

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE INVISIBLE GOD



A very sick man turned to his doctor as he was leaving the room and said, "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side."

"I don't know," he replied.

"You don't know?" the patient gasped. "You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?"

Just then they both heard a scratch and whine at the door. The doctor opened it and a dog sprang into the room and leaped up on him. Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He has never been in this room before. He did not know what was inside. Yet, when the door opened, he entered with no caution, only gladness. He knew nothing except that his master was here. In the same way, I know little of what happens after death. But I do one thing—I know my Master is there, and that is enough. I shall pass through with no fear."

Assumptions About God

Many people project their image of a parent upon God.

"He's stern like my mean father."

"He's hard to get to know like my distant father."

Yet, A. W. Tozer insists, "God is easy to live with. . . The truth is that God is the most winsome of all beings and His service one of unspeakable pleasure."

Tozer goes on to say: "It is most important to our spiritual welfare that we hold a right conception of God. If we think of Him as cold and exacting we shall find it impossible to love Him, and our lives will be ridden with servile fear. If, again, we hold Him to be kind and understanding, our whole inner life will mirror that idea"

Many witnesses who have claimed friendship with God insist that knowing him is restful and healing to the soul, that he "is not sensitive nor selfish nor temperamental" (A.W. Tozer again).

Others will tell you that the God they know values them. They feel he knows when they're trying to do right. That he is delighted with them, perfectly patient. They don't need to be jumpy and self-conscious about every little thing they do or think. They find him the essence of kindly good will.

That certainly has been my experience.

Is It Possible To Be Buddies With God?

Know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10, Psalm 100:3

Is it possible to know Him?

His nature. . .what he likes and dislikes, his emotions and moods.

His thoughts. . .what concerns him, what he thinks about you.

His ways. . .how he interacts with people, the world's affairs, the universe.

His actions. . .what he has done in the past, what he's doing now, what he plans to do in the future.

Can you know God in a personal way? Only if he allows it. Only if he tells you things

(Proverbs 2:6). Only if he offers you his hand of peace and provides info about who he is. Only if you let him get up close and personal with you.

He certainly knows you. He knows every move you make. He knows what you're thinking. He understands your character—your faults and strengths, your temptations and victories. He knows what you'll say, when you'll speak it, and the motive behind it. It's impossible to hide from him. He knew you from conception (see Psalm 139:1-16).

The Risks of Getting Close

To get close to God most certainly will mess with your world-view, your values, your character, your lifestyle. Not all at once. Not immediately. But you'll begin a learning process of seeing your world through his lens. He'll get it focused for you, little by little. And he'll be sensitive to when you're ready, and if you really want to see things his way.

Others Who Have Been His Friend

Moses got the closest. He got to learn about God's ways and explain him to the Israelites (Psalm 103:7). He spoke to God "face to face", in very close communion. He didn't actually observe God's total being, but he

experienced clear, open communication. He truly considered God a personal acquaintance.

Later, at Moses request, he was able to observe God as he rushed past him.

Theologians comment that Moses glimpsed the afterglow of God's glory as he passed by (Walter C. Kaiser, Renald E. Showers).

Job got better acquainted with the Almighty after going through a lot of trials (Job 42:1-2).

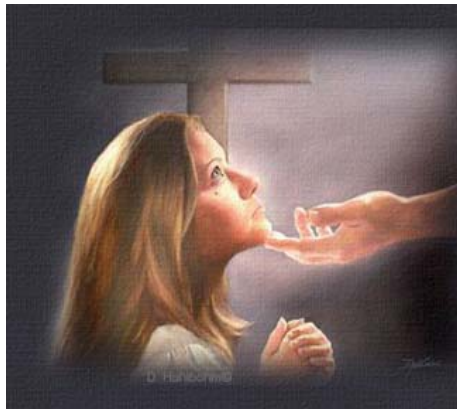
Balaam knew him well enough to speak for him (Numbers 24:16).

Jonah knew God well enough to get upset about his mercy to undeserving enemies (Jonah 4:1,2).

David's intimacy with God is seen best in his prayers (1 Chronicles 29:10-19).

Abraham believed what God told him and was called his friend (James 2:23).

In fact, at one time, the whole world knew God (Romans 1:20,21).



You can know God. He's eager to teach you about himself and your world (Psalm 94:10). He'll give you wisdom, knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6). Sometimes he speaks in visions. Now and then in dreams. Mostly through written words. On occasion via audible voice (see Numbers 12:6). You can know beyond doubt that he is Lord and God of all humanity (Psalm 100:3).

The Invisible Companion

He is indiscernible to your present eyes, no matter how close to 20/20 vision you've got. That is, he conceals the entirety of his person. You can't touch him in the physical sense, but he's someone who has touched everything you can see, hear, smell, or touch.

God is spirit. He has no body, unless he wants to appear to you in that way. Yet he fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24). He's not confined to one place at a time.

God seems so abstract. . . someone 'out there' or 'up there.' How can you sustain a relationship with someone you can't see? Makes you feel like the actor James Stewart in the movie Harvey whose best friend was an invisible 6'3" rabbit. He seemed to talk to thin air. Folks considered him crazy.

It would seem that God is beyond human comprehension. You can detect, at best, hints of his being. That's why humans tend to keep him small, shrink him down to some handy, manageable size.

In light inaccessible hid from our eyes. . .

O help us to see 'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee!

Walter Chalmers Smith, "Immortal, Invisible"

But even if you could see what he looks like, that would be only a bare beginning in knowing who he is. Rather than concern for the shape of his face, the color of his eyes, whether he has high cheekbones or not, you should register his emotion. Is he pleased or displeased? Does he frown or smile at you?

It's harder to get to know someone you can't see. Like a blind person, you must depend on other senses. When it comes to God, to walk in his presence, you must depend upon, activate your spiritual senses. Including the Holy Spirit. And search out the spiritual truth provided to you.

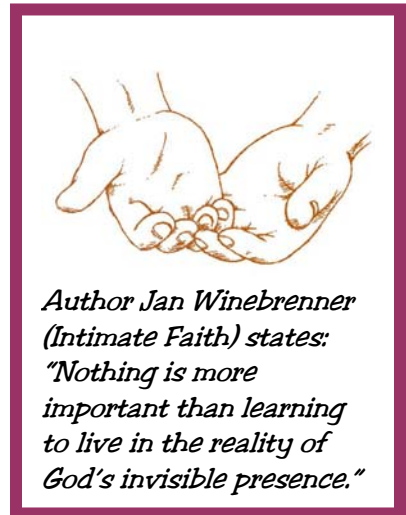
Still, the question remains, how can you expect to sustain a relationship with a Being you can't see, when you have a tough time getting along with friends and family and various other folks you can see? What's the point of concealed charms? Or shrouded charisma? Who wants a mystery friend? Wouldn't the whole world come rushing to his feet, if they could see him? Isn't that what he wants?

Sometimes when you pray, it seems you're talking to yourself. No reply. No answer. Long periods of frustration. . . silence. . . which may mean the answer is "no" or. . . the answer's on its way.

Who He Is To Me

I remember a spring day many years ago that God nudged me to think about him. . . in a display of sunrays splaying through dark clouds. I was taking dry clothes off a line outside and this what I call a "glory hole" caused me to wonder if God existed. I really wanted to know. It wasn't an idle speculation. I was a very young wife with two babies and felt lost as far as how to do marriage and how to do parenting. I wanted help beyond myself. If God existed, what was he like? Would he care about someone like me? Could he provide resources to aid me in my responsibilities? I determined to find out.

That sky display prompted me on a journey to search for God. And I found him, through reaching out to his Son, Jesus. With the help of friends and family, inspiring authors and a Navigator's home Bible study. Four decades later, he is everything to me. And I'm so grateful for all he's done for my life and my family.



Author Jan Winebrenner (Intimate Faith) states: "Nothing is more important than learning to live in the reality of God's invisible presence."

I learned through the years that God is not a distracted guru dispensing answers, but a Being who is *present*. He is personal. He thinks. He feels. He has desires. He has a will and intelligence.

I can speak to him every day, any moment.

He is always near.

I can discern his leading when I ask him for guidance.

He has proven many times how much he loves me.

I experience his grace every day, every moment.

Things have happened in my life for which there is no other explanation than God was in it.

He is my very best friend, a dear and close associate. I love him with all my heart.

Jason Mitchener, a paraplegic devotional writer, drove this thought home to me. God will always know you much better than you know him. He spied you in the womb. He's experienced your struggles, viewed your victories. He hears your cries, shares your joys. He knows your hopes and dreams. He feels your pain. Nobody knows you deeper than he does. Jason concludes with these words:

When we meet God face to face, we will truly know Him.

All our questions will give way to answers.

Our faith will give way to reality.

Our hope will give way to fulfillment.

The mysteries will give way to majesty.

And the enigmas will give way to enlightenment.

from "A Fellow Traveler Just Passing Through", www.JasonMitchener.com



What's so incredibly amazing is that God has the ability to give unlimited one-on-one time, to make each of his bazillion living children feel important, to know they're special and loved by him.

WHY BE GOD'S FRIEND?

It is he who made us,
and we are his;
We are his people,
the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:3

There's many reasons you'll want to follow God, allow him full entrance into your life.

You will be able to understand spiritual truth. Not everything. Certainly not all at once. But light will penetrate the shadowy wastelands of your mind. You will get it. So many things will make sense. You'll come alive to wonder. Your slumbering spirit will be awakened. You'll live in harmony with God's will, become the person you were created to be.

You'll know whom to ask for help. .when you're stressed, when your heart's broken, when you're in desperate danger. You also know the ultimate being to thank for all the multitude of good things that come to you.

You can have courage and confidence in the midst of life's tumult, because the big guy is on your side.

You will view yourself and others and all the world's events through his perspective. Every longing for heaven is a yearning for God. There are many things you think you want in this life. But they never last. God does. Human love can fade, turn sour. Not so God's love. When you ask him to fill you daily with his love, others will see God in you. His love is vibrant, has no limitation, does audacious acts.

God builds.

God shapes.

God gives.

God protects.

God delivers.

God will be at work in you, for you, and through you. . .and in spite of you.

Becoming a friend of God makes you immortal.

God has loved people through every sin,
past every slight,

in spite of every wrongdoing.

Rev. Ken Klaus, The Lutheran Hour

And someday he will take you in his lap and hug you and hold you and you'll know forever and always that everything will be all right.

Meanwhile, he wants you to get close to him.

"Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark but actually *find* him. He doesn't play hide-and-seek with us. He's not remote; he's *near*. We live and move in him, can't get away from him!" (Acts 17:25 MSG).

God does not want to be wholly mysterious to us.

If anything, human history is the story of God
making himself known to us.

James Emery White

GETTING CLOSE TO THE ALMIGHTY

Some folks wonder if God is shy. What they run up against is the humility of His Majesty. He doesn't have to prove anything. He is who he is. He has the spirit of a servant. He proved that through Jesus. He doesn't force his greatness on you.

He's got a love that's genteel, rooted in respect for the one loved. God is a gentleman. His Holy Spirit defers to Jesus. Jesus defers to the Father. God concentrates his attention on his Son and his Spirit, not on himself. He's not self-centered, but other-centered (John 14:26, 16:13).

The whole blessed Trinity is shy.
Each member of the Trinity points
faithfully and selflessly to the other
in a gracious circle.

John Ortberg

God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit form an intimate triune fellowship. And they invite you to join them. It's intimacy you want when you yearn for God's company. You seek a bond, true communion.

Some level of intimacy is crucial for any important relationship. Intimacy with an invisible God requires faith. Long hours, many years of fellowship with him increases your knowledge of him. Intimacy with God unfolds, little by little. Moses didn't see God's glory until he'd spent forty years communing with him while caring for sheep. He didn't see God's glory "pass by" until he knew God well enough to yearn to know more.

"This kind of intimacy. . .comes when we desire the Lord more than anything else in this life" (David Wilkerson).

Spend time alone.

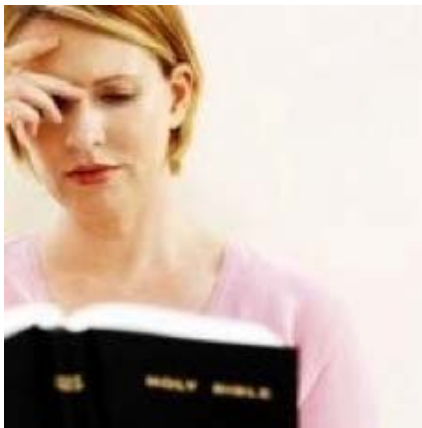
Be still
and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

All relationships demand some sort of personal exchange. Linger with God. Sit or stand or kneel in his presence. Seek his fellowship. Shut yourself in with him—away from everything else. Seek his face. Walk and talk with him. Get going on your faith journey. Be alert to every active evidence of his being in your space.

Discover that place that settles you in to your own break, an uninterrupted time-out, just you and the King of the universe. Find a Sacred Place . . .where God seems to dwell. . .a place set apart for a memorable moment or event, where revelation might happen.

God is known through experiences like these and by asking each day, "Lord, show me yourself."



To get a better picture of God, to know him deeper, to be a better friend, you've got to study Scriptures, no getting around that. It's his journal. His family history. A record of what he's done, what he hates, what he loves, who he's hung around, and what he forecasts for his future, and yours, together.

Invite him in.

Let him be part of your world. It's about building a relationship and not always expecting excitement, miracles, instant answered prayers. Talk to him. . .in the shower, while watching a sunrise, when slurping hot soup, in the midst of crowds or traffic or chaos. Take him with you into your heart, your home, your projects and plans, your work.

Go to his house.

Find a church where the presence of Jesus is felt. Seek church leaders and mentors whose main ambition is to be like Jesus, to follow and obey his directives.

Friendship with God makes church like home, a family reunion, in company with kindred sisters and brothers.

Read his story.

Get Immersed in his book. Sit still in his presence as you read his words—to meditate, to pray. That's hard if your mind buzzes with things to do, competing issues to ponder. Any part you read reveals God and his ways. . .and will point you to Jesus.

Get close to your heavenly Father and his Son by reading the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John--so often you know the stories by heart. Focus on the things he likes, what pleases him. The Book of John

especially will help you understand who Jesus is.

Include regular Bible reading in all your other studies and entertainment. To increase knowledge of God and His will (Colossians 1:9,10). To recognize God's still, small voice when you hear it.

Appreciate his craftsmanship.

"When I'm hiking, I remember that God has shown Himself in all of creation. So when I look at the sea, I am reminded that God is ever-changing, yet never changing. The sea changes with weather, but yet is always the sea. I see the mountains, chiseled by time and weather. I

know God is strong and firm. He is mighty and great. I see the trees and know that God is creative. He has seasons of growth and seasons of silence. He is varied. he gives us sustenance. He IS sustenance. He is full of variety of sustenance" (Lissa Halls Johnson).

Let him fill up your senses. Make a conscious effort: "Today I will contemplate the beauty of God."

Assess your inner life.

To the pure you show yourself pure.

2 Samuel 22:27

You'll get closer to God if you allow him to purify your heart. Because of Jesus and what he did on your behalf, you can be forgiven, you can be fully accepted, you can have uninterrupted fellowship with God your Father.

You must be born of God spiritually to know God personally (1 John 4:7). That means a heart invasion.

Accept the reality of mystery.

Learn to love the God you don't always understand.

Even those with faith, who absolutely know God exists, find it a challenge to commune with an invisible friend. Knowledge of someone you know only by name, reputation, e-mail, or even voice on the phone, proves vague. How can you know you love someone if you don't know if they're beautiful, plain, or ugly? It's easier to understand what you can visualize. Even so, faith believes he is worthy to be praised.

Practice Prayer

"Prayer is the guide to perfection, and prayer delivers us from every vice, and gives us every virtue; for the one way to become perfect is to walk in the presence of God" (Madame Guyon).

Pray about everyday things. Have the courage to pray big prayers. Kings Solomon and Hezekiah prayed that all the people and kingdoms of the earth would "know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:60; cf. 2 Kings 19:19).

Getting close and personal with God makes prayer a joy and a privilege.

Worship him.

God is spirit
and his worshipers
must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

J. B. Phillips remarks in his book, Your God is Too Small, "We have not only to be impressed by the 'size' and unlimited power of God, we have to be moved to genuine admiration, respect, and affection, if we are ever to worship Him."

HOW WILL YOU KNOW GOD IS YOUR FRIEND?

The Lord says:

'Don't brag about your wisdom,



Humans are made to worship . . . something, someone. If you don't worship God, you will find a replacement for which to give your adoration, your veneration, your full attention and focus. Everyone worships.

or strength or wealth.
 If you feel you must brag,
 Then have enough sense to brag about worshipping me, the Lord.'

Jeremiah 9:23 CEV

When do you consider that you really know someone, enough to call them a friend?

The internet has blurred those lines. You can befriend anyone, from anywhere, with a click of a mouse. Because you've had e-mail contact, you claim ownership at some level, especially if you've viewed a photo or shaken their hand somewhere or sat three rows behind them on the plane. At least you know what they look like.

But you can only know so much about a person through writing. . .or even seeing them. When do you know you're really close to someone else?

Here's some signs that you know God enough to be called his friend.

You want to be with God, to be where he is.

You believe that he is in you. . .with you. . .around you. In your focus, he is high and lifted up, above everything that invades your world, that plagues you today. All your worries and concerns get second billing to your trust that God has everything under control.

You recognize the signs of God at work. . .in your life or others.

You don't mind being in God's waiting room. You trust he knows what he's doing.

Finally, you believe the Know Statements of 1 John 2. . .you try to obey his commands, to walk as Jesus did, to avoid hating anyone. You acknowledge Jesus is the Son of God.

Eternal life is this: "That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

In addition. . .

- 1.) You know that God exists.
- 2.) You treat him as a living, personal Being who is your best friend.
- 3.) You seek his wisdom for every problem, each decision.
- 4.) You believe he can save you from eternal destruction.
- 5.) You depend on his power to give you strength in temptation, to protect you from

evil.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS AND STUDY GROUPS

- 1.) Do you think it's possible for a blind person to enjoy close relationships? To develop a friendship with a pen-pal? What are the negatives and positives of such a relationship?

- 2.) He is a personal God. He invites you to the privilege of friendship with him. But do you think it's possible to actually love him, without ever seeing him? See 1 Peter 1:8,9.

- 3.) How well do you know God? Explain your answer.

- 4.) Read Psalm 139. How well does God know you?

- 5.) Doubts aren't bad. Wondering is okay. The very fact you might ask, "Why?" implies you assume God exists and you desire to know something about him. But how far do you think doubters can go and still find friendship with God?

- 6.) What one thing do you know about God beyond all reasonable doubt?

- 7.) What human wouldn't crave to see the face of their beloved? Who could be content with notes, phone calls, and blurry, obscure photos when you could meet face-to-face and embrace?
Moses heard the Creator's voice for days, weeks--the voice that spoke and worlds whirled into living matter. He felt God's love. His spiritual insight rose to the bursting point, until he cried out, "Show me Yourself." He realized the great chasm between what he knew now and the first audience before his throne in heaven. Yet, what Moses viewed, in all its limitations, caused him to drop to the ground in worship.
Would you like to be in Moses place? Why or why not?