

## Nearer Heaven in 2007 Cultivating Intimacy with God

**Intro:** Last year we began with a great and worthy goal to read through the Bible and pray to God every day. And it has been so encouraging to me to see how many of you accepted the challenge of doing that and staying with it throughout the year. And it has been equally encouraging to hear your comments about the lessons that went with our reading. This year I'm taking a different approach but we have the same goals.

This year I'm planning my lessons around the theme "Nearer Heaven in 2007". The goal of course is obvious—to encourage us all to rise to new levels of understanding, faith, and obedience, to grow closer to God and to serve Him more fervently. This quarter I plan to talk with you about "Daily Godly Living" discussing some of the features of our daily discipleship. As we kick off this series we might first ask:

### What is Godly Living?

*By "godly" living we mean a life that is devoted to God, pious, devout or religious. The Greek expression commonly used in the NT and translated "godly" or "godliness" is "eusebeia" and commonly describes the lifestyle of the disciple. Paul urged Christians to pray:*

*for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. (1 Timothy 2:2)*

*Likewise Peter urges disciples to let the promised coming of the Lord and His judgment have its effect in their lives:*

*Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness. (2 Peter 3:11)*

*Since God seeks godliness in us...*

### What does the quest for godly living include?

*The Quest for Daily Godly Living includes "Cultivating Intimacy with God Himself"!*

Godliness is more than an attempt to live by a moral code or philosophy; it is to seek God Himself and to grow in intimacy with Him. In fact, no moral effort will succeed that is not connected with the effort to establish a close and living relationship with the Lord Himself.

*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

*Just as in human relationships, intimacy is close familiarity with God and honest sharing with Him.*

A couple may be said to be intimate in the sense that they know each other very well and share with each other things that they might not reveal to any other.

Though the English Bible does not use the term “intimacy” I believe the idea is clearly suggested by those Scriptures that describe the disciples’ “knowledge” of Christ and God.

*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. (John 17:3)*

*It is not a matter of knowing about God; but truly knowing Him!*

***Intimacy then is the result of honest communication and revelation of one’s innermost being. And in this sense the Scriptures are intended to provide this revelation of God and to prompt a spiritual response.***

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:2-3)*

**How can I cultivate this intimacy with God that results in godliness?**

***I must spend time reading and meditating upon God’s revelation of Himself in the Scriptures.***

*Now they have come to know that everything Thou hast given Me is from Thee; for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received them, and truly understood that I came forth from Thee, and they believed that Thou didst send Me. (John 17:7-8)*

To become intimate with God we must learn to be good listeners to God’s word; receiving it, understanding it and believing it!

***I must spend time responding to God’s revelation. (Intimacy is a two-way street, not because God needs it, but because we do!) This is the revelation of ourselves to God (What some have called the “ACTS” of prayer). We respond to God:***

Through adoration and thanksgiving

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. (Hebrews 13:15)*

Through confession

*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)*

Through supplication

*And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 5:14-15)*

***By the experience of learning about God and sharing with God I can come to new levels of apprehension of who He is and the wonder of being His child and experiencing His blessing.***

**What is a good strategy for cultivating intimacy with God?**

***Allocate time each day to receive His revelation!***

*Use the Daily Bible as a way of getting an overview*

*Listen to tapes of Scriptures*

*Develop your own person own study plan that gives you ample time each day (20-30 minutes) to just learn more about God through His revelation and time to reflect upon what you are learning.*

***Allocate time each day to respond to His revelation! Ask some fundamental questions:***

*What features of God have been presented?*

*Praise and adore him for it!*

*Consider also singing from a song book or join with others singing on tape or CD.*

*Why must worship be confined to church services when we are permitted to worship “in spirit and in truth”? (Jn. 4:23-24).*

*What deeds of God have been described?*

*Thank Him for what He has done for others and for you.*

*Tell others about what He has done.*

*What has God asked of us?*

*Reading God’s word makes us aware of our sin.*

*Confess your failings and transgressions; sincerely contemplate what replacement behaviors might be needed to overcome a weakness.*

*What needs do we have of God?*

*Facing the challenges of each day enables us to anticipate where we need God’s help.*

*Anticipate what the day holds in store and pray about it in advance.*

*Reflect on current challenges you’re facing and pray about them.*

*What needs do others have of God?*

*Keep a prayer list of those who have special needs.*

*Pray about not just health or finances, but spiritual things like Paul did (Cf. Col. 1:9-12).*

***Arise from the experience of knowing God to obey Him.***

*Can we truly say we have come to know God, if we are not transformed by the experience into His likeness?*

*Can we affirm that God is truly wise and then ignore His instructions?*

*Can we affirm that God is all-powerful and then fail to rely upon that power? You get the idea.*

*To know God, to be intimate with God, is to discover by experience that His will is “good, acceptable, and perfect” (Rom. 12:2) and to apply it to our lives in daily service to Him and others.*

**What cautions do I need to keep in mind?**

***Spiritual intimacy is not merely engaging in spiritual exercises. It is possible that one might read the Bible daily and pray daily but never achieve true***

***intimacy with God. For true godliness occurs in the heart and now merely in outward actions or forms.***

*holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. (2 Timothy 3:5)*

***But no one will grow in spirituality without engaging in spiritual exercises of this kind. If they are done with a heart to know God and serve Him, they will have a powerful effect in our lives. In fact it is the analogy of exercise that best described how Timothy could grow in “godliness”.***

*But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (1 Timothy 4:7-8)*

Just as an athlete increases in strength through the routines of daily exercise, so the disciple experiences a similar increase in godliness through the “exercise” of faith in daily Bible reading and prayer.

**Conclusion: I wish for you the blessings of pursuing the inexhaustible glory of God. Each day you will learn more about Him, but never reach the point where you have known Him completely. I like to remember the words of Paul who prayed that the Ephesians might:**

*may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. (Ephesians 3:18-19)*

**That means that God’s revelation will last you a lifetime and give you ever increasing joy in knowing Him. And in the meantime, such a quest for intimacy with God will lay the foundation for the whole of your life. The quest for daily godly living begins here!**