

Intimacy

Once upon a time a Daddy with two little girls thought it would be fun to plan a treasure hunt for them. When he had the treasure hunt all laid out he sought out his little girls and asked them to come and play with him. Both girls interrupted him with requests for things they wanted from him. He didn't answer their requests but just invited them, again, to come seek the treasure. The first little girl sat down and started crying because Daddy wouldn't do what she wanted. Unfortunately, that little girl continued to cry and felt that her father didn't really love her at all or he would have done what she asked him to do. Her heart was bitter and rebellious and he sadly watched her walk away.

However, the second child was eager to go on the treasure hunt so the father happily handed her the first clue. The little girl set off to look for the treasure. She found clue after clue. Occasionally she found a small treasure but with it would be another clue and so the treasure hunt continued. As she read the clues she recognized how much her Daddy loved her because he included little love notes with the clues and because she realized how much effort he had put into making this treasure hunt just for her. One time she caught him watching her from the shadows and it became part of the game for her to catch glimpses of him. Her love for Daddy grew with each special message and each time she saw him watching her with love in his eyes. They were having so much fun following clues and playing hide and seek with each other that the little girl began to enjoy the journey as much as the treasures that were hidden along the way. The journey became her focus and her father's love became the treasure. At the end of the journey she found the gift that she had requested earlier but that gift was less important than the fun and the love that she had discovered on the journey with her father.

Our God is not the angry, vengeful judge that many picture Him to be. He is, instead, a loving Father who wants to *play with* and *partner with* His children as He builds a kingdom on earth. Sometimes, like the first little girl, we get angry and upset because He isn't building the way we want Him to but it is HIS kingdom and it is our job to follow Him on the journey of life and discover the clues that reveal His love and His plan. They will eventually lead to wonderful treasures and love gifts but the real point of the journey is to discover the greatest gift of all--to truly know and love God and to understand God's great love for you.

The Invitation

Matthew 6:33 is your invitation to join God's treasure hunt: *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* (NIV) Will you join Him on the journey?

Before Joshua began the battle to enter into the Promised Land he had an encounter with the Living God (Joshua 5:12-15). Joshua was near Jericho considering how he should enter into the Promised Land when he lifted his eyes and saw a Man with a sword drawn. Joshua asked if the Man was for or against them. The reply was this:

"No, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." (Joshua 5:14 NKJV) Joshua falls on his face, calls him Lord and worships him. Then the Man, who we can assume is the Lord Himself, gives him a very strange strategy for defeating Jericho—March around the walls seven times.

We will never understand God's strategies and purposes until we have an encounter with the Living God. He does not use left brain, analytical, straight forward approaches that we are used to in our western culture. His strategies start with relationship. We will never walk in the power of the promises unless we put first things first and learn to love God well. Joshua asked if the Man was for or against them. His reply is God's reply to us, "No. I am not for or against you. I have a plan, are you with me or not?" We must choose to pursue God and let Him guide our plans.

What would it take to experience God's Power?

When I was a teen-ager I studied the book of Acts and wondered why my church wasn't like the early church. During my college years I read George Fox's *Journal* and wondered why our denomination was no longer manifesting God's power like it did in the early days. I wondered periodically about this. Then, several years ago my prayer partner and friend, Vicki Sawyer, asked God, "What would it take for the church to once again walk in power like it did in the book of Acts?" God responded by giving her this strategy:

Pursue Intimacy

Intimacy will lead to Purity.

Purity will lead to Unity.

Unity will lead to Power.

Intimacy

God's answer was really a riddle and part of the treasure hunt is to discover what it means. God *wants* to restore power to His church but He cannot trust the church with power until they learn to love and trust Him; until their hearts are purified of selfishness and sin and they are walking in unity with one another. The journey begins with the first step—pursuing intimacy. That is why the great commandment is also the first one:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30 NIV)*

Learning to love God well is the first goal of our journey. Many of us, however, have trouble walking in love in our families, with our friends and with our church fellowship. How do we show love to a God who is invisible and often seems distant? Certainly spending time in prayer is a prerequisite. As we pray we learn that the real treasure of life is not answers to our requests but learning to love the Lord Himself. His Presence with us is our greatest desire and hope. God has given us a door that will lead us to love and that door is Praise and Adoration.

The Door to Intimacy: Adoration

Psalms 100 says, "Come before His presence with singing ...Enter His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise (v.1, 4)." If you are going in to see a king you don't stand and shout your requests to Him. You start with words of worship and praise. God invites us to love Him above all else because this will help us to realize what a big, loving, good, gracious, kind, powerful, amazing God He really is and that no problem is too big for Him.

I once read about a study that was done with people suffering from depression. There were three groups. One received counseling, the second group received instruction in how to pray and the third group was told to pray but not given any instruction on how to pray. The third group was the only group that actually got *worse* instead of better. What was the problem? They were praying "whiney prayers". They were repeating their problems over and over until the problem was magnified and they became more depressed. This is what many of us do. Our prayers are a way of dwelling on problems and worrying. They do not magnify God. They magnify our problems. Adoration, on the other hand will take our eyes off our problems and fix them on Him. It magnifies God and reminds us of His love and kindness. It opens the door to intimacy and helps us learn to love Him well.

ACTS Prayer Model

Bob Hartley and Bob Fraser from Joseph International in Kansas City teach the ACTS prayer model. It will be introduced here in a short, modified version. The name “ACTS” reminds us of the power of the book of Acts but it actually stands for an acronym that gives us the steps for effective prayer.

Adoration
Confession and Proclamation
Thanksgiving and the Table of the Lord
Supplication

Practical Ways to Adore God

The first step in the ACTS prayer is ADORATION. Adoration is focusing with love and praise on who God is and on His character. Here are four practical suggestions for Adoration.

1) Consider the *names of God*. Praise God that He is who He says He is (King of Kings, The Almighty One, Savior, and so on). Choose one or two names each day. Meditate on what that means. Read the verses where these names are used. To make this exercise even more powerful—pray out loud. Then you *hear* the praises and your voice drowns out the other voices in your head¹.

2) Find verses that describe *the character of God*. Meditate on those verses and praise God that He is faithful, loving, good, and merciful. Meditation is mentally chewing on the verses. Repeating the phrases and thinking of how they apply to your life. Think of how that aspect of God’s character has been manifested in your life and the lives of others. As you read scripture look for names and characteristics of God and pray them back to Him as praise.

3) *Sing songs* of praise and adoration—or make up your own songs. If you are not particularly musical yourself you can play a worship CD to help you enter into adoration and praise.

4) Let’s not forget the way that early Quakers entered into the presence of God was through *silence*. Waiting with expectancy and faith can bring us into the place where we *experience* God’s goodness and love. We must, however, silence the wandering mind and wayward heart that lead us into musings that distract rather than enlighten. Often silence is one of the best ways to learn to love God but we must be patient and take the time it requires to become “centered” on Jesus, His character, His name, His heart.

Here is an example of a prayer of adoration:

Thank you, Lord, that you are the Good Shepherd. Thank you for the way you guided me to the green pastures when I was confused and alone. Thank you for leading me to the still waters where I could be refreshed and restored. Thank you for walking with me through the Valley of the Shadow of Death when my loved one passed on to Heaven. Thank you that you are my Good Shepherd today and that you are ordering my steps and helping me stay on the path of righteousness.

¹ The books by Hartley and Fraser give lists of names of God with accompanying verses and can be very helpful in starting your journey of Adoration¹. *Adoration Prayer Book* by Bob Hartley available from bobhartley.org and *Acts Scriptures: Devotional Prayer Guide* by Robert Fraser, available from ww.newgridbooks.com

Starting your daily prayer time with a several minutes of praise and adoration will revolutionize your prayer time and start you on the journey of learning to love God well. Taking time periodically for more extended times of adoration and praise helps increase your love. Starting corporate prayer meetings with songs, scriptures and words of praise helps us avoid the dry, whiney prayer meetings that many of us remember from the past. ***Adoration is the door to intimacy. It is the key that will help you learn to love God well.***

Group Meeting:

- Sing a few choruses or songs that magnify the names of God such as: Father, I Adore You, His name is Wonderful; Jesus, Name above all Names; Jesus, the sweetest name I Know; Thou are worthy
- Then each person pick one of the names or characteristics of God that is meaningful to you and tell about how God has showed that aspect of His character to you this week. Some examples might be: Good Shepherd, Light of the World, Living Water, Healer, Provider, Faithful
- Pray the name. Each person takes a turn praising God for who He is, using the name that you shared about.
- Discuss disciplines that have helped you grow in your love for God.

Personal Prayer

This week, as you set aside time each day to pray, start each prayer time with several minutes of adoration. Sing a praise chorus, pray about one of the names of God or find verses that tell about God's character and praise Him for who He is. Here are some scriptures to get you started: Psalms 36:5-7, Psalms 2, John 6:35, John 14:6 or 25, and John 15:5. Below is a list of names of God or you can pray through the alphabet and think of one name of God for each letter of the alphabet (A-Awesome, B-Beautiful, etc.).

Family Prayer Time:

Chose one meal per day (breakfast, lunch or supper). Each day at the start of that meal focus on one of the names of God and, as a family, offer a prayer of praise for that characteristic of God. You can take turns offering the prayer so all family members participate. Here is a list of names for each day of the month to help you get started.

NAMES OF GOD THAT TEACH US GOD'S CHARACTER

1. Emmanuel, God with Us: Mt 1:22-23
2. Savior: Isaiah 60:16
3. Redeemer: Isaiah 49:26
4. Good: Psalm 135:3
5. Word: John 1:14
6. Prince of Peace: Isaiah 9:6
7. Mighty God: Jeremiah 32:18
8. Light of the World: John 8:12
9. Good Shepherd: John 10:11
10. Friend: John 15:9-16
11. The Way: John 14:6
12. King of Kings: Revelation 19:16
13. Lord: Philippians 2:9-11
14. Alpha and Omega: Rev. 22:13
15. Bread of Life: John 6:48-51
16. Living Water: John 4:10
17. Father: Matthew 6:9-11
18. Provider: Genesis 22:13-14
19. Judge: Isaiah 33:22
20. All wise: I Timothy 1:17
21. Omnipresent: Isaiah 43:1-2
22. Almighty: Genesis 17:1-2
23. Stronghold: Nahum 1:7
24. Love: I John 4:8
25. Healer: Exodus 15:26
26. Door: John 10:7
27. The Truth: John 14:6
28. Wonderful Counselor: Isaiah 9:6
29. Vine: John 15:1-8
30. Faithful: Deuteronomy 7:9
31. Helper: John 14:16-18