

INTIMACY WITH GOD

How Scriptural Themes and Parameters Should Shape Our Pursuit

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INTRODUCTION

A. Defining Intimacy

Intimacy is an important concept at the root of a relationship with God and others. Spiritual formation studies and methods have taken this into account. Anyone who studies and attempts to write on it knows how vast the topic is and should realize quickly that a major portion of their task is to limit their attempt. This paper is a modest attempt to add a critical voice, not a criticizing one, to the discussion on the intimacy of God. Furthermore, it seeks to examine intimacy as a theological construct as well as a practice of all humans and God Himself in light of some of perhaps many Scriptural themes and patterns.

What should a theological examination of such a personal topic as intimacy with God have? Carson's reflection on the current use of the term "spirituality" in his magisterial work, *The Gagging of God*, is helpful at this point.¹ Like the concept of spirituality that he addresses there, intimacy is also a theological construct. However, what is meant by that? There is much talk on intimacy, but there has to be more to the discussion than say feelings of closeness between two parties. What are its constituent parts? He gives the analogy of the theological construct of the Trinity. It is believed or denied and articulated in various ways, but the basic constituent theological parts are not under debate despite the refinement of the details. Intimacy, like spirituality, is to be contrasted with that kind of construct because it is more of "a *person-variable* synthetic theological construct." In other words, in studying intimacy, because it is personal and studied by various theological viewpoints, "one must always inquire as to what components enter into the particular construct advocated or assumed by a particular writer, and what components are being left out."

Therefore, this study will assume that because the Bible addresses intimacy with God, and so because it is a theological construct, it is legitimate human experience. The scriptural data will be the moorings for the description of this concept. However, to start such a project, the concept under investigation is in some ways an answer to the question, what is intimacy itself? To understand how to answer that question according to the biblical record, the shared understanding of our culture as to the meaning or usage of the term intimacy needs to be clarified. By intimacy, most mean something along the lines of a close safe sharing of oneself with another.²

¹D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 562.

²For example, a good starting point for determining our American culture's understanding of certain concepts can be found in *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (p. 1000). It can give some initial parameters to the concept under theological investigation. "1. The state of being intimate 2. a close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship with another person or group. 3. A close association with or detailed knowledge or deep understanding of a place, subject, period of history, etc.: *an intimacy with Japan*. 4. An act or expression serving as a token of familiarity, affection, or the like: *to allow the intimacy of using first names* . . . 6. sexual intercourse. 7. The quality of being comfortable, warm, or familiar: *the intimacy of the room*. Cozy café. 8. Privacy, esp. as suitable to the telling of a secret: *in the intimacy of his studio*." Thus, the elements of closeness, familiarity or knowledge, affection, being comfortable, and privacy seem to be constituent parts of our culture's conception of intimacy.

B. Spiritual Formation Training and Movement

Intimacy has become a significant theme in spiritual formation training and in the movement. Intimacy with God is its hallmark and yet it is variously and often vaguely defined.³ A few examples from a vast amount of references to the concept of intimacy with God will have to suffice. Some have made intimacy with God a stated goal for their ministry organization. Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship has stated that it's "Fourth Core Commitment" is Spiritual Formation. They explain it with the claim: "We cultivate intimacy with God and growth in Christ-like character through personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, empowered by the Spirit."⁴ There is no explanation of exactly what intimacy with God is. Their explanation immediately shifts to the primary purpose of life being to "glorify God and enjoy him forever." It then shifts to the "means" of growing close to God and becoming like Jesus, that is, the spiritual disciplines. An amorphous description then follows with intimacy being vaguely defined as a "divine-human dance" and placing ourselves "in the loving arms of our Lord."⁵

The more mystical Catholic perspective of intimacy can be found in the Boston Theological Institute's discussion of what they feel is good ministry as it pertains to what they seek to develop in their students. It is about the formation of spirituality defined as "true intimacy with God" through the 'otherness' of life, marked by a transition of consciousness (Brian McDermott): *lectio divina, meditatio, contemplatio*, and finally *actio*." They go on to say that this training for intimacy with God "comprises the schooling of the imagination" and "is a spiritual practice, a form of the *lectio divina* as a way for modern cultural consciousness, contemporary generational imagination, desires and faith." They summarize this practice by saying, "We are becoming something—and we have somewhere to go."⁶

³The concept of intimacy with God seems to fit into what generally is called "devotional spirituality" although it may overlap with other aspects of spirituality. Cf. Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 151-98. Other terminology seem to be associated with it: contemplation, mystical union, centering prayer, deeper experiences or relationship with God, encountering God, spiritual marriage, ecstasy, etc. One of Henri J. M. Nouwen's descriptions of intimacy with God is a place in ourselves where "God dwells and holds you," where we are to "trust in the place of unity." *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey through Anguish to Freedom* (New York: Image/Random House, 1996), 14-15. Many see it as a process or pilgrimage. M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., whose approach is a transformational or incarnational model of spiritual formation, advocates and describes the classical Christian pilgrimage toward the goal of spiritual formation as four stages: awakening, purgation, illumination, and finally union. Ecstatic union, as a example of an aspect of the union stage, is "a period of total absorption in God during which a person is unaware of her or his surroundings" (cf. 2 Cor 12:2-3). *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 79-101. Gary L. Thomas in his *Seeking the Face of God: The Path to a More Intimate Relationship* (Eugene, Ore.:Harvest House, 1994) is disappointing when it comes to clearly defining what intimacy with God. He advocates knowing the path or having clear goals for it, but never defines what it is. The closest he comes is deferring to general statements from John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila (pp. 24-25).

⁴"Spiritual Formation," Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship.
http://www.intervarsity.org/news/news.php?item_id=326. Date Accessed: 1/25/06.

⁵"Whatever list (of spiritual disciplines) characterizes our particular journeys, the message is that spiritual maturity does not simply happen to us or the students we serve. To grow in intimacy with God and to develop Christ-like qualities requires our active participation. Our role in this divine-human dance is to place ourselves—with intentionality and regularity—in the loving arms of our Lord. He has promised to do the rest." "Spiritual Formation," Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship.

⁶"Spiritual Formation" The Boston Theological Institute.
http://www.bostontheological.org/programs/spiritual_formation.htm. Date Accessed: 1/25/06. For other relatively recent representatives of mystical Catholic approaches to intimacy with God see Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with*

Contemporary attempts at understanding and cultivating intimacy with God should be asked important questions the foundation of intimacy with God: Are there prerequisites to entering into an intimate relationship with God? May anyone have intimacy with God? May anyone who claims to be a Christian obtain intimacy with God? What truths about God must be kept in mind when seeking intimacy with Him? Methodological questions need to be answered as well: Like any spiritual pursuit who does the search for intimacy with God face the temptation to be reduced to techniques? As important as the spiritual disciplines are to cultivating intimacy with God, do they guarantee it? Without a clear theological understanding of intimacy, techniques may cultivate something, but is it in accordance with what is legitimate and genuine? With Carson we need to ask two important questions concerning techniques: to what extent are techniques value-neutral and to what extent are they transportable from one culture or time period to Christianity?⁷

All this should draw the Christian back seeking to answer: what does the Bible have to say about intimacy with God? More specifically, how is intimacy as a close, safe, sharing with God to be molded by Scriptural themes and parameters?

FOUNDATIONS FOR INTIMACY WITH GOD

The Scriptures express themes that show that there is a clear and unequivocal foundation to this intimacy. The themes of Creation, Fall and Redemption are at the heart of this.

A. Created for Intimacy

Human intimacy with God begins with creation. Von Rad rightly observes that when the text of Genesis 1:26 notes “the announcement of a divine resolution: ‘Let us make man’ . . . God participates more intimately and intensively in this than in other works of creation.”⁸ Furthermore, man and woman made in the image of God is in itself a picture of God’s intent for intimacy with the capstone of His creation. The resemblance men and women have to God is found in the companionship and complementarity they have for each other that reflects the same qualities in the Godhead. Hoekema states, “In this way human beings reflect God, who exists not as a solitary being but as a being in fellowship.”⁹ God shares His dominion over the rest of creation with them. Part of this dominion is to be fruitful and multiply, implying the one-flesh marriage union. Thus, built into the created order is the intimacy of humankind patterned after their Creator.

B. Universal Estrangement

This designed capacity for humanity’s intimacy with God was severed at the one moment in history. The Fall of man was the result of the serpent’s test and twist of the thesis that the man and woman’s relationship had been based upon an honest open sharing between them and God. The serpent got the woman to believe that God indeed had not been sharing everything with them.

God (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Richard J. Huelsman, *Intimacy with Jesus: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); Michael Fonseca, *Living in God’s Embrace: The Practice of Spiritual Intimacy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 2000); George A. Maloney, *Called to Intimacy: Living in the Indwelling Presence* (New York: Alba House, 1983); Gabriele di Santa Maria Maddalena, *Divine Intimacy: Meditations on the Interior Life for Every Day of the Year*, Translated from the 7th Italian ed. By the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Boston (New York: Desclee Co., 1964); Clifford J. Stevens, *Intimacy with God: Notes on the Vocation to Celibacy* (Schuyler, Neb.: BMH Publications, 1992).

⁷Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 563-5.

⁸Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Translated by John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 55.

⁹Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 14.

Why hadn't He allowed them to experience the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Had God really said that about it? A possible solution for Eve at that very moment was to either trust God because of the intimacy of their relationship up to that point, or go and make a connection of intimacy with God and simply ask Him.

The consequence of this sin did not bring about "the promise of divine enlightenment," but "mistrust and alienation replaced the security and intimacy they had enjoyed"¹⁰ not only with each other but with God Himself. The self-conscious nakedness and inadequate attempt at self-protective covering underscore the destruction of their intimacy. Furthermore, the previous pattern of their walking with God in the Garden in the cool of the day (3:7) was interrupted forever. God calls for them asking, "Where are you?" to ferret them out of their hiding. Universal estrangement had begun.

C. Salvation Prerequisite

There are various ways that the Bible describes the divine remedy to the fall of man and not all focus on restoring intimacy (i.e., redemption, propitiation, expiation, etc.). Nevertheless, Paul describes in Romans 5:10 all humanity participating in universal estrangement. They are God's "enemies" (*echthros*), whose minds set on the flesh practice "enmity" (*echthra*) or open hostility toward God and His will (Rom 8:7). Paul argues that Christ's atoning sacrifice provides justification to the believing sinner (Rom 3:24-26; 4:5; 5:1). This results in a removal of the wrath with which God reciprocates the enmity and replacing it with reconciliation (*katallage*) (Rom 5:10-11). Justification is the foundation for this restored intimacy as Paul states clearly in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

A new kind of intimate relationship is created for the justified person in adoption. Paul shows that the Law was the *paidagogos*, or guardian, nanny or tutor, but now believers are "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:25-26). However, he not only argues that faith in God's provision not only produces sonship, but one of a most intimate nature. It is not a relationship with a "spirit of slavery" (Gal 4:5), "a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear" (Romans 8:15) but with a "spirit of sonship." God adopts the believing sinner (*uiothesia*), grants them the full rights and privileges of sonship, including intimacy with Father. Now the child of God can approach Him as "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). This Aramaic term is one of endearment and intimacy.

The "Abba, Father" is cried out by the needy and humble believer in prayer. It is true that the word "Abba" is a familiar term of the home of a little child. However, excessive familiarity not bounded by a healthy respect is not the case here. Morris argues that before we transfer our "Papa" or "Daddy" to this term, "we should reflect that the head of the family was an August figure in first century society (the Roman paterfamilias still had the right to put members of his household to death, even if the right was used rarely; cf. Gen 38:24)."¹¹ God is at the center of this familial intimacy. The Spirit of God confirms with our spirit that we are His children, but as Morris incisively observes, "The Spirit does not cause us to cry 'I am God's son', but 'God is my Father.' The believer looks at God rather than contemplating himself."¹²

There is now a reversal of the estrangement created by the fall. This reversal now available to the sinner who comes out of hiding to embrace their Creator's offer of reconciliation

¹⁰Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 137.

¹¹Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316.

¹²Ibid.

and intimate sonship made available by the sacrifice of His own Son.

The implications of this for spiritual formation are foundational. One cannot have intimacy with God without justification by faith.¹³ There is no Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of men as if God overlooks sin as a permissive parent might. The entrance requirement for intimacy with God is the *sola fide* teaching of the Bible described above without which there is no peace with God and intimacy, but only arrogant sinners who think that through self-achievement they can merit in some way access and favor with a holy God.

IMAGES OF INTIMACY WITH GOD

What truths about God Himself must be kept in mind when seeking intimacy with Him? The Scriptures give many images of intimacy with God that provide general truths concerning how His people should view their relationship to Him. Without a clear theological understanding of who God is and appropriate images to model, the intimacy sought with Him may be inappropriate or even counterfeit.

A. God's Nearness

One biblical theme that places parameters on intimacy with God is the image of His nearness. Theologically, reality of His nearness is associated with His immanence which is a corollary conception to His transcendence.¹⁴ Traditional Christian theism has sought to maintain the balance of these that Scripture presents.¹⁵ When God's transcendence becomes His paramount attribute, then one's ability to cultivate a closeness with God is hampered.

God's immanence is an expression of who He is and how His people should view intimacy with Him. In Psalm 139, for example, David exclaims that God's immanence is intricate. More specifically, His nearness is a knowledge that is overwhelming to him (v. 6) because it includes

¹³As Leon Morris stated so well, "The justification of sinners is the great and basic problem for all religion. God is good and man is not. How then can man, the sinner, stand before the high and holy God? Every religion must answer this question, and its value depends on the adequacy of the answer. What characterizes Christianity is that its answer centers on the cross. Justification does not take place because people in some way work out a means of dealing with sin. They do not and cannot. They can neither overcome it so that for the future they will live without it, nor blot it out from their past. But God can and does.

Justification by way of the cross means that God saves us in a way that accords with right. He does not save us at the price of saying 'Morality doesn't matter. Though people have sinned they will be accepted just as they are.' Sin is evil, and God never condones it. It must be dealt with. When we speak of justification by way of the cross, we are saying that it has been dealt with." Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Downers Grove: Eerdmans, 1988), 147.

¹⁴Carl F. H. Henry argued that God is not only intricately involved in running his created universe from a transcendent real. "God is not a divine being who acts only behind, outside or between cosmic and historical processes; he is present in these processes and works in them. The universe does not exist without his support and concurrence. God both acts on the events of nature and history from without and is purposefully and meaningfully engaged within the universe as well. He is not indifferent to the world and to man." *God, Revelation and Authority*, Volume VI: God Who Stands and Stays, Part Two (Waco: Word, 1983), 48.

¹⁵The longstanding struggle for Christian theologians has been over the balance of God's immanence and His transcendence. Grenz and Olsen argued that affirming the balance is necessary especially for our age. "At the transition between the modern and postmodern eras, therefore, theology has the opportunity to articulate anew and in new ways the Christian conviction of the reality of the transcendent-immanent God. This God invades our present circumstances from the vantage point of the transcendent *telos* of the whole of reality. At the same time, this God is immanent in or circumstances, sharing our present, just as God invites us to look beyond our imperfection to the as yet unattained perfection." Stanley Grenz and Roger Olsen, *20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 314-5.

God's searching omniscience of his daily activities, thoughts and words (vv. 1-5). Furthermore, God's omnipresence does not allow David to flee from His nearness, but it actually comforts him in the midst of personal crisis and attack (vv. 7-24). This same searching and comforting nearness was a promise God made to Moses in Exodus 3:11-12 when He said, "I will be with you."

A promise of nearness has been given to all believers. Jesus Christ promised His presence to His disciples in Matthew 28:20, saying, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." If the Great Commission is to be fulfilled, then this promise extends to all subsequent believers. However, this promise appears to be tied to the disciples' obedience to His command and possibly even conditionally.¹⁶ Does the end of the age end Christ's presence? It seems that Christ's comforting and providential presence will be with His followers until the end of the age at the consummation of His kingdom. It is at that point that their job will be done. Nevertheless, closeness to Christ or Christ's closeness to us is contingent upon or at least tied to obedience to Christ's command to fulfill the disciple-making mission of the church.

Assurances of God's nearness are also given to His people who are in the midst of trials. After David had been driven away by Abimelech when he faked being insane, he trusts in God's nearness. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18). Again, however, this nearness is contingent upon being righteous since David is putting this in parallel to the righteous in verse 15. Psalm 119:150 and 151 further this theme. "Those who follow after wickedness draw near; they are far from Your law. You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth."¹⁷ In other words, the righteous who pursue obedience to God's commandments experience God's nearness, not the wicked who try to draw near to Him.

Thus it should be apparent at this point that intimacy with God associated with His nearness is in some sense conditional. God will always be omnipresent and omniscient with regard to the activities and attitudes of His people. However, the assurance of His comforting presence is conditioned upon living righteously and obediently before Him as opposed to living in pride and wickedness. This parameter obviously needs more investigation that is done here, but a significant parallel issue will be developed below.

B. Other Images of Intimacy with God

There are other images in the Scriptures that seek to relay anthropomorphically what intimacy with God looks and feels like. They demonstrate the richness of how God has had close relationships with His people. There are examples of these images with famous biblical characters and images that are promises and assurances of God's intimacy with His people.

A problem arises, however, with theological application of concepts that the Bible describes but are not necessarily applicable to our age. For example, in Exodus 33:11 the LORD spoke with Moses "face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend." Theologically and practically, God's people today should not expect God to speak to them face to face as He did with Moses. He was received direct revelation from God at a unique point in salvation history. This was accompanied by many other miraculous signs demonstrating God's instructions for His people were being given to Moses. People today does not fit into that category of theocratic mediator. Even if people were to experience a face to face encounters with God so to speak, there would be clearer evidences of that including glowing faces. This brings up many other issues and claims that just cannot be addressed here. It must suffice to say that certain manifestations of closeness

¹⁶Cf. D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *EBC*, Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,), 8:599.

¹⁷Cf. also Ps. 145:18 "The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." David assumes that this nearness is for those who "fear Him" (v. 19), "love Him" and are not wicked (v. 20).

to God cannot be reduplicated today simply because the Bible describes the fact that they happened to someone in the past.

Nevertheless, a metaphorical but real “face to face” intimacy with God is possible. The LORD’s blessing to Aaron and his sons in Numbers 6:25 “The LORD make. His face shine upon you” is the desired blessing of all of God’s people.¹⁸ Asaph calls upon the LORD with this desire three times as He asks God for restoration and salvation. In Psalm 24:6, David carefully describes intimacy with the LORD as the responsibility of those who ascend to the tabernacle to worship. They are those “who seek Him, who seek Your face—even Jacob.” The conditionality parameter of this approach to intimacy is clear when David describes this “ascender” as one who has “clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully” (v. 4). There is also a real sense where God’s nearness is veiled from a human standpoint in sorrow and deep conflict as when David asked the LORD, “How long will You hide your face from me?” (Ps 13:1). It is at that point that faith/trust in the LORD is the means of regaining intimacy with Him (v. 5-6).

The intimate bond of affection, care, and trust described by the image of God’s “bosom” has some of the same issues as the “face to face” image. Jesus was said to be in the “bosom of the Father” (*kolpos*). Emulating that as a present day believer is difficult at best. Also, the Apostle John had the unique opportunity to cultivate such an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus that he was granted the privilege of “reclining on Jesus’ bosom” (*kolpos*) because he was the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). This was so striking that John had become known for this (John 21:20).¹⁹ Nevertheless, God’s people are His sheep that are part of an intimate relationship which God Himself initiates. Isaiah 40:11 pictures the intent of the sheep metaphor when the Lord promises to “gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing” (*chowq* or *cheq*).

An image of intimacy in the Bible that needs far more investigation is the application of the Song of Solomon to images and principles of intimacy with God. One only needs to read Dee Brestin & Kathy Troccoli’s book *Falling in Love with Jesus: Abandoning Yourself to the Greatest Romance of Your Life* to see the need for this. They take the Shulammitte maiden’s desire-filled statement, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine” (Song of Solomon 1:2) and claim that though it is metaphorical, there are three ways Jesus “kisses” us. He does this through His prophecies, His provisions, and His presence. They have to admit, “Obviously this concept is one that is easier for women, but perhaps if considered what it really meant to be kissed by the King, we’d all be more comfortable with it. When Scripture is metaphorical, we need to be as well.”²⁰ It is unclear what their metaphorical caveat means. Nevertheless, hopefully this example speaks for the need for clear theological thinking in this area.

Friendship with God is another important image the Scriptures use to describe intimacy with God. The same issues as the ones above surface again. Key figures in salvation history are described as friends of God. In Exodus 33:11, the LORD spoke to Moses “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” Abraham is described by God Himself as “My friend” in the NASB (Isaiah

¹⁸Cf. Ps 67:1.

¹⁹In that case John uses *stethos*, a term for the breast or chest, rather than *kolpos*, a term for the bosom or lap.

²⁰Dee Brestin & Kathy Troccoli, *Falling in Love with Jesus: Abandoning Yourself to the Greatest Romance of Your Life* (Nashville: W Publishing Group/Thomas Nelson, 2000), 105-6. See also an ancient but popular example in the famous Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Love of God and Spiritual Friendship*, abridged edition (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1983), 138-9.

41:8). This term is actually from אהב and refers to a beloved one. James ties Abraham's justification by faith to his being a friend of God (James 2:23). This tie needs further investigation. However, God's people are called His friends. However, in two important passages, this privilege is conditional. In John 15:13-15, Jesus states that "greater love" is demonstrated when someone lays down "his life for his friends." Yet He goes on to describe this friendship's conditionality by saying, "I call you friends if you do what I say, told you all things from My Father." James argues an either/or case for friendship with God declaring that friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God (James 4:4).

So far then, the Scriptural images of intimacy with God show that there are firm foundations for it in creation, the fall and salvation. A deep awareness of the nature of God and the Scriptural images of intimacy show that His people can and should be close to Him. However, there is also a conditional nature to this intimacy. Salvation history limits certain miraculous instances of intimacy with God to certain individuals at certain times. More important, the people of God are able to be intimate with God when they are obedient and singularly loyal to Him. This parameter is explicitly taught elsewhere in Scripture and is where we will now turn.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF INTIMACY WITH GOD

God's people are responsible for cultivating intimacy with Him. He has provided the foundation and means. However, like safe, close human relationships, humans must fulfill their obligations. There are images of this in the Scriptures,²¹ but due to the length of this paper, one key passage will have to suffice.

James 4:8 is one of the clearest passages in the Bible exhorting believers to keep close to God. In this case, God's people are to draw near to Him. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." However, this is not a promise without significant conditions. The aorist active imperative (*eggisei*)²² not only describes a privilege to draw near to God, but shows that failure to

²¹Cleaving or clinging to God (*dabaq* קָבַד) is an image that deserves more development than can be given here, but is at least worth mentioning at this point. See the following passages.

Deut 10:20 your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear

13:4 His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

Josh 23:8 "But you are to cling to the Lord your God, as you have done to

Ps 63:8 My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.

Ps 119:31 I have stuck/clung to Thy testimonies

Jer 13:11 as a girdle cleaves to the loins of a man, so I have caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, Judah . . . so that they might be unto me . . . , but they would not hear.

There is also the image of those who "walk with God." Genesis 3:8 describes what appears to be a habitual occurrence in the Garden. "They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" Sin obviously destroys intimacy. Genesis 5:21-24 states, "Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah. . . Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." An interesting reward in the context "and he was not" replaces "and he died" in the genealogy. Hebrews 11:5 describes Enoch's intimacy as an activity: "he obtained the witness that he was pleasing to God." However, the biblical exhortation is given to believers to "walk in" the sphere of God. Gal 5:16 walk in the Spirit. Colossians 2:6-7 "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude." This seems to describe how we are to conduct our lives with an intimate faith in Christ and His provisions.

²²The only means for gaining intimacy with God in this age of salvation history is coming to God through His Son, Jesus Christ. There are several passages in Hebrews where Christ is the means to drawing near to God. The author gives a clear exhortation to intimacy in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (*proserchomai*). In 7:19 he says that we

do so is, at minimum, disobedience.

The most striking feature of this exhortation is that it is intended to be a cure for two specific spiritual ills. First, James is calling his readers to spiritual faithfulness vs. spiritual adultery. God's people who are selfish, envious and quarrelsome (4:1-3) will not only see their prayers to God go unanswered, but will find themselves acting as God's enemies. Friendship or intimacy with the world and its materialistic values is nothing other than spiritual adultery (v. 4-5). There could be no more horrific and painful image that James could use to describe this kind of sinful breach of intimacy with God. Davids notes, "This term normally indicates an activity of worship: All their church's worship is not a coming near, for their community disharmony rooted in preoccupation with worldly success makes it unacceptable."²³ The cure for this first spiritual illness is plainly given: humble repentance before God.

Second, James is calling his readers to cease succumbing to Satan's desires to separate them from their intimate relationship with God.²⁴ In verse 7, James calls them to "resist the devil and he will flee from you." Then he exhorts them to draw near to God. It is then that God will draw near to them. The cure for this illness is clearly again humble repentance in refusing to listen to the devil's lies about how to fulfill ones desires. This humble repentance assumes that spiritual and emotional cleansing of this adultery inspired by Satan needs to take place. This is because James immediately exhorts the offender in verses 8b-10: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you double minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." Moo aptly describes this image, "Those who sincerely repent and turn to God will find him, like the father of the prodigal son, eager to receive back his erring children."

This exhortation shows that intimacy with God can be damaged. God's people who have already entered into an intimate relationship with Him through conversion and the step of salvation can violate that closeness and safety that God grants. This exhortation is a warning to any believer who seek to fulfill their desires apart from God and His means commit a heinous crime of spiritual adultery. However, this passage also shows that the devil appears to know this human tendency and will wage a great war of temptation in order to "break up" this intimate relationship.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this limited investigation into the biblical concept of intimacy with God, it is easy to see that much more work needs to be done. It also should be quite apparent that intimacy with God is an important concept at the root of ones relationship with God and others. Its foundation is in man's creation in God's image. Sin has marred the ability to achieve it. Salvation through faith in God who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself is the only means of re-establishing the ability to have it once again. However, the challenge for spiritual formation models is to think according to the Scriptural themes and parameters that do justice to foundational theological truths. Any model that does not take these truths into consideration is

have "a better hope [NC], through which we draw near to God" (*eggizo*). In 7:25 he says that we can be those "who draw near to God through Him" for salvation and forgiveness (*proserchomai*). In 10:22 he gives a conditional exhortation: "let us draw near with a sincere heart" (*proserchomai*)

²³Peter H. Davids, *James*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 15, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrikson, 1989), 102.

²⁴Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 148.

deceived and deceptive at best. Again, only the justified by faith alone can have intimacy with God and call Him Abba.

For God's people, the great privilege of intimacy with God is to be enjoyed and deepened through understanding the rich images of biblical accounts of the saints of old, but always recognizing the difference of ages in which they lived in salvation history. This privilege is clearly demonstrated in loyalty, trust and obedience. Spiritual adultery and spiritual warfare cause great damage to intimacy with God. They must be viewed as the major threats to it. Humble repentance and spiritual cleansing must be a part of the ebb and flow of this quest.

There will always be a significant challenge when seeking intimacy with a Holy God. How do God's people seek intimacy with Him while avoiding presumption? In Exodus 19:12, God put limits on the people's approach to Mt. Sinai. In 1 Timothy 6:15-16, Paul says that God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see." Maybe the balance is in the analogy of looking at a mountain. The closer one gets to it, the bigger it becomes. Not the opposite. Therefore, the closer one gets closer to God, the bigger, more majestic and holy He becomes. At the same time, Christ brings us near as the Bride of Christ. Full intimacy awaits His return (1 John 3:1-3).

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