

“Cultivating Dynamic Relationship with God” Pt 3

Introduction

Chico exists to help one another practice CPR

Continually cultivate dynamic relationship with God.

Persistently pursue meaningful connection with people.

Resolutely resist evil and restore godly living.

The faithful practice of these three things results in impacting those around us for Christ.

I spent the last two weeks stirring our hearts to seek deeper relationship with God. Many of the Old Testament kings were commended or condemned by this criterion. “They set their heart to seek the Lord.” OR “They did not set their heart to seek the Lord.” It seems that this all begins with a heart decision to DO something. Any relationship only grows when we engage in certain activities that cultivate that relationship. The Bible prescribes regular engagement in certain activities as a habit of life. Some time ago I did a whole series on what I called at that time, Healthy Habits of a Deeper Walk with God.” I am convinced that they are key in the realization and practical experience of being WITH and IN God.

Like I said last week, the fact or reality of an oil reservoir under our property is true whether I know it or pursue it.

The fact that God is WITH us and IN us and us IN Him is a reality whether we know it or pursue it. If we want to experience the value of that reality or not, depends on both perception and active pursuit.

We have to know something and do something.

The same could be said about a marriage.

The fact of a marriage is real regardless of our awareness or effort.

The concept of us with and in God and He in us is mysterious and difficult to fully comprehend. As I contemplate some way to help illustrate this reality I thought of air or oxygen. Air is IN us as we at the same time are IN air. It feels like air is

“omnipresent” all around us and yet the specific personal need for air also to be IN us is critical for life.

God is omnipresent and therefore all around us and yet there is an aspect that God is also in us and necessary for true spiritual life.

Our capacity to fully realize that presence or connection can be diminished by any number of things.

Just like the capacity of our lungs to process life giving oxygen to the rest of the body can become diminished.

There is lung disease, repertory virus, lack of exercise etc.

There is also exposure to harmful chemicals that affect the body.

Our capacity can be increased through dealing with disease, avoiding toxic environments, or just plain exercise.

In order to reap the richness of an intimate relationship we need to regularly engage in twelve specific activities (exercises) that deepen that relationship by increasing our capacity to breath in God’s presence.

This illustration bring whole new meaning to the song “Breathe.”

“This is the air I breathe. This is the air I breathe. Your holy presence living in me.”

There is both a sequential and interactive relationship between these activities. By that I mean there is a sense in which each one builds on the next or logically relates to the next. There is also a sense in which the practice of one affects the practice of all the others. Just like habitual physical exercise increases our physical capacities, these habits or exercises or spiritual disciplines increase our capacity to relate to God.

Today I will review them in a specific logical sequence.

1. Solitude and Silence (Getting away)

Everyone knows that relationships take time. Rarely does quality time happen without sufficient quantity. Few human relationships flourish and grow on a few hours a week in public place. Neither will relationship with God. Yes coming together is part of the dynamic but there must be intentional time set aside to interact with God on a regular basis. Jesus modeled such time alone with God regularly; sometimes the whole night. We need to take time for silence and

solitude to let the “silt” in our lives settle to the bottom enough to see more clearly. This is why it is one of the Ten Commandments. Only stillness allows the sediment in muddy water to settle enough to see more clearly. Our lives get so hectic and busy that our eternal perspective gets cloudy. The more we “cease striving”, the more God is able to provide the direction we so desperately need and want.

For many, there is rarely a time when you are quiet. We are continually surrounded by background “noise.” We live in a noisy world. In broadcasting, “dead space” is the cardinal sin. People depend on the system to save them from silence before God.

Gary Thomas in his wonderful book “Seeking the Face of God” comments,

“Cultivating the quiet is a painful experience when we are addicted to noise, excitement, and occupation. Opening the door to spiritual quiet can also open the door to spiritual fear and loneliness. Our chaos of the soul and busyness of the spirit robs us of our created destiny to find fulfillment in a relationship with God. A voice deep within our souls tells us something is wrong, but we are too afraid to slow down and find out how life could be different. Much of television watching is a quiet, sleepless death in which we kill our souls by letting time race by. We can spend several hours in front of television, and what have we gained? We haven't talked to anyone, we haven't accomplished anything, and we usually haven't gained any insight or inspiration. Yet time has slipped by, and it will never return again. In essence, we have willingly forfeited a precious slice of time God has given us on this earth. The difficulty of simplicity is that it will, at times (especially in the early stages as we break our addiction to diversion), lead us into soul boredom, gloom, depression, and possibly despair... our souls will roar for diversion, the fix that saves us from God's presence.”

Dan Rather questioned Mother Theresa concerning her prayer life. He asked, “When you pray, what do you say to God?” She answered, “Nothing. I just listen.” He followed up by asking, “Well what does God say to you?” She answered, “Nothing. He just listens. And if you don't understand that then you don't really know God.”

This comes very close to the reality of WITH and IN God. Have you ever felt close to someone by just being in the same room in spite of little or no conversation?

Few are comfortable in silence alone with God, but that is the goal. It starts with a decision to seek God and establishing a regular appointment. If you don't schedule it, anything and everything else will derail it.

I encourage you to establish several levels and lengths of appointments with God. Daily, weekly extended periods and monthly or quarterly times when you might set aside a whole day alone with God.

"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalms 46:10

Glory in His holy name; let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually. Psalms 105:3-4

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. James 4:8

2. Practice SUBMISSION (Reporting for Duty)

A rebellious proud heart or attitude prevents going deeper with God.

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." Submit therefore to God. James 4:6-7

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. James 4:10

This is very clear. Even in a marriage there must be a sense of mutual care and submission. In the case of our relationship with God, line of authority must be clear in our minds. We must submit to His agenda or communication suffers. Pride and rebellion hinders or blocks to relationship with God.

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? James 4:4-5

Rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. 1 Sam 15:22-23

Some sort of commitment to God's agenda as you get up in the morning is a good habit to embrace. Let Him know you are ready to be used by Him all through the day and dedicate your time to Him.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

3. Confession (Clearing the decks)

Few things hinder relationships more than unaddressed offenses. Mostly this exercise is for our sake. Any desire to get closer disappears in the face of an unresolved issue. This causes us to withdraw rather than draw closer. We simply don't want to deal with it; whatever IT is. Eternal consequence for sin is no longer an issue for the Christian. Temporal consequence for sin however does affect the enjoyment of our current relationship with God. A simple request that the Holy Spirit expose any unaddressed sin so that we may "clear the decks" with God is a good daily practice.

4. Interacting with Scripture (Increasing knowledge)

Only when we have eliminated the obstacles to relationship can there be an honest and undistorted interaction with Scripture. When we harbor sin in our life, we have a tendency to misinterpret and apply Scripture. We close our ears to anything that might expose our sin. God speaks most clearly through the Scriptures. The Bible is a record of His conversations with humanity. It is there we get to know God better. It reveals more and more of His person and purpose.

Scripture speaks extensively of the importance of regular interaction with the truth the Word of God. It boasts of the power of the Scripture.

"God humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Deuteronomy 8:3

We wouldn't think of missing too many meals. When we do, the physical body ceases to function efficiently. Food fuels the physical body. So regular interaction with Scripture fuels the spiritual body.

88% of households own a Bible. Only 37% read it once a week or more.

Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments.

A Barna poll indicated that at least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Another survey of graduating high school seniors revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. A considerable number of respondents to one poll indicated that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.

A whopping 57% of 18-28 year olds read their Bibles less than three times a year if at all.

This is just reading statistics. I think it gets worse if we consider diligent study of a book we consider God's word to us and the source of truth and wisdom for life. Without an intentional scheduling of time for interacting with Scripture or Bible Study or learning this won't happen. The number of tools and helps in this area in this age exceeds the imagination.

5. Faith (expressing trust)

Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by way of the Word of God. The natural progression from interaction with the Scriptures is a commitment to believe and trust what God has communicated. The Bible reveals God's eternal perspective on life. When someone reveals their heart and we respond with trust, the relationship is deepened.

6. Prayer (Communing with God)

We use the term "pray" to refer to a wide variety of communication with God. At its core, prayer is simply talking to God. In conversation with God we express our feelings, our hurts, our fears, our disappointments, our aspirations, our desires for ourselves and others.

7. Thanksgiving, Praise, Worship (Expressing admiration)

This practice is another aspect of prayer. The Scripture calls for thanksgiving in relationship to prayer often. This practice includes praising God for His deeds and expressing admiration for who He is as well as what He has done and embrace Him as the object of our affections.

8. Personal Sacrifice (Giving of yourself)

Giving is an integral part of any relationship. Our heart is drawn to give of ourselves to those we truly love. The deeper our relationship with God the greater the desire to sacrifice or give up any personal desires in order to please Him. Not because we have to but because we really want to. This includes financial resources, time, things, and personal pleasures. Now God is not opposed to any of

these things. Intimate relationship with God motivates us to keep them all subordinate to Him.

9. Simplicity (Clearing the clutter)

This practice flows from the previous. There is so much in our culture today that gets in the way of what is important. Someone called it the “tyranny of the urgent”. How many times has the seemingly urgent thing crowded out the important things? Hebrews calls us to deal with the clutter in our lives.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... Hebrews 12:1

We do that by “fixing our eyes on Jesus”. This practice takes time to evaluate our schedules and activities from time to time. Many families today no longer consider the faith community as the center of their lives. Involvement in the faith community takes a back seat to any number of other activities.

10. Community Interaction (Engaging others)

When it comes to spiritual growth, healthy relationships with other people are critical. We have previously emphasized the importance of such encouraging relationships not only to discourage sinful behavior but encourage godly behavior and growth.

11. Public Witness (Sharing the wonder)

When you truly love someone, it is natural to want to tell other about them. Some don't talk about God much because it is not that real to them. It isn't working for me so why should I suggest it to anyone else. Paul declared why he was eager to share.

I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:15-16

Paul was convinced of the power of the good news to change lives. He realized that the gospel saved lost and broken people. There is much to share about our relationship with Christ. The more precious it becomes, the more we will want to talk about it.

12. Warfare (Protecting the relationship)

We not only live in a broken, rebellious world but a world in which the very real and ruthless enemy seeks to hinder if not destroy and satisfying relationship with God. He completely derailed Adam's unhindered relationship with God by causing them to shift to a self-centered focus. Scripture calls us to constantly be on the alert.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. 1 Peter 5:8-10

This is not merely some one-time prayer. We must be ever vigilant to Satan's schemes. Paul told the Corinthians they "we are not ignorant of his schemes." Unfortunately today, many are woefully ignorant of Satan's schemes.

I urge you to make the year of rooting the spiritual disciplines or habits in your life. They say it takes 21 days to form a habit. Give it a try. Plan to participate in a Healthy Habits workshop on January 31st . 9AM-1PM

Following is a sample prayer that touches on each of the habits when your schedule for that day is busy.

Good morning gracious Father,

Today is a tight schedule, but I realize the futility of attempting to proceed through this day without checking in with you and fueling up spiritually before I get on my way. Clear my mind to make most of these few concentrated minutes I have to communicate with you.

I need this alone time with You. Even though I don't always feel that need, I know it is true, and it is pure arrogance on my part for me to enter my day without this time. Please bring to mind any specific sin issues I may need to clear before my day gets started or to clear up during this day. (Pause in silence to listen for any prompting of the Holy Spirit.) Grant that I may start my day with a clear and free conscience before You, my family, and all those in my sphere of contact! I purpose to deal with whatever You prompt me to do. I acknowledge my daily need for cleansing and forgiveness.

I thank you for Your forgiveness. I celebrate the fact that Jesus has paid for my sin and has made it possible to live above that sin through the power that mightily works within me. Because I am thoroughly loved and accepted and remarkably significant, I have nothing to prove to any one, nothing of eternal value to lose at the hand of any one, and therefore nothing to protect from anyone. I can live today as a channel of Your grace and a demonstration of Your love. I can find meaningful fulfillment through relationship with You and not submit to the drive of the flesh to demand it from others. I can purely desire and enjoy significant relationships with others because You have touched my life in such a significant way. I am a fully loved and accepted and significant child of the King of the Universe. Empower me to live according to who I am today.

I yield my life to You again. I acknowledge that without You I can do nothing of significant value in this world. I submit my members as Your instruments, Your channels for displaying the life of Jesus Christ. For I

have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in this body, I live by faith in Jesus Christ who loved me (unconditionally) and gave Himself for me that I should no longer live for myself but for Him who died and rose on my behalf. I entrust my soul to You today as my faithful Creator; that whatever comes my way, You have allowed for Your glory and my good. I yield all of my life to the filling of the Holy Spirit so that I may walk according to His power and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. May my walk clearly display the fruit of Your Holy Spirit today!

I bring to You now some specific issues that I am facing today. (At this point share with the Lord any specific petitions concerning the day.)

I need the truth of Your word to penetrate my very soul that I may be mature, completely equipped for every good work today. (Repeat the verse you have purposed to memorize or find ONE verse to read and think about.) Give me insight into this verse from Your word that I have not seen before and give me opportunity to practice its truth today.

I thank you for this day and rejoice in it. I purpose to give thanks in everything. I look forward to all that this day may bring by way of opportunities to trust You and see You work in my life. I pray for the opportunity to share the message of Salvation either by my life or by words today.

You are always available. You are aware of all that I face and feel. You are able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that I ask or think. I worship You for who You are, and for the works You have done in the past, and what You are doing in the present as well as what You have promised to do in the future. Enlarge my heart today to know You more fully and honor You more highly throughout this day in the everyday affairs of life.

I stand against and refuse all of Satan's purposes and schemes this day and embrace Your design for my life. I break all curses against me and my family cast knowingly or unknowingly and I stand in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to live free from the bondage of sin and Satan today. Grant me discernment to recognize the darts and schemes of the enemy today and the strength to stand against Him; fully armed with Your armor. Guard my mind from the lies of the evil one. Guard my emotions from the fears and worries of the evil one and the evilness of our day. Bring me into all truth that I may walk today in Your truth.

I wait for any orders and direction You may have for me today and invite You to go with me wherever I go. Keep me aware of all my Spiritual resources in Christ in the heavenlies and of Your eternal presence this day. I yield myself to You as Your hands and Your voice to a dark and hurting world.