jesus is my Lord, and I obey him.

The converse is that sin kills intimacy. That was true of Adam and Eve in the garden when they tried to hide from God. It's true in human relationships, and it's certainly true of intimacy with Jesus. If we want intimacy with Jesus, it needs to be founded on a habit of obedience.

Now you might say, "I don't want Jesus as my Lord if I have to give up my freedom." But as Tim Keller has said, "Freedom is much more complex than we think." Let me give you an example.

My brother-in-law received a kidney transplant more than twenty years ago. He has taken anti-rejection drugs ever since. He would not survive long if he were to stop. One could say that he is enslaved by the drugs, and he is not free. But by submitting to the regimen of the drugs, he is free to live a normal life. So he is not free in a small way, but he is very much free in a greater way. Similarly, we who submit to Jesus as Lord give up freedom to do what we think is best, and we gain the greater freedom to become what is best, what we were created to be.

I am wholly enslaved to Jesus, and at the very same time I am wonderfully free. My intimacy with Jesus is predicated on my submission to him as Lord, and yet I am completely free to enjoy an intimate relationship with him.

I know, by God's grace, that this is all true, but I also know that I am naturally inclined not to obey. Am I doomed to failure and discouragement? That brings us to the third truth.

The first is Jesus is Lord. That is the truth.

The second is Jesus is my Lord, because I have been given the faith to perceive the truth and commit to it.

The third is Jesus gave me a new nature.

## 6 Jesus gave me a new nature

When we come to genuine faith in Jesus, the old nature dies, and we are given a new nature. Nothing changes at the physical level; no scientific tests will reveal a change. But the change is very real. The Bible often refers to this change, but there is no standard wording.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” When we commit to Jesus, we are born again.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.”

Paul told the Galatians about himself, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Peter echoed Jesus’ words when he wrote, [God] “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

John wrote, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”

Romans 6 gives the lengthiest and fullest description of what happens in us. Read it again if you haven’t recently.

So something very big happens in us when we come to faith in Jesus.

How can you tell the old nature from the new? The old nature is focused on self. There is no remorse when you sin, unless you get caught. The new nature is focused on God and delights in God. Yes, we do still sin, but then we regret most strongly that we have offended God.

The two key things to note are: First, because our new nature has been created by God, we have his power to live the life of obedience that he desires for us.

Second, God lives in us in this new nature that he created.

My favourite verse on this is Col.1:27, “God willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery ..., which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Here are riches indeed. The one who created everything, who is Sovereign over everyone, who loved us so much that he died to redeem us, he is the one who is in us, in the new nature that he has given us.

Do you want intimacy with Jesus? This is why it is possible. This is how it happens. He isn’t merely near us, he is in us. No greater intimacy is even imaginable.

The third truth is “Jesus gave me a new nature in which he dwells.”

My life comes from him. He is in me, all the time. I am never alone. I am able to obey my Lord, not because there is anything special about me, but because He is in me. It’s all about Him.

You might wonder what more we could need, but there is something still missing. That brings us the fourth truth.

## **7 Jesus gave me a new family**

Jesus gave me a new family!

Listen to 1Jn 3:1. “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.”

God doesn't only save us from our sin, which is itself a really big deal. He brings us into His kingdom (when we submit to Jesus as Lord). He dwells in us. He adopts us into his family as his heirs, and co-heirs with Jesus (Rom 8:15-17). We are born again as His children.

Now if I am a child of God, and you are a child of God, then we are brothers (or brother and sister). We are in the same family because we have the same Father.

I've always looked on this as a huge bonus. I was content to offer myself as a slave to Jesus. I didn't expect anything more. I didn't ask for anything more. But rather than a slave, I was made a brother, and I found myself as part of an enormous family.

I've experienced this many times, and probably you have too. You meet someone in an unexpected place and learn that he is a Christian. Within five minutes you feel closer to him than to many people you've known for twenty years. Why? Because you are brothers. Because you are committed to the same Lord. That's the work of the Holy Spirit in us. And it's wonderful.

But there is something much deeper here. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

The kind of love that Jesus is talking about being primarily concerned about the good of others. We are to put the interests of our brothers and sisters in Christ ahead of our own. Why? Because Jesus did. Because we are family. That's the way God's family works. Anything else would dishonour Him. I care for my brothers and sisters. My brothers and sisters care for me. What a joy that has been.

It was never God's intention that he give us faith so that we could be alone with him. He wants us to work out our faith in the community of our family and of course in the broader community too. We are to stand out as different because of our love for one another.

Look at all the “one another” passages of the Bible. We are told not to forsake assembling together. There is great emphasis on unity, on encouraging one another, on comforting one another. These are aspects of God's family at work

Jesus gave me a new family. Now here is an odd fact: Intimacy with Jesus is unlikely if it's just Jesus and me. Unlike any other type of intimacy, intimacy with Jesus grows along with others. I don't understand why it's true, but I know it is true. Jesus wants us to be deeply involved in one another, and as we are, intimacy with Jesus grows, and so does intimacy with each other in the family.

Jesus gave me a new family with whom I grow. That is his plan, and that is his provision for us.

## **8 Intimacy with Jesus**

So here are four key truths:

Jesus is Lord and I am not. Intimacy with Jesus must recognize who he really is. Anything else would be based on falsehood or wishful thinking, and that is no basis for a relationship, much less an intimate one.

Jesus is my Lord and I obey him. Intimacy with Jesus is not a relationship of equals. I draw my life from Him, and I am obligated to obey Him. And obeying him sets me free to be who he created me to be and to enjoy intimacy with him.

Jesus gave me a new nature in which he dwells. That new nature allows an intimacy deeper than is possible in any human relationship. Intimacy with Jesus is by his indwelling.

Jesus gave me a new family with whom I grow. Jesus focused on others rather than himself, and he wants me to do the same. It aligns my heart with his, and it deepens intimacy with him and with my brothers and sisters.

Do you want intimacy with Jesus? These are the foundation for it.

Without the foundation intimacy is not possible. The foundation is necessary, but it isn't sufficient. We have a role to play too. I will mention three things briefly:

We have to want it. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart." If intimacy with Jesus isn't vital to us, we will never achieve it.

We have to make time for it. We cannot become intimate with Jesus without spending time with him, a lot of time. That's true for intimacy in any relationship. If we want it, we will spend time with him, in the Word and in prayer.

We have to work with others. It is hard to go very far all alone. You will need at least one or two others who will journey with you. I recommend LifeGroups. They are well positioned to help a group develop the practice of intimacy with Jesus.

Do you want intimacy with Jesus? He wants intimacy with you. All you need, He will provide. You won't find anything better or greater.

I haven't arrived. In fact in preparing to speak today, Jesus has shown me some things about myself that have hurt my intimacy with him. But he has also awakened a greater longing for him. That's how he works, little by little, sometimes taking a step back so that we can make a big step forward. It isn't a transaction, it's a journey.

I've addressed my comments today almost exclusively to those who are already on the journey with Jesus. There may be some here or watching who aren't there yet, and for whom much of what I said is confusing.

The four truths that I've emphasized: acknowledging Jesus as Lord, committing to Jesus as my Lord, receiving a new nature, and being part of new family, these are part of larger whole that includes Jesus paying the penalty for our sin (our rebellion against him), being forgiven for our sin, being reconciled to God, and being assured that we will be with him forever. If you are feeling drawn to these things, you can be sure that God is already at work in you. Let's talk today. You don't have to wait until everything is clear. You can contact me, or any of our staff or elders, or you can email [howcanwepray@grandviewchurch.ca](mailto:howcanwepray@grandviewchurch.ca).

If you want to learn more about intimacy with Jesus, particularly the practice of it, look at today's handout on our website. It mentions some Scriptures to check out, it recommends some books, and it has a link to a short document I wrote on practicing intimacy with Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, I encourage you to make deepening your intimacy with Jesus a goal for this year, and for each year to come. He is waiting for you.

Let's pray.

Father, I have spoken today about what you desire for me and for all of us who are your children. Cast out of us whatever is keeping us from intimacy with Jesus, and draw us to him, by your grace and by your power, for our good and for your glory.