



fingerprints

Intimacy with the Father

THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO, during the waning days of my very young bachelorhood, I was stationed aboard the *U.S.S. Chicago*, just off the coast of Vietnam in the Tonkin Gulf. My even younger betrothed was back in Iowa, being distracted by college while she planned our impending nuptials.

It is true that I yearned for her, but I was nonetheless kept far from my beloved. She may have been constantly in my thoughts and dreams, but our moments together (this being well before the globe-circling inventions of the internet, personal computers, and cell phones) consisted entirely of written correspondence and, during the six-month period of the cruise, one achingly brief phone call placed from the Philippines.

As a result of this and other periods of separation, by the time the ship finally docked in San Diego at the end of its return voyage, the young woman awaiting me on the pier was, in many respects, a stranger. We had dated for about a year prior to my entering the service, but since then had had only periodic visits to replenish the longing we felt for each other. So by the time our wedding

date arrived, we had mostly been apart for more than a year.

Memories and photographs and hand-smudged letters written from the depths of a lonely heart cannot faithfully stand in for a loved one's physical presence. All that time apart meant that we had a lot of catching up to do. It meant that even though we loved each other deeply, there were still many things about each other that remained a mystery. A teenaged girl is already a profound enigma to a teenaged boy, and that mystery only deepens when distance limits evidence to dreams, and fantasies, and idealized remembrances.

And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Matthew 19:4-6



Reflections
by the Pond

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Linda and I have now been married thirty-eight years. During those years the earlier pattern of separation has been, for the most part, reversed: our almost constant time together has been only rarely interrupted by brief separations.

As husband and wife, Linda and I have seen wondrous sights and have visited far-off lands; we have passed through times of great joy and withering sorrow; we have grown and shared and have faced side-by-side the many surprises that God has thrown our way. As a result, we now have a profound and intimate knowledge of each other. Where once there were mysteries, now there is a deep and abiding understanding. Distant longing has been replaced by the embodiment of God's mystical "oneness."

The God-seeking believer longs for this same level of intimacy with the Lord. But, just as with Linda and me, such intimacy does not take place over great distances; one must draw near to the object of one's desire.

"For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them up and not overthrow

them, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."

Jeremiah 24:6-7

Much as a boy and girl court, then begin building a lifetime relationship through shared experience and abiding love, so intimacy with the Father—and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—is something that must be nurtured and cultivated. It does not happen overnight and it does not happen by accident. It is not naturally in the heart of man to see God in the objects, people and events which surround him.

Just as a man and woman do not necessarily become "one flesh" on their wedding night, the believer does not enjoy this level of intimacy with the Father on the day he or she accepts Christ. It comes into a believer's life through practice, and a deep-seated hunger to know this One who is at once Lord of the universe and keeper of each individual's heart.

The doctrine of justification by faith—a biblical truth, and a blessed relief from sterile legalism and unavailing self-effort—has in our time fallen into evil company and been interpreted by many in such a manner as actually to bar men from the knowledge of God. The whole transaction of religious conversion has been made mechanical and spiritless. Faith may now be exercised without a jar to the moral life and without embarrassment to the Adamic ego. Christ may be "received" without creating any special love for Him in the soul of the receiver. The man is "saved," but he is not hungry nor thirsty after God. In fact, he is specifically taught to be satisfied and is encouraged to be content with little.

The modern scientist has lost God amid the wonders of His world; we Christians are in real danger of losing God amid the wonders of His Word. We have almost forgotten that God is a person and, as

such, can be cultivated as any person can. It is inherent in personality to be able to know other personalities, but full knowledge of one personality by another cannot be achieved in one encounter. It is only after long and loving mental intercourse that the full possibilities of both can be explored.

All social intercourse between human beings is a response of personality to personality, grading upward from the most casual brush between man and man to the fullest, most intimate communion of which the human soul is capable. Religion, so far as it is genuine, is in essence the response of created personalities to the creating personality, God. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

God is a person, and in the deep of His mighty nature He thinks, wills, enjoys, feels, loves, desires, and suffers as any

other person may. In making Himself known to us He stays by the familiar pattern of personality. He communicates with us through the avenues of our minds, our wills and our emotions. The continuous and unembarrassed interchange of love and thought between God and the soul of the redeemed man is the throbbing heart of New Testament religion.

This intercourse between God and the soul is known to us in conscious personal awareness. It is personal: it does not stay below the threshold of consciousness and work there unknown to the soul (as, for instance, infant baptism is thought by some to do), but comes within the field of awareness where the man can know it as he knows any other fact of experience.

You and I are in little (our sins excepted) what God is in large. Being made in His image we have within us the capacity to know Him.

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