

Women's Day of Prayer

Intimate Friendship with God

by Pastor Alice Rich



Women's
MINISTRIES
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION
of SOUTHERN-BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

International Day of Prayer 2004

March 6, 2004

Resource Packet

Intimate Fellowship with God

Written by Pastor Alice Rich

North American Division

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

Sermon Title: Intimate Fellowship with God

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:9 or optional responsive reading

Opening Hymn: #3, "God Himself is With Us" *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* or
(Choose one) #15, "My Maker and My King"

Closing Hymn: #186, "I've Found a Friend or
#224, "Seek Ye First the Kingdom"
#308, "Wholly Thine"
#330, "Take My Life and Let it Be"

There are several hymns that would be appropriate to close the service. Pick the one that will work best for your congregation. You may want to use one of the others for special music. "Wholly Thine" and "Take My Life and Let It Be" would work very nicely too as a prayer song.

Optional Litany – Responsive Reading:

Open the Door

Here I Am! I stand at the door and knock,
waiting to be first in your life,
desiring intimate fellowship with you.

Open the door! Let the Lord of Love into your heart.

God, who is faithful,
has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ.

Open the door! Welcome Jesus to the table of fellowship.

Your greatest duty is to love God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.

Open the door!

Let God touch your heart so that you may love Him fully.

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart,
but welcome Him and be obedient to His calling, welcome His presence.

**Open the door of your heart! Obedience will bring a fuller
revelation of God and a greater joy into your life.**

Trust in God – He is able to fulfill His purpose for you.

**Open the door of your heart!
Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.**

Here I Am! I stand at the door and knock!

**Welcome Lord – we open our hearts and invite you in.
Come, fellowship with us!**

Scripture used: Rev. 3:20; 1 Cor. 1:9; Matt 22:37; Ps. 95:7-8; Prov. 16:2

SERMON

Intimate Fellowship with God

(Note to the speaker: When possible, add examples from your own life or others in the congregation. In other words, personalize the message.)

As our scripture reading indicated – God has called us into fellowship with Jesus. And Jesus once said, “Seek ye first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness ...” (Matt 6:33)

Over and over in Scripture we see emphasized a need for us to know God, to be in relationship with Him. On this Day of Prayer, we want to look again at this intimate part of our lives, our growing in Jesus.

John 17:3 says “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” This verse indicates that the basic element of salvation is “knowing God and Jesus Christ.”

The “knowing God” and “seeking God” spoken of in these verses refers to a deep, intimate fellowship with God. Since this fellowship with God holds eternal value and consequences, we need to take time to understand the essential elements of intimate fellowship with God.

The first essential element of intimate fellowship is that we must love God with our total being.

When the Pharisees approached Jesus and asked: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” (Matt 22:36) Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40

Everything in our Christian life and experience boils down to these two commandments: intimate fellowship with God and with each other.

If we "keep" the Sabbath but don't have an intimate relationship with the Lord of the Sabbath, we've done nothing more than set aside hours in a day.

We can give Bible studies, preach sermons, or eat the healthiest of diets, but if our words and our teaching do not find their foundation in the love of God, with a goal of increasing the quality of our relationship with God, we are nothing more than clanging cymbals.

In Matt 7:21 Jesus warned that not everyone who outwardly appears to follow Him will gain access into His eternal presence. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

We cannot fake an intimate relationship with God.

The Good News is that God Himself pursues a loving relationship with you and enables you to love Him. We don't have to accomplish such a relationship based on our efforts and our desire; He plants that within us. He promises in Prov. 8:17 that those who seek Him shall find Him.

We can draw from the truth and power of God's word:

Deuteronomy 30:6 – "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of our descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and all your soul, and live." Isn't

that Good News?! It is!

Philippians 2:13 – “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”

And as Revelation 3:20 points out, God continually seeks a deeper relationship with you. We often use this verse evangelistically to indicate that Jesus is seeking after the lost, but used in context, this verse is about Jesus seeking after believers, at times when He is needing to rebuke and discipline us. If our hearts begin to grow cold, Jesus comes and says: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” If we break the cords that bind us, Jesus will pursue us and invite us to join Him at the table of intimate fellowship once again. He doesn't discard us or turn His back on us—instead He comes and knocks at the door of our heart.

Jesus knocks at the door of our heart by revealing Himself in some way. It might be through a scripture that pricks our heart, or in our prayer time, or He might even use something in the daily newspaper or a worldly song on the radio to bring our attention back to Him. God has endless ways to get our attention—the key is—will we listen and respond? Will we invite Him in to have fellowship with us?

We come to know God more intimately as He reveals Himself through His word and the experiences of our daily lives. When we open the door, when we acknowledge His presence, when we humble ourselves in prayer before Him, when we allow His word to take root in our hearts, we become more aware of His presence in our lives. The more our awareness of Him grows the more we desire to know Him. The more we desire to know Him, the more He reveals of Himself. The circle of fellowship continues.

The second essential element of Intimate Fellowship is that we must submit to God's

sovereign rule. Absolute surrender to His Lordship is necessary for right fellowship with God. If we insist on maintaining the right to decide what is best for our own life, intimate fellowship with God will be impossible. Giving our heart over to anyone, or anything, other than Jesus is spiritual adultery; it's denying that God is truly Lord of our life.

But God promised in Jeremiah 7:23: "Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you."

If we will hand over what we consider our right and need to have control over our own life and instead place that energy into developing a deeper, active trust in God, then He says to you and me: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

I will be your God—we could spend the rest of this day just talking about what that means!

He's our Lord, our Savior, our Provider, our Redeemer, our Defender, our Judge, our Mediator, our Heavenly Father, our King, and on and on and on!

But, when we find ourselves panicking and wanting to take back the reigns, we need to remember that nothing is so small or trivial as to escape the attention of God's sovereign control, and nothing is so great as to be beyond His power to control it. His sovereignty stretches over every minute area of existence.

God wants total, sovereign rule in our lives—and it's for our own good—to be within His sovereignty is the safest place we can be. Remaining under the umbrella of His sovereignty allows us to have full confidence that His will for our life will reach its perfect conclusion in His time and way, no matter what!

We don't have to worry that the obstacles in our life will prevent His will from expressing itself in our life. "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the

Lord.” (Prov. 21:30). “The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations.” (Ps 33:10-11).

It's not what we do that matters, but what our sovereign God chooses to do through us.

God doesn't want our successes—He wants us.

He doesn't demand achievements; He demands obedience. Being obedient will cause us to mature in our faith—maturing involves acting on the knowledge we are given. Submitting to the sovereignty of God is believing and acting obediently regardless of circumstances or contrary evidence. In other words we are to act by faith, not by sight.

The third essential element of Intimate Fellowship is that we must experience God in a real and personal way. No one else can develop that personal relationship for you, it has to be you—deep in God's word, on your knees, responding to God on a daily basis, inviting Him into your life and putting Him first.

What does it mean for the relationship to be personal?

It's experiencing God's word giving you direction, purpose, hope, relief and correction. It's being personally convicted while reading His word or during prayer time. It's having fellow believers convey a message that has also been coming up in your prayer time and Bible study and now God's people bring affirmation.

I think of the story in 2 Sam 12 when God sent Nathan to tell David about the rich man who took a poor man's only ewe lamb and David burned with anger and said, “This man deserves to die!” Then Nathan said to David, “You're the man!” God's word became very personal for David, the message was very specific to him and his situation.

Now, most likely God will not send a prophet to us to point out our sin. (Although some

members are confident that they are called out to point out everyone else's sins!)

But, if we read God's word and humble ourselves before Him, believing that God actually wants to interact with us, He will speak to us through His word, through our prayer time, and He will use others around us to convey His thoughts to us.

As each day draws to a close, I dare you to take the time to say to yourself, "Today I experienced God when (fill in the blank)." Perhaps it was when someone just happened to give you a word of encouragement on something that you had been putting before the Lord, or you listened to a song that really stirred your heart, or He convicted you of some truth in His word, or several times during the day a particular thought came back to you time and again. As you begin to acknowledge the ways in which God communicates to you personally you will begin to realize that God is doing it constantly, that you've missed so many times before, simply because you weren't looking for or expecting to hear Him.

It's also important to remember that when God gives us a personal message it is because He is wanting us to do something about it, to be obedient to Him.

The fourth essential element of Intimate Fellowship is that we must trust completely in God. In John 14:1 Jesus said, "Trust in God; trust also in Me." And in John 15:5 Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (Abiding is remaining in a trusting, obedient relationship with Jesus).

We are reminded that our focus is not to be centered on our actions and works—even if they are good and valuable—our focus is to be on abiding in Christ: developing and maintaining an intimate fellowship with Him. If our focus remains on (or abides with) Him, He will,

according to Ps. 138:8, “fulfill His purpose for you.”

If we believe God's word to be true, we have every reason to trust God completely for Is. 54:10 says “though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.”

God stakes everything He and His kingdom stands for on His “trust” worthiness. And, He doesn't ask that we match that in return —He only asks that we turn our heart toward His and place our life in His capable hands.

Trust is letting Jesus fill in all the blanks in your life, it's allowing Jesus to complete the sentence of your life.

- It's stepping into the water before the water parts
- It's marching into a battle only with a song of praise for God in your heart
- It's laying down at night and sleeping peacefully when life seems like a lion's den
- Trust is giving thanks for the last piece of bread—not knowing when or from where the next meal will come
- It's facing the fiery furnace without fear
- Trust is standing next to the gravesite of a loved one, with belief, love, peace, and hope still beating in your heart.

There are times in life when it seems that things just go from bad to worse to the point of being totally unbearable. Trust, at such a time, is placing your broken heart, your defeated spirit, your fragile faith into the hands of God and knowing that your salvation is secure, that God still has a purpose for your life, and that He has plans that are good for you, not evil. As Prov. 16:20 puts it, blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.

I once heard a story about two little girls who got into an argument over something.

"It is so!" one little girl said.

"It is not!" the other countered.

"It is so!" "It is not!" (back and forth they went. Sound familiar?)

The one little girl, thinking she would settle this once and for all said, "It is so true because my father says it is so."

But the other little girl just shrugs because she doesn't even know the other little girl's father. "It still isn't so," she said defiantly.

Now the first little girl stands and with hands on her hips she sternly replies, "It is so true because if my father says it's so, it is so, even if it ain't so!"

We are called to be like little children. Maybe not the arguing part, but to trust in our Father so deeply that when the circumstances of the world or even the actions of a fellow Christian, seem to be in direct contradiction of what God has promised for you, you choose to stand firmly in your trust of God and say, "What God says is so, is so, even if it ain't so!"

Pause (allowing the above message to settle in and as a transition)

God has called us into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ. In order to develop and maintain this fellowship we must:

- Love God with all our heart, mind and soul
- Submit to God's sovereign will
- Experience God in a real and personal way and
- Trust God completely

- Love Him, Submit to Him, Experience Him, and Trust Him

In conclusion, I want to challenge (or encourage) you on this special day of prayer to start each day by recommitting yourself to God in this way:

1. Proclaim (out loud for God and all of heaven to hear): “God, I love you with all my heart, mind, and soul! And in those places within my heart, mind, and soul, that true love is lacking, please fill in the gap and prune and cut away as You so desire.
2. Lord, I submit myself to Your sovereign will and I choose to follow You this day.
3. Lord, I want to experience you today in a real and personal way. Help me to see and respond to You.
4. Lord, I have total belief, total trust, and total confidence in You; help me in my unbelief, my mistrust, and my lack of confidence. (Don't worry that the latter statement negates the first statement— it is just an acknowledgement of your humanity! Each time you declare your trust in God you set your mind in the right direction—the more you set your mind in the right direction the fewer times it will waver from the pathway.)

May you love God with all your heart, mind and soul!

May your Christian walk be a real and personal, intimate fellowship with God.

May you accept His sovereignty over your life.

May you trust in Him completely.

Intimate Fellowship With God

Introduction

- a. God has called us into fellowship with Jesus.
- b. Jesus once said, "Seek ye first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness ..." (Matt 6:33)
- c. John 17:3 says "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you...God, and Jesus Christ..." The basic element of salvation is "knowing God and Jesus Christ."

A. The first essential element of intimate fellowship is that we must love God with our total beings.

1. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40
 - a. If we "keep" the Sabbath but don't have an intimate relationship ...
 - b. We can give Bible studies, preach sermons, or eat the healthiest of diets...
 - c. In Matt 7:21 Jesus warned that not everyone who outwardly appears to follow Him will gain access into His eternal presence ... we cannot fake an intimate relationship with God.
2. The Good News is that God Himself pursues a loving relationship with you and enables you to love Him. We don't have to accomplish such a relationship based on our efforts and our desire, He plants that within us. He promises in Prov. 8:17 that those who seek Him shall find Him.
 - a. Deuteronomy 30:6; Philippians 2:13

b. Revelation 3:20 points out, God continually seeks a deeper relationship with you. (Used in context, this verse is about Jesus seeking after believers, at times when He is needing to rebuke and discipline us.)

3. We come to know God more intimately as He reveals Himself through His word and the experiences of our daily lives. (The more our awareness of Him grows the more we desire to know Him. The more we desire to know Him, the more He reveals of Himself. The circle of fellowship continues.)

B. The second essential element of Intimate Fellowship is that we must submit to God's sovereign rule.

1. Absolute surrender to His Lordship is necessary for right fellowship with God
2. God's promise in Jeremiah 7:23
3. I will be your God (Lord, Savior, Provider, Redeemer, Defender, Judge...)
4. His sovereignty stretches over every minute area of existence
5. Remaining under the umbrella of His sovereignty allows us to have full confidence that His will for our life will reach its perfect conclusion in His time and way, no matter what! Prov. 21:30; Ps 33:10-11

It's not what we do that matters, but what our sovereign God chooses to do through us.

God doesn't want our successes, He wants us.

C. The third essential element of Intimate Fellowship is that we must experience God in a real and personal way.

1. What does it mean for the relationship to be personal?
 - a. It's experiencing God's word giving you direction, purpose, hope, relief and correction...

2. 2 Sam. 12 Nathan and David

3. As each day draws to a close, I dare you to take the time to say to yourself—today I experienced God when (fill in the blank

a. When God gives us a personal message it is because He wants us to do something about it, to be obedient to Him.

D. The fourth essential element of Intimate Fellowship is that we must trust completely in God.

1. John 14:1; John 15:5

a. Our focus is not to be centered on our actions and works, even if they are good and valuable, our focus is to be on abiding in Christ, developing and maintaining an intimate fellowship with Him. Ps 138:8

2. Is. 54:10

3. Trust is:

a. letting Jesus fill in all the blanks in your life, complete the sentence ...

b. It's stepping into the water before the water parts

c. It's marching into a battle—with a song of praise for God in your heart

d. It's sleeping peacefully even when life seems like a lion's den

e. Trust is giving thanks for the last piece of bread...

f. It's facing the fiery furnace without fear

G. Trust is standing next to the gravesite of a loved one...

H. There are times in life when it seems that things just go from bad to worse...

placing your broken heart... into the hands of God...

4. As Prov 16:20 puts it: blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.

5. Story about two little girls who got into an argument over something.
 - a. "It is so!" one little girl said. "It is not!" the other countered.
 - b. "It is so true because my father says it is so." ("It still isn't so")
 - c. "It is so true because if my father says it's so, it is so, even if it ain't so!"
 - d. "What God says is so, is so, even if it ain't so!"
6. Pause (allowing the above message to settle in and as a transition)

Conclusion

1. God has called us into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ
 - a. Love God with all our heart, mind and soul
 - b. Submit to God's sovereign will
 - c. Experience God in a real and personal way
 - d. Trust God completely
2. In conclusion, I want to challenge (or encourage) you to start each day by recommitting yourself to God in this way:
 - a. Proclaim (out loud for God and all of heaven to hear):
 - b. Lord, I submit myself to your sovereign will.
 - c. Lord, I want to experience you today in a real and personal way.
 - d. Lord, I have total belief, total trust, and total confidence in You.
3. May you love God with all your heart, mind, and soul!
4. May your Christian walk be a real and personal, intimate fellowship with God.
5. May you accept His sovereignty over your life.
6. May you trust in Him completely.