

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



Time with an
Old Friend

three

“You had forgotten that I was at your side. You were beginning to forget that I was your best friend. And I feared that you might even forget who I was. You’re too dear to me to ever let that happen.”



By My Side

The human experience, especially in its relationship with God, is a rich cornucopia of possibilities. No one may dictate to another the precise manner in which they may respond to and commune with God, for it is an unregulated process—save for the one entryway essential:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

John 14:6

There are many reasons why God is manifested to us in three associated yet distinct ways, but those reasons can be distilled down to two: each member of the Godhead has His own unique ministry, and each person has his or her unique needs that draw upon those three ministries in different ways.

God the Father is unspeakable, unimaginable holiness. He cannot be seen by mortal humans, and His purity is such that it cannot be approached by sinful man.

God the Spirit is just as holy, and though His effects may be more evident, He remains as invisible and untouchable as the Father to mortal man. In fact, there is a special way in which the Holy Spirit is set apart from sinful man, and unique even within the Godhead, as Jesus explained:

"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."

Matthew 12:31-32

God the Son is as holy and pure as the Father and the Spirit, yet in that eternal, uncreated Tri-unity He is unique in that He is approachable in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God getting His hands dirty. His earthiness did not diminish His deity, nor did His deity dilute the authenticity of His human personality. He never ceased being God, but He translated God into a language we could understand.

Hence the full personality of the Godhead dwells in all its component parts. God the Father is holy; Jesus the Son is holy; the Spirit is holy.

Because God cannot be anything less than who He is, the full complement of His attributes is shared by all three members of the Trinity. But in His wisdom, God “sent forth His Son” so that when we needed holiness packaged in earthly form we would have Jesus. When we needed an understanding shoulder to lean on, we would have Jesus. When we feel abandoned and hopelessly confused, we would have Jesus.

We cannot dictate the form and method of another’s communion with God, but during times of struggle, during times of pain and strife, during times in which despair threatens to overwhelm us—in times of profound need, the face of God is the face of Jesus. The Spirit may be the “Comforter,” but when we need someone more tangible, more tactile, to whom we might pour out our troubled soul, it is the face of Jesus that comes to our visions. It is His hand we feel upon our shoulder. In a courtroom every defendant has beside him his lawyer—his advocate. And, whether guilty of the crime or no, it is his advocate’s hand on his shoulder when the verdict is read. Jesus, as our supreme Advocate before the Father, is there to comfort us in our times of trial. In our eyes we may be deserving judgment; we are guilty before the bar of justice. But, as a Christian redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, in the eyes of the Father we are innocent. The Judge has no verdict of condemnation to hand down. In conference Jesus has already leaned over the Judge’s desk and said, “He is Mine.” And the Judge has gavelled, “Case dismissed!”

Then why do we need our Advocate beside us? We need Him for comfort and defense against our own insecurities. And it is our insecurities that have brought us back to our hometown, to the street on which we once lived, to the home of our old Friend and companion.

Evening has merged silently into night. The long shadows cast by the ancient oaks and elms that border the street of our old neighborhood have disappeared into an encompassing black broken only by the solitary street light and a smattering of other porch lights. In a polite society one does not overstay one’s welcome. The hour is late, and while we sense no urgency on the part of our Friend, reluctantly we rise to leave.

This world does hold a few special people—those in whose presence we are profoundly energized or affirmed. It is not impossible for that quality to dwell in flesh, for we have all encountered one or two along the way. Their numbers, however, are few and dwindling. Today’s culture does not encourage excellence of character—indeed, it goes out of its way to encourage a bland sameness, an egalitarian uniformity at the lowest common denominator. But in spite of society’s pressures, a few do rise to a high and extraordinary level of excellence, and our lives are the better for time spent in their presence.

Yet time spent with any of these special people cannot even approach in quality or depth time spent with the Savior. Others may be able to energize our spirits, but only Jesus can revive our very soul. Others may reignite enthusiasm, but only Jesus can restore our passion for living with and for Him. Others may comfort or console, but only Jesus can unite our spirit with His and give us hope, and thus raise us up to where He dwells.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called

Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42 NIV

I had returned to the street where I once lived to rediscover something that had been lost. Pleasantly, I had found it, but now it was time to depart.

"Good-bye, my good Friend," I say, embracing Him at the door to His home.

"Why are you saying good-bye?"

"It's been wonderful visiting with You again. I had forgotten what it was like. But now I have to get back to my real life. It was well worth the trip, but I can't live in the past forever."

"But this isn't the past. It's now, and I'll be going with you. After all, I arrived with you."

"What?"

"You didn't really think that all this time I have been living where I was born, did you? It's a great place to visit—and I've enjoyed the memories. But I've been living with you all along! In fact, I'm the one who brought you back here."

"But, why?"

"You had forgotten that I was at your side. You were beginning to forget that I was your best friend. And I feared that you might even forget who I was. You're too dear to me to ever let that happen."

And, as if waking from a dream, my mind clears. I see the two houses from our past as they really are—just two old houses, just buildings that stand for a while, swapping families in and out, until they crumble into dust. The neighborhood is interchangeable with thousands more across the land, holding memories, but little more. It all belongs with the past—a past that was good, but which no longer exists.

With a cleared mind I realize that the one standing by my side is more than just a childhood Friend. He is my Friend even now. He came with me through childhood, through adolescence, into perilous adulthood. He has been with me all along, holding me up, giving me hope.

He wraps His arm around me, and together we go down the front porch steps, down the sidewalk, and out of the old neighborhood where we had been young together. The sidewalk is uneven, broken by decades of weeds shooting up through the cracks. And leaving the faint illumination of the porch light, all becomes black around us. But we don't fear the way, for our feet never touch the ground. ❖

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

C. Austin Miles