

#251 "Intimacy"

T.H.R.I.V.E. part 4

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God has called to us in a spiritual romance in sending His Son Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks much of familial metaphors to describe our connection with God such as being His children or joint heirs with Christ (John 1:12, Romans 8:17), but the most potent metaphor of all is that of the marriage supper of the Lamb. The consummation of the spiritual marriage between Christ and His church is a feast in heaven with all of the church worshipping and glorifying Christ, finally seeing Him face to face in all of His heavenly glory. Revelation 19:7-9 says,

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.'"

This is the moment of great expectation, the moment of highest hope, the point where eternal rest begins in its fullest sense, and where intimacy has reached its peak. How thankful will we be on that day that the abundant life that we have only had internally is now forever expressed externally! We will see golden streets, Jesus will be the Light, we will have a permanent home with an ever-present Savior, and the relationships we had with believers who died in Christ will be renewed. No more pain, no more struggle with sin, and no more devil to reckon with will make intimacy all the more wonderful. Just as marriage on earth has its distractions and forces constantly attacking it, so, too, does our relationship with Christ. Just as we must fight for intimacy in our earthly marriages by communicating regularly, speaking words of love to one another, and by being emotionally and physically close, so, too, do we need to tend to our relationship with God. He has spoken love to us in the cross and in His Word. He continues to demonstrate His love to us in His daily mercies, and He literally holds our hands in the spiritual realm. He is very close in that He lives within our hearts, and He is able to dissect our thoughts and emotions and transform them into those which honor Him. *He is constantly drawing us toward Him, but we will feel distant until we embrace His embrace and enjoy the connection that He is trying to create.* As we finally draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8). Of course He will, because He has already been drawing us near day after day.

Psalms 139:17-18 says, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You." If your spouse never thinks about you, it is hard to believe that he or she is really that excited about you. Our God thinks about us all the time. He knows when we stand up and sit down, and He knows our every movement. He knows what we are going to say before we say it, and He even knows how many hairs reside upon our heads. I know my wife likes to get a phone call during the day or an email or text

just telling her that I miss her and like her. Can we honestly say that we don't enjoy being in the Word and being reminded of just how much God loves us and just how much He proved it in giving us Jesus Christ? He thinks about us constantly. In fact, His thoughts about us are so numerous that they outnumber all of the grains of sand in the entire universe. Now, if God had evil intentions toward us, we would be in a great deal of trouble. *But the reality is that He only thinks good toward us, and every one of His thoughts about us has our best interest in mind.* What an advocate, what a God, and what a valued relationship! Hopefully, we can say with David that the knowledge of all of these thoughts toward us by God is indeed precious to us. The fact is that God values His relationship with us to a degree that overwhelms our minds. The question is, do we value God in any way that is even remotely similar? Obviously, we cannot love to the same infinite and perfect way that God does given that He is God, but by grace through faith we should be increasing in our love for Him each day. We should get more and more excited thinking about what God is doing in our hearts, how He is working around us, and just how wonderful, powerful, and majestic He is. Our thoughts about Him should be on the increase. If they are on the decrease, it means we probably have an ongoing issue with God, such as unconfessed sin, bitterness, lack of trust, doubt in His Word, etc. If we want to regain our intimacy with God and grow in it, we need to have an open conversation with God, we need to align our thoughts with the God of the Bible (2 Corinthians 10:5), and we need to thank Him, hope in Him, and rest in Him. The more we open our hearts in vulnerability to Him, the more we can actually enjoy the very Person Who can offer the greatest enjoyment possible (Psalms 16:11).

In addition to our relationship with God being described as His children or as the bride of Christ, we are also called Christ's friends. John 15:15 says, "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." We don't need to seek out some extra-biblical revelation in order to know what God is doing and what He wants us to do because He has already told us what we need to know. He said to His disciples that all that the Father told Him He made known to them and to us. All that we need in order to be able to grow in Christ, to change and be sanctified, and to be prepared and ready for every good work that Christ has called us to is found in the Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, our intimacy level with God will be directly related to our faithfulness to listen to Him speak to us as we read His Word. Some people read God's Word waiting for some mystical revelation or for some word to jump off the page. While certain verses may stand out to us at some times more than others and while the Holy Spirit does draw our attention to certain places in Scripture, all of it is required reading. We can't be lazy, open the Bible, close our eyes, point to a place on the page, and then expect that to be the verse of the day that is going to revolutionize our intimacy with God. That is like telling our spouses that we will listen for three minutes and then no more, so they better make it quick and make it count. We need to persevere in the Word, study it, and meditate upon it. This means that we think about it, its relevance, and how to apply it by faith throughout our lives. There should never be a time when God's Word is irrelevant to us in a decision-making process. It should never be a non-issue when trying to chart a moral course of action. It should never be disregarded in lieu of some other so-called authority. *If we want to grow in intimacy with God, we need to patiently, persistently, and fervently journey through God's Word.* There is no shortcut or easy method here. If we want to get a lot out of our relationship with God, which we should, we need to invest in it accordingly by being in the Word and

spending time in prayer in relation to what we have read, learned, and are trying to put into practice. God's Word is how we know God, and the more we know God the more we will love God and enjoy being loved by Him. **If Jesus was willing to be known as a friend of sinners, just think how much of a great friend He can be to His saints!**

Not only are we friends of God, but we are also the sheep of our Good Shepherd. Our Shepherd is our refuge, our guide, our protector, our caretaker, and our provider. With Him, we shall have no lack because in Him we have all that we could ever need (Psalm 23:1). *If all we needed to be spiritually full and to thrive was to have food and water, the Shepherd would have given us just that. But He knows that, more than that, what we need is His presence, His care, His staff, and His voice, for they comfort us and lead us in the everlasting way* (Psalm 23:4, John 10:2-4, Psalm 139:24).

Psalm 73:28 says, "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works." Intimacy with God is good, for He alone is our ultimate and enduring refuge. It is our connection with Christ that enables us to get the most out of His Word and to want to proclaim it to others. Intimacy has a way of sharpening our spiritual vision so that, in the end, we can endure.

Next up: Vision

What is T.H.R.I.V.E.? God has promised His children the abundant life (John 10:10), even when life is full of trials (John 16:33). Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, sometimes life feels like surviving more than thriving. Yet, even there, God provided for them bread from heaven and water from a rock. More importantly, He helped them learn that man does not live on bread alone but upon His Word (Deuteronomy 8:3). It is feasting upon the inviolable truths of Scripture that can enable us to endure. Even in times of earthly abundance, we will starve without the food of doing God's will (John 4:34). 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." This six part series will feed our souls so that we do not lose heart by strengthening the inner man despite what may be happening to us on the outside. To thrive is to live life fully alive.