

Purity

We have been pursuing *intimacy* with God by praise and adoration of who He is. If we truly learn to love God we will become passionate about wanting to be in His presence and hear His voice. Once you have had the experience of really feeling God's loving presence overpower you, you will never be satisfied with less than that.

In the parable of the 10 virgins, Jesus taught about intimacy (Matthew 25:1-13). Understanding some details about a Jewish wedding gives added meaning to this passage. Jesus is the bridegroom in this story and the virgins represent the church. The lamps represent our outward appearance. They were shining and looked ready. Many Christians look like they are ready for the return of their Lord Jesus Christ. They come to church every Sunday. They may have an important ministry in the church—the Sunday School teacher, the church treasurer, or a member of the trustees. During the week they may do good works like being kind to their neighbors and feeding the poor. But inside, in their heart, there is no oil. The oil represents the love, the passion, the intimacy with the Lord. Jesus says, only the ones who have that fire burning in their heart are really ready to see their Lord.

Passionate Love leads to Sacrifices

If we are passionate about something, we gladly make sacrifices for that thing we love. Athletes put in hours of practice and push their bodies to new limits. They sacrifice rich foods and drink. They lay aside other activities to have more time to practice. They do all this for a sport that they love. They have found something they value more than comfort and sweet food.

Early pioneers made tremendous sacrifices to go into the wilderness. They left behind family, friends and all the comforts of civilizations. They took just a few necessary possessions and traveled hundreds of miles on a dangerous journey to live in a tent or a sod house. Why would they do this? There was something they were passionate about. For some it was land; others sought gold and for some it was more freedom or independence. They were pursuing something they thought would be worth the sacrifice.

Do you remember when you “fell in love”? Were you willing to sacrifice other things in order to spend time with your loved one? Was there anything that was more important than him or her? As we fall in love with Jesus we will want to be with Him. Other things will become less important to us and we gladly lay them aside to be close to Jesus. That is why intimacy or love for God leads to purity. It is not about a list of do's and don'ts. It is about falling in love and becoming passionate for Jesus. It does involve sacrifice but it is a willing sacrifice because we love someone more than the things of this world. When we become passionate about something or someone it is not a hardship to lay aside lesser things to pursue the thing we love most.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field — and to get the treasure, too. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!” Matt 13:44-46 (NLT)

Purity Brings Freedom

Intimacy leads to purity. Purity is not a list of do's and don'ts or a legalistic attitude. As we first fall in love with God we think of big things and the obvious sins but as we grow in our love for God we become aware of other things that are hindering love. As we grow closer to God our heart yearns for His purity and His holiness and we become more and more like Him.

2 Cor. 3:17-18 (NKJV) says: *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

As we become more like Him the things that we loved before are not as important to us. The things that draw us closer to God become more desirable. The things of the world lose their hold on us. For example, as we come closer to God and find security in His love, our fear of what other people think becomes less. We experience more freedom; more liberty.

Truth of the Word

If we are going to be the church, the Body of Christ, we will look different from the World. We are so surrounded by a worldview that is inconsistent with who God is and the love He shows forth in His Son, Jesus Christ, that it is easy to be deceived about Truth. We need to surround ourselves with the Word—written and spoken—which will reveal Truth to us. As we study the Word we bring our lives into agreement with it. We have a deeper appreciation for the Truth of His Word for it reveals those areas of our life that are still in bondage. We need the church to encourage, teach and hold us accountable so that we become more and more a reflection of the character of Christ. As we come closer to God, we more fully know the truth—about who He is and about who we are. Jesus said:

*"If you **abide in My word**, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* John 8:32 (NKJV)

As we know the truth, we have choices to make.

Making Painful Choices

Sometimes when we recognize that there is something standing between us and God, or that our lives do not line up with the Word of God, it feels painful. We can avoid it and ignore it; we can compromise; or we can fully surrender because we love God. Laying down our life should not be an expression of duty or obedience but an expression of our love. Jesus laid down His life for love. Our goal is to love Him more and that means that we want to obey. Even though it may be painful for the moment we know it is for our good in the long run.

Heb 12:10-11 (NLT) says: *For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*

What Does Purity Look Like?

Purity is becoming more and more like Jesus. Purity will look different for each person. As we love God more, we love other things less. We want to remove those things that hinder love and we want to become more like the One we love. Here are some examples of what purity looks like for different individuals.

One young man who accepted Jesus as his Savior, quickly found that he could no longer use Jesus' name as a swear word. He gave up **swearing**. Later when he became convinced that he could no longer play the **video games** that had been consuming so much of his time; he threw them all away and became an ardent student of the Bible instead.

A couple who had been **living together** without benefit of a marriage covenant realized, as they prayed and studied God's Word, that they could not continue this way and stay close to God. They moved to separate apartments and set a date to be married.

If there is anything we do that causes feelings of guilt or shame, it will separate us from the love of God. We need to confess those things and ask God to give us the strength and courage to let go of those temptations. Some temptations are so strong they have become addictions or obsessions. In these cases we need help to overcome. The first step is to honestly confess to another believer our weakness and to put ourselves in a position where we are accountable to someone who will walk with us in our journey to freedom.

Too often, when we feel guilt, we run away from God instead of running to Him. He is always willing to forgive a truly repentant sinner and to help us overcome our temptations. As we

pursue love for God with a committed heart, the hold of the world becomes weaker and weaker until we find freedom from the things that bind us.

There are many things that are not mentioned in the Word of God that can come between us and the love of our Heavenly Father. As we grow in our walk with God things that didn't bother us before begin to feel like they are coming between us the fellowship we crave. Even things that are good in themselves can become too important and crowd out our relationship with God.

For one man **watching football** had become his obsession. When he realized he was still obsessing about a lost game four days after it was over, he decided it was time to stop watching football for a while.

For a grandmother, it seemed that every time she planned to go to prayer meeting, her children or grandchildren's activities interfered. She finally realized she had made **her family** more important than her time with God.

We can even put **ministry** before God. One survey found that, except for the time they spent preparing sermons, the typical pastor spent less than 10 minutes a day in prayer or Bible reading.

Your ministry, your job, entertainment, spending time with family and friends—all can be good in themselves but if they become our *most* important priority, we are no longer obeying the first and great commandment. The most important commandment is to *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.”* (Mark 12:30)

Purity may look different for each person but as you pursue intimacy and loving God most, there are things that God will ask you to remove from your life or lifestyle changes that will be necessary. When large crowds began to follow Jesus he separated the true disciples from those who were only casual followers by telling them this, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, his wife and children, his brother and sisters, yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciples.”* (Luke 14:26-27) There is a cost to following Jesus but the decision to lay aside other things is not difficult if we truly love God with all our heart. ***Purity is removing anything that gets in the way of love.***

Pure Identity

Having a pure identity is an important part of purity. If you have a hunk of rock and it has little bits of gold in it you can't call it gold—it is rock with a little bits of gold. To be *pure* gold, the gold must be separated from the rock. If we are going to be *pure Sons and Daughters* of God we must be separated from the things of the world. Our identity is related to our purity.

An egg is a helpful illustration of how our identity develops. When you look at an egg you see the shell of the egg; but inside we know there is a yoke and the white of the egg. Like the egg, we have three parts. The shell represents our *flesh*. Inside, though, we are *soul* and *spirit*. The yoke of the egg represents the spirit which is where the life is.

If this is an unfertilized egg it will never be anything but an egg. But if this egg is a fertilized egg, it has the potential to become a chicken. Just as an egg has to be fertilized, our spirit has to be united with the Holy Spirit. When we surrender the Lordship of our life to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes into our spirit and brings life. Then, like the fertilized egg, it has life and has the potential to become a child of God.

Now that fertilized egg has to be **incubated** in a warm place for that new life to grow into a chicken. For the new Christian, intimacy with God is the incubator that helps us mature into Sons and Daughters of God. As we spend time loving God and receiving His love for us we mature as believers.

The white of the egg is designed to feed the yoke. The written Word as you read the Bible and the Living Word as you soak in God's love will feed your spirit until you absorb the Word and become more and more like Jesus. That spirit man inside of you will grow. Your mind will be renewed and your emotions will be renewed until they, too, are spiritual and you have the mind of Christ and heart of Christ. What you choose to feed on and whether or not you sit in God presence are critical factors that determine whether or not your spirit will mature.

Pretty soon that chicken inside the egg has grown to where it wants to break free of the shell. If you feed your spirit by soaking in God's presence and enjoying intimacy with Him, your spirit will soon want to break free of the things of the flesh. That little chicken begins pecking away at the shell and starts breaking off pieces of that shell. It pecks a while and then it has to rest a little bit. Little by little, the shell is destroyed and the chicken begins to emerge from the shell. So it is with your spirit being. Little by little you break off the things of the flesh from your life. You want to be free of them so your spirit can be free.

This is **identity**. The day before that chicken starts pecking at the egg, if you looked at the egg you would not say, "That is a chicken." You would say, "That is an egg." But when all the shell is gone and that chicken starts walking around you say, "Now that's a chicken."

When the spirit first starts breaking off the fleshly things of this world, we may still look much like every other sinner. But if our spirit keeps maturing and pecking away at the fleshly things, one day we emerge as a full grown, mature Sons and Daughters of God and the glory of God is revealed to the world. **Identity and purity** go together. If we are half chicken and half egg we aren't pure, we aren't a true Child of God. In this impure state we give the world a mixed message, but if we break off the things of the flesh and destroy their power over us, we become free and we emerge as mature Sons and Daughters of God, reflecting His glory.

2 Cor 3:18 says: "*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"

Intimacy and purity cause us to become more and more like Him until we truly are all that God has called us to be and we reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

ACTS Prayer

Remember that the ACTS prayer model is an acronym:

Adoration (Intimacy)

Confession and Proclamation (Purity)

Thanksgiving and the **T**able of the Lord (Unity)

Supplication (Power)

We start our prayers with Adoration. As our hearts turn toward God and our love increases we want to bring our thoughts and emotions into alignment with Him. Confession and Proclamation are how we align our hearts with God's. As He shows us things that are interfering with love we **confess** that we have let something come between us and God and we repent. Repent means to turn around. We turn away from those things that interfere with love and we turn toward God so that we might become like Him.

We also agree with God about our identity and about what He says about us. We then we declare and **proclaim** what God says about us. Just as the names of God help us discover His true identity and learn to love Him more; the names which God uses to describe us can help us learn our true identity. As we meditate on these names and thank God that He is helping us develop into this kind of person, we find that we are becoming more like Him.

Who Does God say that we are?

Look at the list of words at the end of this chapter. This is who you are "in Christ." As you read scripture look for the phrase "in Him" or "in Christ" and you will find who God says you have become in Christ Jesus. Declare these truths over yourself. Believe them and proclaim them often in your prayer time. One friend I know started every prayer time with these words, "Thank you, Lord, that you love me." Confession is more than confessing our sins. It is agreeing with God and confessing who we are in Christ.

Group Meeting:

Discuss: What things changed when you became a Christian? What things did you give up? How have those changes proved to be worth it? Are there things, now, that hinder your walk with God or anything that gets in the way of love? Read together Luke 14:25-34. Are you willing to offer them up as a sacrifice of love for God?

Read Ephesians 1 and write down all the words which describe who you are “in Christ”. For example: Faithful (verse 1); Blessed (verse 3). Thank God for your identity “in Him”. Agree with God by *proclaiming* before God that you are these things: “*LORD, thank you that you call me faithful, blessed,*” and so on.

Personal Prayer Time:

Examine your own life and determine if there is anything that is hindering love for God. Write down on a piece of paper the person or thing in your life that would be the hardest for you to offer up to the Lord. Weigh in your own mind the benefits and joys of fellowshiping with the Lord against the person or thing you wrote on your paper. Count the cost and consider if being a Disciple of Jesus isn’t worth more than anything else. Do you love the Lord enough that you are willing to give up everything for Him? Are you willing to offer up to Him in prayer the person or thing you wrote on your paper? Confess, repent and commit to loving God best.

As you read the scriptures watch for words that describe how God feels about you and how much He loves you. Aloud, make declarations agreeing with the scripture until your heart knows and believes the love God has for you. Use the verses at the end of this chapter to help you get started.

Family Time:

David Warren of *Life Action Ministry* shared, at National Friends Pastor’s Conference (2012), how his family felt they were spending too much time watching TV, using the Internet or talking or texting on cell phones. They did not have enough time to spend with each other. They decided to set aside Sundays as a screen-free day and use the time to connect with each other---playing games, talking and spending time together. Is there something that is taking all your family’s time and keeping you from having time for each other, for family devotions or for God? Consider taking a *fast* from that activity for a period of time. Consider if longer lifestyle changes are need. Discuss these things together.

Make declarations over your children declaring that they are loved, blessed, faithful, and so on. Trust God to make it so.

Verses for Proclamation: Who We are in Christ Jesus

Loved – We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. I John 4:16

Chosen - You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit. John 15:16

His Delight – The Lord your God, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing. Zephaniah 3:17

Forgiven - In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace. Ephesians 1:7

Righteous - For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. II Corinthians 5:21.

Friend - You are my friends if you do what I command. John 15:14

Sons of God – For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. Rom. 8:14
For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. Rom. 8:19

His Workmanship – We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

Ambassadors of Christ - Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. II Cor. 5:20

Kings and Priests – And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Rev. 1:6