













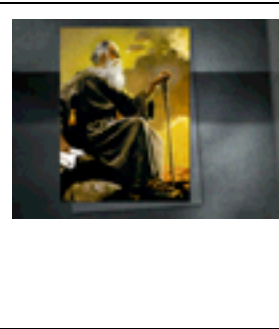
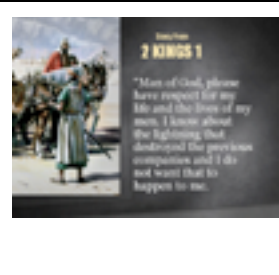


Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?</p> <p>A Sermon on Passionate Spirituality by David Newman</p>	
 <p>King Ahaziah had fallen off the second story of his palace and injured himself. He sent his servant to the pagan god Baal-Zebub to find out if he would live.</p>	<p>King Ahaziah had fallen off the second story of his palace and injured himself (2 Kings 1). He sent his servant to the pagan god Baal-Zebub to find out if he would live.</p>	
 <p>On the way the servant ran into Elijah who told him to return to the king and give him this message, "You sent your servant to the wrong god. The God of Heaven tells you that you will not recover from your injuries. You will die."</p>	<p>On the way the servant ran into Elijah who told him to return to the king and give him this message, "You sent your servant to the wrong god. The God of Heaven tells you that you will not recover from your injuries. You will die."</p>	
 <p>When the servant describes the appearance of Elijah the king knew instantly who it was. "I want that man in my palace right now," he thundered. He ordered the captain of his guard to take fifty men and arrest Elijah.</p>	<p>When the servant describes the appearance of Elijah the king knew instantly who it was. "I want that man in my palace right now" he thundered. He ordered the captain of his guard to take fifty men and arrest Elijah.</p>	<p>I have often wondered why he felt it was necessary to send so many soldiers to arrest one unarmed man. The captain found Elijah sitting on top of a hill outside the capital. "This is a piece of cake" he must have thought. "I don't need fifty men I can do it by myself."</p>
 <p>He calls out to Elijah in domineering and sneering tones, "Man of God, the king wants you on the double. Get down from that hill and come with us."</p>	<p>He calls out to Elijah in domineering and sneering tones, "Man of God, the king wants you on the double. Get down from that hill and come with us."</p>	

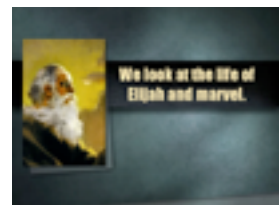
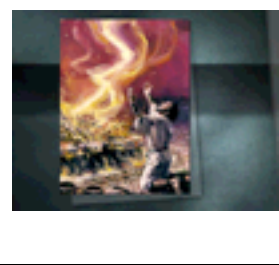

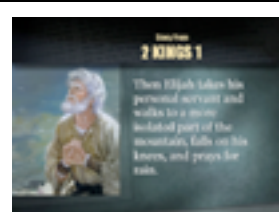

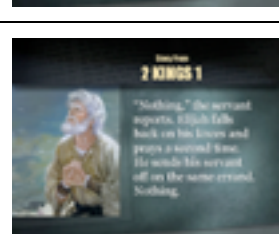
Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

 <p>2 KINGS 1 Elijah stays put and calmly replies, "You say I am a man of God but it seems as if you do not really believe that. Well here is the proof. If I am a man of God let fire come down from heaven and incinerate you and your fifty men."</p>	<p>Elijah stays put and calmly replies, "You say I am a man of God but it seems as if you do not really believe that. Well here is the proof. If I am a man of God let fire come down from heaven and incinerate you and your fifty men."</p>
 <p>Immediately, lightning struck that was so hot that the captain and his fifty men ceased to exist.</p>	<p>Immediately lightning struck that was so hot that the captain and his fifty men ceased to exist. Now there must have been some onlookers because the king soon heard what had happened. He did not take time to reflect. He did not think about how one man could kill a captain and fifty fully armed soldiers. He just ordered another captain with another fifty men to go and arrest Elijah.</p>
 <p>2 KINGS 1 This captain did not learn from the fate of his predecessor. He approached Elijah with the same arrogant attitude as the previous captain.</p>	<p>This captain did not learn from the fate of his predecessor. He approached Elijah with the same arrogant attitude as the previous captain.</p>
 <p>2 KINGS 1 Again he called Elijah a man of God and commanded him to go with him to the king.</p>	<p>Again he called Elijah a man of God and commanded him to go with him to the king.</p>
 <p>Again, Elijah replied in the same way... and lightning struck from heaven and killed the captain and all his men.</p>	<p>Again Elijah replied in the same way and again lightning struck from heaven and killed the captain and all his men. It is obvious that King Ahaziah got his position from family connections and not from aptitude.</p>
 <p>After hearing what happened, he sends a third captain with another fifty men to arrest Elijah.</p>	<p>After hearing what happened to the second captain he sends a third captain with another fifty men to arrest Elijah. It seems that he would have kept on sending men to their death until he had no army left. There is a definition of insanity that fits King Ahaziah very well.</p>




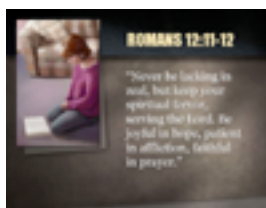
Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Why did he think that after suffering the loss of more than one hundred men he would be successful continuing to use the same methods?</p>
	<p>Elijah is still sitting on the same hill in the same spot when the third captain approaches with his fifty soldiers. This captain is much wiser than his predecessors. He has to follow the orders of the king but he is not about to repeat the stupid and deadly mistakes of the captains before him.</p>
	<p>Before saying one word he falls on his knees before Elijah and says in pleading tones “Man of God, please have respect for my life and the life of my men. I know about the lightning that destroyed the previous companies and I do not want that to happen to me.</p>
	<p>Would you please be willing to come with me to see the king?” God immediately spoke to Elijah and said</p>
	<p>“You can now go to deliver your message to the king. You will be safe. No harm will come to you.” And Elijah went.</p> <p>Notice in this story how intimately Elijah knew God. He did not have to pray “Lord, if it is your will, may fire come down from heaven and incinerate these men.” He knew instantly what the right response would be. There is no hint that he needed to ask God what He should do.</p>

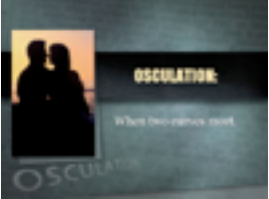

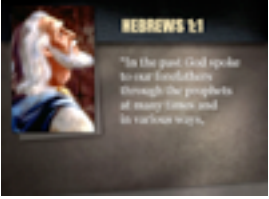
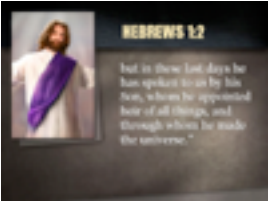
Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>We look at the life of Elijah and marvel. How wonderful it would be if we could know God that well. Is it possible to know God really intimately, so intimately that we always know exactly what God's will is.</p> <p>But Elijah, while having an extraordinary relationship with God sometimes had to plead long and hard with God, praying the same prayer over and over again.</p>
	<p>On Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18) he had rebuilt the altar of the Lord and in response to his prayer fire had come from heaven and incinerated the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and even the water that he had poured over the sacrifice.</p>
	<p>Immediately after that he told King Ahab to get something to eat and be prepared to return home because rain was about to fall after an absence of three and a half years.</p>
	<p>Then Elijah takes his personal servant and walks to a more isolated part of the mountain, falls on his knees, and prays for rain.</p>
	<p>After his first prayer he sends his servant to search the sky over the Mediterranean to see if any clouds have appeared.</p>
	<p>“Nothing” the servant reports. Elijah falls back on his knees and prays a second time. He sends his servant off on the same errand. Nothing.</p>


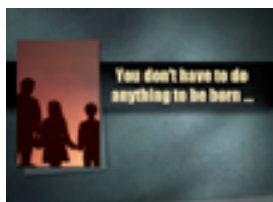
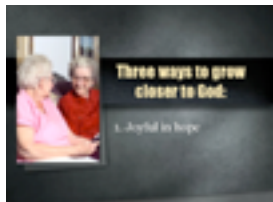
Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>Seven times Elijah prays the same prayer. Seven times he sends the servant to search for the signs of rain.</p>
	<p>It was not until after the seventh time that the servant reports back that he can now see a small cloud the size of a man's hand. Rain is on the way. Here is Elijah who knew God so intimately still having to wrestle with God in prayer.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The fact that we pray for the same thing over and over does not prove that we do not have a connection with God. Our church will grow to the extent that there are enough of us who are eager for and desire a greater intimacy with God.</p>
	<p>Now intimacy is relative. A baby has an intimate relationship with its parents but not as intimate as it will have at five years of age. And then the intimacy will be even greater at twelve. At each stage of development the baby is still intimate. So it is with our relationships with God. What is God looking for?</p>
	<p>“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:11-12).</p>
	<p>The first thing that God wants from us is passion. “Zeal, Fervor” are key words in this text. When you fall in love do you get passionate, are you full of zeal? What was the date like when you suddenly realized that you loved that woman or man? What kind of kiss did you give? Was it a brief peck on the lips? Or was it a long passionate</p>





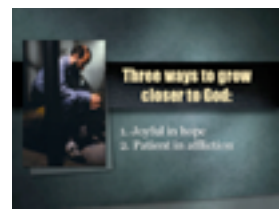
Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>osculation? Osculation? You say, what is that?</p>
	<p>The scientific definition of a kiss is an osculation which is defined as when two curves meet.</p> <p>Describing a kiss in that manner drains all the passion away. It is not geometry we are interested in but a person. God wants us to so be in love with Him that we feel toward him the same as we feel toward someone we passionately love. It is not a doctrine we are after, an osculation, it is a kiss with a person, a relationship.</p> <p>How do we get this passion, this fervor?</p>
	<p>Well, how do you fall in love? If I could explain that clearly I could make millions. Falling in love is one of life's mysteries that we cannot explain but we know it when we see it.</p> <p>However, true love does not take place without certain characteristics. We find there are values we hold in common, interests we both like, qualities we admire in the other person. And the same is true with God. We cannot expect to love God without knowing something about God. And what is the best way to learn about God?</p>
	<p>“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,</p>
	<p>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” (Hebrews 1:1-2).</p>



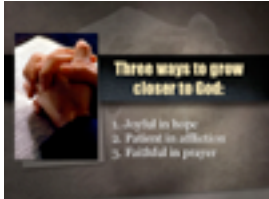
Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>The bible tells us that the best way to know God is to know Jesus. We know Jesus first through the eyes of the men who wrote the gospels. As we read we fall in love with this man Jesus and enter into an experience with Him. Now we know Him not just through knowledge but also through experience.</p> <p>We find that Jesus loves us as His own body. That Jesus does not condemn us. That Jesus always accepts us as we are. That Jesus does not stand over us with a list of things to do or change. Jesus is not primarily interested in us believing or behaving. What He wants is for us to know that we belong to His family.</p>
	<p>You do not have to do anything to be born, to become part of a family. You are just born. As you grow in that family, as you belong in that family, then you come to believe certain things and behave according to the expectations of that family. So it is in God's family. Before we can become passionate about being part of God's family we must know that we belong with no preconditions attached.</p>
	<p>What does all this lead to? The second part of this passage in Romans gives us three areas in which to concentrate, to develop our passion, to become more intimate with God.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Joyful in hope.</i> The Christian is first a joyful person, a happy person. And we are joyful not because we have no problems, not because everything is right, not because we have all the answers. We are joyful because we live in hope. Hope keeps us alive.

Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>A teacher who was assigned to help children in a large city hospital was asked to visit a particular child. The boy's classroom teacher asked her to teach him nouns and adverbs since that was what they were studying back in school. "Please help him so that he does not fall behind the others in his studies."</p> <p>It was not until the teacher got outside the boy's room that she realized that it was located in the hospital's burn unit. No one had prepared her to find a young boy horribly burned and in great pain. She felt that she could not just turn and walk away, so she awkwardly stammered, "I'm the hospital teacher, and your teacher sent me to help you with nouns and adverbs."</p>
	<p>The next morning a nurse on the burn unit asked her, "What did you do to that boy? We've been very worried about him. He was not making it. But ever since you were here yesterday, his whole attitude has changed.</p>
	<p>He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he has decided to live."</p> <p>The boy later explained that he had completely given up hope until he saw the teacher. He put it this way,</p>
	<p>"They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"</p> <p>Hope saved him.</p>
	<p>2. <i>Patient in affliction.</i> We grow passionate when we realize that trouble, problems, issues, afflictions have nothing to do with whether God loves us or not. Affliction is the result of sin. Problems are part of life. Problems are not the problem. It is our attitude toward problems that is the answer. Patience! We are impatient</p>

Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>people. We want God to answer our prayers immediately. We live in an instant world where we can obtain so many things just by pushing some buttons and entering some numbers.</p>
	<p>Moses prayed for forty years herding sheep before God gave him his answer about his future. God told Abraham that he would have a son and he become so impatient with God that he engineered his own son outside of God's will. God made him wait fourteen more years before giving him the child he had promised.</p>
	<p>Paul prayed three times that God would take away his thorn in the flesh, his affliction but God declined. God said you will learn patience in your affliction. Joseph learned patience at the hands of his brothers who sold him into slavery, as a slave in Potipher's house, being falsely accused and imprisoned, being forgotten by a man he helped in prison. But he never gave up hope. And one day he became the prime minister of Egypt.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Patience in affliction is one of the ways that God grows our passion.</p>
	<p>3. Faithful in prayer. The third element in how we develop spiritual passion, fervor, is being faithful in prayer. The level of spirituality in this community, in this congregation, will be at the level of our prayer life. How much time do you spend talking and listening to God?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">How do you keep love alive in a relationship?</p> <p>Through constant communication. Without communication misunderstandings arise, doubts enter, wrong ideas intrude. Prayer is talking to God as you talk to your best friend.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Prayer is expressing your frustrations, your fears, as</p>

Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>well as your hopes. Listen in on one of King David's prayers,</p>
	<p>“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”</p>
	<p>O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, by night, but find no rest” (Psalm 22:1-2, NRSV).</p> <p>Here is David being open, challenging God, telling him exactly how he feels, and God takes it on the chin. God does not tell him off for how he feels. Too often we were taught to pray by thanking God for all our blessings but what do we do if we feel like we have no blessings. We are stuck or we feel like a hypocrite in mouthing just words.</p>
	<p>God says “Be open, I know how you feel anyway, so pour out yourself. Complain if you want to just like you may complain to a friend.”</p> <p>Being faithful in prayer means getting rid of all our wrong ideas about prayer. Go to God as you are. Tell him exactly how you feel. Do this every day and several times a day. Come to gatherings at church where people pray to be encouraged. Learn to be open in those prayer times. We need each other.</p> <p>To become a more passionate church, to develop a greater intimacy with God, comes with a deepening conversation with God. Prayer is very simple. There is no formula to use with God. Just tell him all about what is going on in your life and then listen. Listen to see where He is working, what He might be saying. Come on Monday nights to the Upper Room here at the church.</p>

Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?

	<p>The strength of this church is not in our individual prayers but also in our community prayer.</p>
	<p>Jim Cymballa leads the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church. They began small in their prayer ministry. Now they have a prayer group that meets at the church twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Yes, you heard that right. Pastor Cymballa says “You have no idea the encouragement it gives me to know that there are people specifically praying for me during the time the worship service is going on, and praying for this congregation.” He says that the growth of that church from less than fifty people to many thousands is due to their ministry of prayer.</p>
	<p>We began with the experience of Elijah. We wondered if we could ever reach the level of intimacy with God when we could say something and it would instantly happen. But we also learned that Elijah had to pray seven times before the rain came.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Bible tells us that Elijah was really no different than anyone here today,</p>
	<p>“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.</p>
	<p>[18] Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:17-18).</p>

Is It Possible to Really Know God Intimately?



“Elijah was a man just like us.” Take comfort from this fact. We can be like Elijah, full of faith and intimate with God.