

Purpose Driven Life, IV

As Close as I Choose (Chpt 11-14)

February 29, 2004

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

- Many of you have seen “The Passion of the Christ”.

It was going to open on 2000 screens. Then it was bumped up to 2800. It opened on 4643 screens (and jumped to 4793 on Friday). It’s deepening and challenging the faith of believers, and spurring non-believers to question and discuss its content.

It’s so strange to hear Roger Ebert (the *thumbs-up* critic) explain how the blood of Christ redeems mankind; or, to see Walden Books spotlight “The Case for Christ” and “Mere Christianity” at the entrance of their store.

- I’ve been trying to understand the scene with Satan holding a baby. Is he trying to show Jesus that the Devil loves *his* son more than God?
- And did you notice the scene from far above the cross that distorts into a single rain drop? God’s tear perhaps? A tear of joy or sorrow?

The movie means the most to those who understand this passage:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! – Romans 5:8-10 NIV

- This week’s reading assignment was chapters 11-14.
- It is all about friendship and closeness with God.

This isn’t an OT concept; *terror* of God was more common! But Jesus changed that. The veil (separation) was split. We’re now called to friendship through God’s grace and Jesus’ sacrifice.

- Shortly before the cross, Jesus said to His disciples ...

I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn’t confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. – John 15:14-16 NIV

God wants us to go from a servant level of “Doing this because He said so!” to a companion level of understanding His heart. Part of our purpose is to grow in intimacy with God so that He can confide in us as friends.

- Intimate friendship with God is by choice, not accident.
- We’re as close to God as we choose to be.

THREE C’S TO FRIENDSHIP

There are: Three C’s to a Growing Relationship:

1. Conversation (continual prayer)

Wouldn’t be much of a friendship if we didn’t talk to them.

I’m “preaching to the choir” telling you that God wants you to pray. But He desires more than a daily devotion; more than an appointment on your schedule; do you know what He really wants?

... pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. – 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 NIV

There’s a common misconception that “spending time” with God means “being alone” with God. We do need to disconnect from our daily routine in order to focus on God effectively ... but that doesn’t mean much if we leave Him behind when we reconnect to our daily routine.

- We must practice the presence of God.

The goal isn’t a *feeling*; it’s a continual awareness of the reality of His companionship so that we can engage Him and connect with Him on even the smallest details of our lives.

2. Contemplation (meditation)

Wouldn’t be much of a friendship if we didn’t think about them.

Q: What percent of your average day consists of God-amnesia?

Q: What prompts you to remember God? (Good group question!)

It takes effort. We need to create reminders and learn to bring our thoughts back to an alertness of Him. One of the chief ways to accomplish this is through His Word.

It’s much easier to keep God in our thoughts *during* the day if we’ve *opened* our day by opening His Word.

We can't love God unless we know Him; and we can't know Him unless we know His Word.

- Prayer lets *me* speak to God; meditation lets *God* speak to me.

It's helpful to personalize scripture. Take a scripture like ...

... the LORD was with them ... - Judges 1:22 NIV

And turn it into, *Father, You are with me!* Instead of simply observing how He "was to them," internalize how He "is to you." The reality of it reaffirms and replenishes the relationship.

3. Consideration (worship)

Wouldn't be much of a friendship if we didn't respect them.

One of the ways we demonstrate our respect to God is through reverence, praise, and worship that aligns with His Word.

[Jesus to a Samaritan woman:] Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. - John 4:23-24 NIV

To worship in spirit is to offer adoration that is heart-felt. If worship is mindless it's meaningless. Insincerity is offensive to a friend and insulting to God.

To worship in truth is to worship the one true God, revealed in His prophetically proven and consistently confirmed Word.

- Sincerity alone isn't enough; we can be sincerely wrong.

So, we must worship with our heads *and* hearts; in spirit *and* truth. This kind of consideration is not always convenient or comfortable; it takes considerable effort.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. - Mark 12:30 NIV

To the degree that we talk to, meditate on, and worship God, our relationship grows from servant-level to friendship-level. However, we can't allow ourselves to achieve intimacy at the expense of His sovereignty.

- (In other words) We can be friends but not equals.

It makes me uncomfortable to hear people refer to God as their “buddy” or “pal” or “the man upstairs.” It seems flippant. We’re *junior* partners; He’s our loving leader and we follow ... not out of duty, fear, or compulsion but because we trust Him.

THE DRY TIMES

And to mature this trust, God will allow periods of seeming separation when He’ll “hide Himself” from us.

Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel. – Isaiah 45:15
NIV

The deepest level of worship is to trust Him when we’re tempted, to thank and praise Him in spite of hardship or adversity.

Here’s how we can actually grow in intimacy during the *dry times*:

1. Be honest with how you feel.

God insists on honesty even if it means complaining, accusing, or arguing with Him. The *Dry times* teach us to tell Him how we really feel, rather than what we think He wants us to say.

2. Focus on His unchanging nature.

God is real no matter how I feel! We must trust, in the dark, what we’ve seen in the light.

3. Remember what He’s already done.

Remember how He’s treated you in the past. “The Passion” should remind us that what Christ accomplished on the cross is worthy of our continual thanks and praise whatever *our* circumstances.

4. Wait patiently on His promises.

Problems can be a means to His promises. Pain energizes us to focus, to draw close, and to change. In the *dry times* we must realize that we’re being taken to a deeper level of maturity and understanding ... from servant to friend.

By a friend whose not mad *at* you, but mad *about* you.