

PURSUIT OF PEACE

"Seek Peace and Pursue it" - Psalm 34:14

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CHAPTER NINE -

GETTING TO KNOW HIM

KNOWING SOMEONE is a relative thing. I know my neighbors because I know their names and occasionally say, "Hello." I know many people in our church in a personal way. We have shared our joys and problems, prayed and eaten meals together. My husband and I feel we know each other because we have been married for more than twenty-two years. We both were amazed last summer when we had time to really have a heart-to-heart talk to find out things about each other we never dreamed were there.

How well we know neighbors, friends or even life partners is of little consequence compared to how well we know GOD.

Do you really know GOD in an intimate, personal, loving way? Is He only a Supreme Being that is everywhere or is He a real, living, ever-present heavenly Father to you? Do you know Him well enough to believe that He loves you and really cares for your every need? Or is He just a Person far removed who frustrates your will and makes unreasonable demands on your time, life, and material possessions? Is GOD someone you try to worship on Sunday because it will please Him and then forget during the week because your knowledge and friendship is weak? Do you feel no need of His presence and help in your life? Are you satisfied with your knowledge of GOD and your closeness to Him?

CHRIST had gathered His disciples together for the passover supper. He told them many times that He would soon be crucified. Their minds were full of questions. They needed to know many things before CHRIST went away. They had been counting on His setting up an earthly kingdom and they thought that He would be with them always. Now time was short and many things had to be settled at once.

Philip asked CHRIST to show them the Father and CHRIST answered with a question. **"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"** (John 14:9).

For three years Philip had lived in a physical closeness to CHRIST but he had missed really knowing the Lord in an intimate, personal way. Philip learned many truths from CHRIST but there were also many he had missed though he lived and companioned with CHRIST in the flesh.

I have known a few Christians who think they know GOD as well as it is humanly possible to do until we finally come into His presence. They have studied their Bibles well, have always been in church and have listened to many radio sermons. These Christians seem to pray as though GOD were in outer space and not very real to them. They treat other Christians with criticism and unkindness. A sad mistake can be made of thinking that a good head knowledge of the Bible is all there is to knowing GOD. The precious fellowship of knowing GOD as a close Friend and Helper can be missed.

My cleaning woman cannot read. All the Bible she gets comes to her from Sunday school and church. Yet GOD is so personal and real to her that she talks to Him while she cleans - sometimes aloud. GOD helps her clean. She doesn't consider it irreverent though it jarred me a little when she first mentioned it. Now I know that she is right; in fact I now do the same thing through my day's work!

Her mind is uncluttered with the things of the world which we have the privilege of seeing and reading, she has a single-mindedness for her Lord. In her case, I say, "Blessed be the uneducated if that status leads to such a personal knowledge and love for our Lord!"

Moses, David and Paul are three examples of men of GOD who were never satisfied with their knowledge and closeness to the Lord.

They were never contented with a superficial or head knowledge of GOD. They longed for the deepest possible spiritual walk with Him. All of these men had such precious spiritual experiences and displays of the presence of the Lord that it would seem they would have been satisfied, but each kept praying and longing for a deeper knowledge of GOD. Perhaps this was because the closer they got to the Lord, and the more they saw of Him, the more intense their desire became to know Him better. The more they realized what GOD was like, the more they felt compelled to be closer to Him.

Moses saw many wonderful displays of GOD's power and might both on his behalf and for the children of Israel as he was leading them through the wilderness. Moses had the privilege that no one else has had. **"And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"** (Exodus 33:11). And again we see how Moses knew the Lord and found grace in His sight. **"And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name"** (v. 17).

Moses spent forty days alone with GOD in Mount Sinai and still he was not satisfied. His plea was, **"I beseech thee, shew me thy glory"** (v. 18). GOD respected his wish and made a plan whereby Moses would see as much of GOD as possible while still living (vv. 18-23). GOD put him in the cleft of a rock and passed by with His hand over him. Then He took away His hand so that Moses was given the unprecedented opportunity of seeing GOD's **"back parts."**

David gave a graphic description of his constant desire to know GOD better in one of his psalms. **"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God"** (Psalm 42:1, 2).

Picture a deer that has been running from a hunter - hot, tired and very thirsty. Think of the time that you have been the longest without any water. You would have given most anything no matter how precious just to get a drink. David says that his desire for the Lord was as intense as that. Is yours?

Paul had all the advantages of race, tribe, education, and prestige. He was brought to know CHRIST as Saviour by a special heavenly vision. He was privileged to be taken up into the third Heaven to see such marvelous things that no one on earth is allowed to hear them described (II Corinthians 12:1-4).

Even after winning many to the Lord and writing most of the Epistles, Paul was not satisfied with his limited knowledge of GOD. Near the close of a long, fruitful life of service, his prayer was still the same. **"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death"** (Philippians 3:10).

GOD never fails to honor a real desire to know Him better.

Our knowledge of Him is so slight because our appetite is so small that GOD hasn't even been given the chance to make Himself as real to us as He did to these saints. We have CHRIST's promise: **"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."** Dare we be satisfied with our limited knowledge when we know that the fault is ours?

By now I hope that you are saying, "That is what I want. How can I get to know Him in that close fellowship so I can be conscious of His presence all the time and see the working of His mighty power in my life?"

May I answer your question by asking another? "How did you get to know your closest friend?" You met and decided that he was the kind of person you wanted to know. Then there followed times of long and short visits, sharing your likes and dislikes, telling your problems and joys; you spent as much time together as possible, for even the sweetest friendships fade when people are forced to be separated by many miles over a period of time.

Friendship or fellowship comes by cultivation. It seldom comes by accident and even then there must be things to share in common in order to continue. There must be mutual interest and likeness for a friendship to flourish.

So friendship with GOD comes by cultivation. We must first come to GOD by taking CHRIST as our Saviour. There is no other way (John 14ff.). To join this intimate family circle, we must first meet GOD through CHRIST (John 1:12, 13).

This is the point at which Christianity is woefully weak today.

Becoming a child of GOD does not automatically guarantee a close walk with Him; in fact, because of the difficult race we have entered, we now desperately need a continually growing desire for Him. Just as we must gradually learn about our earthly friends through spending time with them, we must learn of GOD by spending time with Him. This is not something we complete the moment we receive CHRIST as Saviour. This is a growing process that only comes

through much cultivation.

My husband and I do not like caring for a garden or lawn. But because of our patriotism, we decided to have a victory garden during World War II. We put life into the ground through the little seeds. Neither of us realized how much work was involved in raising a garden. We thought the seeds would grow without much attention. My husband talked to a few of the farmers in our church about it and they enjoyed a good laugh at our expense. They all gave us the same advice. "It takes a lot of work and constant attention to have a good garden. A garden must be cultivated."

The Lord used this as a lesson to my heart. Gardens and friendships take time and energy to grow. Knowing GOD in a real and personal friendship also takes cultivation requiring time and interest that often mean a sacrifice. Sin, no matter how attractive to our old nature, must be thoroughly and continually purged to keep our intimate contact with Him.

Now that we have faced the cost of a closer walk with GOD and a growing knowledge of Him, let us go on.

If you are not willing to pay this price, then do one of two things: stop reading this chapter now, for it will only increase your judgment to be reminded of these things and refuse to walk therein or, the better alternative is to fervently and sincerely ask GOD to give you the willingness and mind of JESUS (Philippians 2:5-8) to help you bow your knee to what you know you should do. This is only intended for those who truly "**hunger and thirst**" for a greater and deeper knowledge of our Lord.

Since we cannot see GOD with the physical eyes, we can't cultivate Him in the same way we learn to know our friends. But we must see Him through our spiritual eyes.

GOD has given us two ways of getting to know Him: His Word and talking to Him in prayer. Perhaps you have been helped by ministers, Bible teachers, and the Christian printed page but essentially it all stems from the God-given Word and from prayer.

Some Christians neglect to read their Bible. They believe that what they hear on Sundays is sufficient for their needs. Sometimes when they are in some special trouble, they turn to GOD's Word to try to find help. Sometimes they do but more often they are so unfamiliar with it that they can't find anything to help.

Other Christians are very faithful in reading the Bible but only from habit. They feel they must read a chapter each day. Often when they have finished their reading, they can't remember a word they have read. This might be true because they weren't concentrating or because the passages were not ones that met the needs of their hearts for that day.

It is far better to get some kind of guide for reading if you do not know how. There are also leaflets that give suggested readings for special needs. Everyone should have additional help unless they are already very familiar with the Word. Whatever you do, be sure to ask the HOLY SPIRIT, Author of the Word, to guide you in your reading and to teach you the lesson He has for you - for that day. It is much better to read a few verses that meet a given need than to read many

chapters that do not speak to your heart and are promptly forgotten.

For many years I read the Bible through every year because I thought that was what a Christian should do. Much of the reading meant little or nothing to me at the time. Finally I realized that Bible reading for me was nothing but a chore and duty, like brushing my teeth, that must be performed.

Pride entered into it too; I discovered I had read the Bible through more times than anyone else I knew and that put an end to that plan. I then started on the pathway of reading until I found a verse that met my needs for that time, semi-memorizing it and trying to recall it throughout the day. Now my Bible reading is a pleasure and joy and always brings help. I look forward to opening the Word each day for a new blessing awaits me there. This is the way I have come into a personal, satisfying knowledge of GOD that assures me of His love, care and presence.

Many of us have formed such poor prayer habits from childhood that they stand in the way of our having precious prayer times now. Usually, we were taught a prayer in rhyme which was repeated each night or morning. We often added a request to "bless" the members of our family and relatives by name. GOD can never become a real heavenly Father to a child or adult who makes prayer a repeated ritual of words.

Difficulty in learning true prayer is often very hard for us because the wrong idea of prayer was ingrained in us before we could read.

Many of our other wrong ideas of prayer have come from the way the preacher prays in church or adults lead in audible prayer. High sounding theological words make prayer seem more like a ritual than a personal conversation with GOD.

For the Christian, prayer is talking to a loving heavenly Father who is more ready to hear than we are to talk to Him. With reverence and godly respect in your heart, express your innermost thoughts, feelings and desires to GOD in the way you would to your nearest and dearest friend.

Don't hasten into GOD's presence with the idea that you'll get it over as soon as possible because you must rush to the next duty. Prepare your heart before Him as you ask the HOLY SPIRIT to guide you in your prayers. That is His work and He is pleased to be given the opportunity to do it.

Forget any little set prayer habits you may have developed, rather listen to the HOLY SPIRIT dictate your words. Pause from time to time and let GOD have a chance to answer. Don't let it be a one-sided conversation, with GOD left out. It is a wonderful experience to have GOD answer parts of your prayer as you pray.

Many times when I have prayed for His will concerning something and paused, the answer has come as definitely as though GOD had spoken out loud.

Then I proceed to my next request, thanksgiving or whatever the HOLY SPIRIT directs. If you have the problem of trying to pray about one thing but you find your mind slipping to something more urgent, then change your prayer.

Pray first about the thing that concerns you so much. GOD cares about everything that concerns you and so He cares about that thing, too. Because that will be off your mind, you can return to the original prayer. If using thou, hath, thine gets you all twisted up when you try to pray, forget them. They are forms that were used when the King James Version of the Bible was written. GOD will understand if you say You and Your and other present-day terms.

That does not mean a lack of respect and reverence for Him unless you deliberately mean it that way. I address my husband, and my mother that way, and neither of them doubts my love and respect. If you prefer to use the other form that is all right. Get in the habit of talking to GOD all through the day. Talk to Him as you work, drive the car, walk, and do any other activity that does not require constant mental ability. Talk to GOD until you fall asleep at night and wake with your first thoughts turned to prayer. This is the way to make GOD a real, close companion, and to have a feeling of His presence.

I increased my prayer time one hundred per cent without changing my routine at all when I saw that to "**pray without ceasing**" (I Thessalonians 5:17) is a privilege rather than an impossible duty. Instead of a command that verse now is a promise that GOD will hear me any time.

For many Christians, Bible reading and prayer is a duty and they feel in some way that they are doing GOD a favor by taking time for them. GOD intended that prayer and Bible reading should be a pleasure and a help. He willed it so that we should enjoy His Word and have great comfort and blessing from its pages.

He did not give us these privileges to torment us and make us feel guilty when we neglect them. If you find these feelings are true in your life, it is time to do something about it. Something is sapping your love for the Lord and you should not let it continue. Tell Him what is wrong if you know or ask Him to show you.

He will show you the way to make the Word a living, powerful necessity in your life. He will make prayer as necessary to your well being as your food. It will bring you to the place where you will feel a definite loss each time you fail to pray. You will be heart-hungry for Him as you are physically hungry when you are forced to go without a meal.

Since prayer and Bible reading are the main ways to keep in fellowship with the Lord, is the reverse true? If we fail to read and pray, does that break our fellowship? No. I have asked a number of trusted ministers this question and they have all answered in the negative. That was my position in the light of GOD's Word, too. It is possible to be in fellowship with GOD apart from these things, but it isn't probable, was the idea most of these leaders gave me. That leads us naturally to some questions about fellowship.

- What is fellowship?
- With whom should our fellowship be?
- What breaks our fellowship?

Webster defines fellowship as akin to friendship. It is companionship, friendliness, a taking part one with another in similar likes and dislikes, a sharing of ideals, interests and tastes, a respect and affection and a unity of interest. All of these things are included in the meaning of

fellowship as applied to GOD. But the Biblical definition goes further. "**Abide in me and I in you**" are CHRIST's words in John 15:4.

Our question "With whom should our fellowship be?" is answered in I John 1:3. "**Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ**," John also mentions fellowship with other believers in the first part of this verse but that is not a part of our discussion here.

John also states how our fellowship is broken. "**God is light, and in him is no darkness** [or sin] **at all**" (I John 1:5). The next verse says that we cannot walk in darkness and have fellowship with GOD. So it is sin that breaks our fellowship with GOD because He is holy and cannot look on sin. It is very difficult to live a life that is pleasing to Him, maintaining victory over sin, unless we are spending time in the reading of the Word and prayer. But, it is sin alone that breaks the fellowship. Sin robs US of GOD's presence and takes away our peace and joy.

Happily, GOD has made a way for us when we have sinned. He leaves no doubt in our minds as to what we are to do in that case. The answer is to "confess." That means to say what GOD says about it. We should have the same reaction to sin that GOD has. GOD hates sin. "Confession" implies more than an admission of sin. The criminal in our courts will admit only as much of his guilt as he has to but that probably does not mean that he hates that sin and never wants to do it again. He is sorry only because he got caught and is to be punished for it. People seldom confess their crime unless they are forced to by evidence and the power of the governing system of our law-enforcement men. When we admit that we have sinned and take the same attitude toward it that GOD does, we have truly confessed.

If this is done the moment we realize that we have sinned, there is no break in our fellowship. But if we wait until night or the next day or week, we have lived just that long out of fellowship with the Lord. This period of time when Christians are out of fellowship will always be a time of restlessness and lack of peace. The HOLY SPIRIT will be striving in our hearts to convict us of sin and bring us to the place where we will want to get rid of it. As soon as confession is made, we are again restored in GOD's sight and know "**the joy of the LORD**" (Nehemiah 8:10) again.

This is not done on the basis of our asking for forgiveness, a response to bitter tears, promises to do better the next time and planning to make restitution for what has been done. There is only one reason for sin's removal and that is because "**the blood of Jesus Christ his [GOD's] Son cleanseth us from all sin**" (I John 1:7).

This is true for the Christian as well as for the unbeliever coming to CHRIST for the first time for salvation.

CHRIST has paid the price of every sin by His death on the Cross. GOD is faithful, He has promised that He will forgive. GOD is just, He must forgive because the full price has already been paid for that sin. Confession is our part; forgiveness is GOD's part. CHRIST is at GOD's right hand as an advocate for us even while we are sinning, and He reminds GOD of the debt paid for our sins (I John 2:1, 2). This is what goes on in Heaven when the Christian sins.

The results of fellowship are so numerous they can't be listed here, but I would suggest a reading of John 15 to see a few of them. We will be able to bear much fruit for Him; we are promised

answers to our prayers; we have a special love of the Father and Son; and, what concerns us most in this book, we will have the peace that is only given by GOD.

We have tried in simple terms to discuss fellowship, but you may still feel a little like my teenage daughter. When she doesn't completely understand what I have said, she says, "Draw me a picture."

GOD has done just that in many cases in the Bible. He drew us a word picture that completely depicts what real fellowship with Him is. This is found in a simple but profound story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42).

The Lord JESUS CHRIST came to visit Martha and Mary in their home. After He had been received, notice what each sister did. Martha hurried into the kitchen to see that CHRIST had a wonderful meal. Mary stayed with Him.

See her position.

She sat at His feet. She took the humble place, out of the way but where she could learn from His words and be in His presence. Her time was spent with the Lord instead of ignoring Him in order to serve Him.

Now picture Martha in the kitchen. I am sure that it was hot and perhaps things were going badly. May I paint the picture this way?

The roast was overdone, the rolls weren't browning right, the vegetables had burned and the cream wouldn't whip. She prided herself on her abilities to serve a good meal and as things went from bad to worse, she began to fret about it and feel sorry for herself. Remember she chose to do more than was required of her.

Her first mistake was to step out of CHRIST's fellowship and then she wondered why everything went wrong. She might have started thinking of Mary sitting at CHRIST's feet and felt that Mary was the cause of her dilemma. We all have a tendency to think others should live by the standards we set up for ourselves, or we are tempted to blame our circumstances for our troubles, even though we have chosen the path.

Whatever was the case, Martha's temper broke into open rebellion. She marched into the living room to complain. To make matters worse, she complained to the Lord. She was blaming Him for her failures and condemning Him for not making Mary help her. No matter what happens in your kitchen, I am sure that you would never verbally blame your guest for it, but Martha did. She had gotten so far out of fellowship with CHRIST that she could even do this.

Martha was miserable; she had completely lost her peace and joy because she had lost her fellowship with CHRIST. Count back and you will find that she had fallen into six definite sins because of this one dinner. What had started out to be a lovely dinner party turned into ruin because she was working in her own efforts from the wrong motives.

There are some ladies in our past pastorates who scorn when this story is mentioned and say, "But there have to be some Marthas in every church, else who would get the work done?" It

shows their complete lack of understanding.

May I add that it is the Marys that we have known who have done the worthwhile things in every church we have served!

CHRIST leaves no doubts in our minds that Martha was in the wrong and that Mary's action was right. CHRIST spoke kindly but firmly to Martha. "**Thou art careful** [anxious, mentally frustrated] **and troubled** [externally agitated and nervous] **about many things**." Then He said that Mary had chosen the "**good part**" and that was the fellowship and learning of Him that could never be taken away from her.

Martha was zealous for the Lord in her service for Him, but she put more emphasis on her work for Him than on CHRIST Himself. Her motives may have been pure but her judgment was wrong. If she had been content with simpler meals and more time spent with CHRIST, none of these things would have happened. Her thoughts were on temporal things and not on the needs of her soul. She was "**careful**" about many earthly things. We are strongly warned in other verses that we are not to be "**careful**" or give any anxious thought to the things of this world.

Perhaps many of us who lack peace today, but who are working as faithfully as we can, will be able to see our mistake in Martha's.

She welcomed CHRIST and then worked hard to entertain Him in her way but found no peace or rest in her service: Even though CHRIST was in her presence physically she chose to be in the next room. Working for Him only brought her worry and distraction. The One who gives peace, calmness and quiet was with her. Martha was so busy about what she could do for CHRIST that she had completely forgotten what He could do for her.

Martha shows us a typical group of Christians today who find their Christian service dutiful, a chore too heavy to bear.

They often wonder at the peace and rest promised in the Word because they have missed it themselves. Sad to say, many ministers and Christian workers find themselves in this group and we hear of more and more nervous breakdowns and prolonged vacations among Christian workers.

The answer is found in Mary's example. Mary put GOD's will first.

This is the truest way to fellowship with the Lord and service for Him that brings happiness and peace. Mary's "**good part**" was putting a personal, intimate friendship with the Lord first, and then service for Him took its rightful place. CHRIST showed His approval of her actions by His commendation.

You and I have to make a choice just as Mary and Martha did. Will fellowship with GOD, then service according to His will be our desire? Or will we continue our service forgetting the Lord in our fretting and rushing to do something for Him? Service is something that we take up and lay down as each piece of work is done. Fellowship is something that must continue all the time and also through our service to make it worthwhile in GOD's sight and to give us peace instead

of agitation, joy in place of self-pity, satisfying results rather than complaining; and humble praise to GOD in place of pride.

Fellowship with GOD is necessary to have peace with GOD. Only as we learn to know Him better can we trust Him to meet every need. Only as we truly trust Him can we have real God-given peace. Fellowship with GOD is possible as long as we live a sin-free life. This does not mean a sinless life for we know that is impossible as long as we are in the flesh. When sin enters, fellowship is broken. As soon as the sin is confessed, fellowship is again restored. The only safe way to keep sin out of your life is to know the Lord better each day through prayer and Bible reading. Never think erroneously that some serve the Lord and others have fellowship with Him. Service and fellowship go together but fellowship must have the preference. When we are living right before Him, He will direct the service He has for us and give us the strength to do it with joy and peace.

~ end of chapter 9 ~
