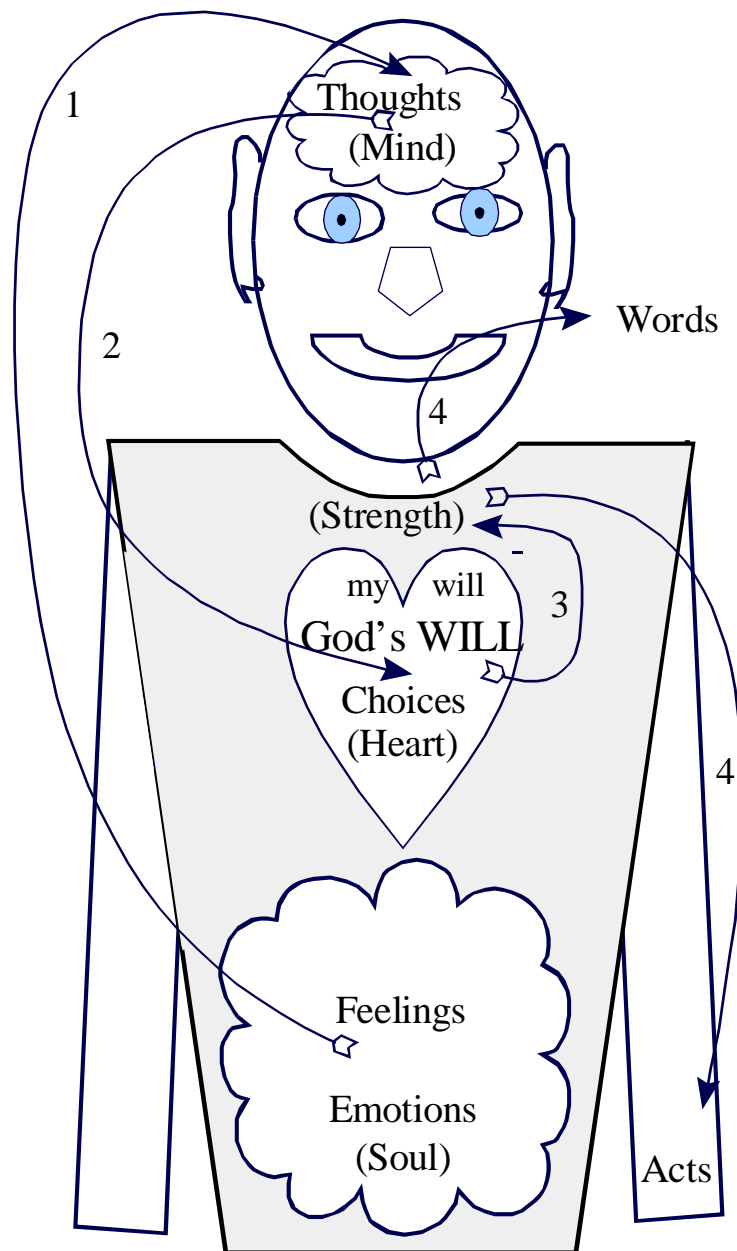


Intimacy in Relationship



INTIMACY: The Passionate Desire of the Soul

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INTIMACY: The Passionate Desire of the Soul

Introduction:

Why this book was written --

Over the years, I have observed and even experienced many things which have challenged and sometimes even broken relationships. I have suffered the loss of a marriage of 25 years. I have watched my son, the week after his 21st birthday in an orange jump-suit and chains hear the gavel come down with the indictment that came with a punishment of 30 years to life. I have served God as diligently as anyone I have ever known. I have never been angry at God but have been more than confused about the circumstances He has brought into my life. I fortunately have a daughter who went straight into God's work, otherwise I might have thought I was a miserable failure as a father.

I spent the lion's share of my life as a good churchman with a resume of service that was pretty impressive. I have studied to be a pastor, been ordained to Christian ministry, and served in nearly every capacity in churches and para-church organizations for over 4 decades. And I have been very involved in community charitable organizations through the United Way, Red Cross, soup kitchens, homeless shelter ministries and rebuilding for months in Mississippi after the disaster of Katrina in 2005.

I believed that the difference between Christianity and all the other world religions was that Christianity offered me a personal relationship (friendship) with God which the others did not. Yet once having been introduced to and accepting this offer of a relationship with God, I was immediately taught that the way to develop that relationship was to get involved in service, regular gatherings, giving money, and trying to live a life that was nearly perfect morally, ethically, and legally.

Yet after 40 years in this pursuit, I sat in church in the fourth pew where I had staked my claim wondering what meaning does this Christianity have and how has it made a difference for me and those in my circle of influence. I determined that I had been wasting a lot of time and energy in this “fortress” we call church. And I may have made a point, but I had not made a difference. Yes I was caring and kind, and had tried to console myself with those deeds. But deep within me, my heart cried out to God, “This is it. I am not coming back to this building and wasting any more time with these people. I’m not giving up on Jesus, but otherwise I’m out of this place.”

Well, God did not just sit back in silence. His voice within me cried back, “Don’t leave your friends here. But I will show you what this ‘relationship’ is supposed to look and feel like. And, by the way, I have been waiting a long time for you to ask.” I was almost stunned. Although I did not hear any audible voice, the message was as clear as if I had heard it over the P A System of the Lawrence Joel Coliseum at a Wake Forest Basketball game. And did I listen up!

The journey upon which I embarked is described in another book, published by RELIFE PUBLISHING, under the name of Michael Craig Alan (pseudonym). But suffice it to say, the journey began with a shot to the heart on the floor of Phillips Arena in Atlanta, Georgia, in September of 2003. The journey included a retreat at The Cove in Asheville, NC. There was a trip to Athens, Greece with a cruise of some Greek islands. A video-taping of “The Patriarchs,” by Beth Moore and Lifeway, in Baltimore, MD, a personally appointed mentor from the country of Jordan in the Middle East, and last, but certainly not least, a mission trip to LaMisquithia, Honduras with my mentor (who was teaching the indigenous pastors, the chief elder of his Moravian

Church, our indigenous missionary pilot who served as our translator, and myself, serving as documentarian for the trip.

Probably the most profound affect on my journey of transformation was the prophecy which was spoken to me by one of the pastors of Honduras. As translated to me, the pastor prophesied, “You are standing in a meadow on a grassy hillside. You have tall meadow grass in your hands. People come from everywhere. You dispense the grass to all. And the meadow grass keeps growing larger in your hands.” Well none of that made any sense to me. But I remember the visions of Joseph and that he did not know what they meant when he received them. But later it became evident when the fulfillment of the vision saved Joseph’s entire family from famine. I knew that I would later discover what the prophecy to me meant.

During this three year transformation I learned that some things are taught and some things are caught. I was reminded that relationships are spontaneous and not intellectual. I learned that every relationship is a two persona choice, even a relationship with God. I was reminded that God IS love, not just has love. I learned that God, is the perfect relational being, that is: perfect father, brother, friend, and spouse and was not subject to the degraded forms of relationship which all humans experience. And among several other things about which you will read in this treatise, I learned that God’s love is unconditional and God’s grace (undeserved favor) is relentless.

During my journey, which ultimately inspired this writing, I discovered that there had been many false things which I had believed were true. I reflected on the teaching of Jesus that “You will know the truth and the truth will set you

free.” And I came to understand that I would know the truth about myself, and the truth about myself would be what set me free. I learned that the expectations which I placed on others which they could not meet, were the bars of my own imprisonment which kept me away from those I loved most. And in the process of clearing up the “lies” which I had been taught by well-meaning sincere people or just assumed on my own, I came to the truth and IT DID SET ME FREE.

So, in order to help you understand what radically improved every relationship I have, I have offered a hopefully plausible definition of intimacy to use as a starting point. Please do not discard it at face value, but modify it to make it the most beautiful definition you could give it, and then read on.

May the richest of relationships become yours and the joy of being set free and helping others gain their freedom as well as you read on.

BoB - 808

Personal parables -- Over the years I have read many stories. And as Eugene Peterson says, “Life is all about stories.” The stories which we tell or write, are about us and our circumstances. They not only reveal who we are, but also they reveal what is important to us. Above all, our stories reveal the sum total of our relational experiences with everyone in our lives.

Jesus, the ultimate story teller, told stories which we call parables. The parables were stories with fictional (or at least nameless) characters. And although they may have been fictional, they revealed truth. Now reality for each of us is that which we perceive or believe to be true. However, truth often times runs completely contrary to what we believe. But we operate in default mode where our perception is our reality. Even lunatics have the courage of their convictions. Unfortunately since their perceptions are not true, their behaviors are not sane.

Now most of us are not insane or even close. Yet in the grand scheme of things, we operate from a reality which we have perceived based on what we believe. And all of us have changed what we believe over the years. We can point to the time when the earth was thought to be flat and that the atom was the smallest particle of matter. Yet now those thoughts are known to be based on insufficient information. At best these might have been partially true, but they still provided a basis upon which to build toward the whole truth of the matter. But, lest we become arrogant, let us admit that we may never know the full truth about anything.

As a result of insufficient data to determine the whole truth and build our lives upon that solid foundation, we are left to work with what we currently have or believe to be true. From there we embark upon the journey.

As we journey through life, our personal stories amass in our minds. These treasures of experience shape our existence and have a causal effect upon subsequent experiences. Yet all the time, we are pressing forward to hopefully a higher plane of personal experience. Many expend immeasurable amounts of energy to build financial castles. Others strive to become famous in some field of science or art or other specialty. Still others work diligently to become leaders of some noteworthy organization or cause.

All of these pursuits are generally believed to be a part of the search for significance which is one of the primary needs of the human soul. Yet as much as we might search diligently for significance, we would all agree that to love and be loved is a common desire which is a part of each of our journeys. For most of us, relationships are the very most important part of life. Just watch a man beam as he sports a picture of his youngest grandson or a mother bringing her new baby to show her off at a PTA meeting.

Seldom do we think of our own stories at all. Rarely do we write them down to pass them on to our progeny. Mostly we think that our story is unimportant and things just happen. But that, my friend, could not be farther from the truth. Because, you see, every episode in the story of my life not only affects me, but every one who is touched by my life or what I have done in life. So my story is not just mine. It is ours. And collectively, in community, we tell an even larger story.

It was not until a few weeks before this book began to form on these pages that I realized that God, as the ultimate story teller, was actually writing my story (and your story, and the stories of every living being) as I live it. However, the most

INTIMACY: The Passionate Desire of the Soul

useful insight which came to me about my story is that each episode (or story within the larger story) is actually a personal parable to me.

When challenged about this last statement by a friend who resisted the idea that my stories were personal parables, I explained how I had arrived at that conclusion. In playing back the recordings in my mind of a few of my stories, I discovered that what I had learned from these stories often had little or nothing to do with the events contained in them. I had been learning lesson after lesson by inferring or gleaning from these stories. And that is essentially what we do with parables.

Well for me the import of this discovery was that it enabled me to begin to see even the tragic or disastrous events had produced some of the most valuable of all insights and revelations in my life. It became evident that as God was weaving the fabric of my tapestry, my parables intersected with and interconnected to the parables and the lives of others. And I began to welcome each new parable with anticipation instead of trepidation knowing that in the end, I was richer after each one.

So as this book unfolds, contemplate your own personal parables. Reflect on how your understanding of truth has morphed through each one. And take inventory of the blessings which ensued. And as was once said, “’tis an ill wind that blows no one any good.” And so it is. But even more likely is this, “’tis quite unlikely that any wind in my life blows to no positive result.” In other words, give thanks in all things. You may not recognize the good right now, but it is most likely that you simply are blind to the good or that you prefer to reject that for which you might be thankful.

My wife and I built a house to use for ministry in several ways. One of these ways we called “Home Away From Home.” This involved opening our home to one “live-in” house guest at a time. One of these was a gentleman whom I had known from many years before. We had not seen each other for over a decade. After 34 years, his wife shocked him one day when she told him, point blank, that their marriage was over and told him to leave. The next day he arrived at our home, over 90 miles from his, and became our house guest for 18 months.

Day after day, he complained about the constancy of terrible circumstances of his life. He was angry about nearly everything. He even claimed that he felt like he was God’s personal whipping post. I listened for hours, night after night to his venting. Then after a few weeks I began to challenge my friend to look for the good things which had happened which he had obviously overlooked. Fortunately, I had grown close to him in those years long since past and knew the good things. So when he faltered in those “good” memories, I gently reminded him of those things which I knew had been blessings in his life.

After several months, he began to see that a large part of his problem was that he had simply chosen to dwell on the bad things and ignore the good ones. To be sure his life was full of tragic and unfortunate events. (Can’t nearly all of us say that?) But his blessings were also as great, or sometimes greater, than the rest of ours. The point is that when we rehearse or replay the parables of our lives with the specific intent of seeing the good rather than the bad in them, we find that some of our greatest pleasures and joys were wrapped in the same stories with the greatest pains and sorrows.

INTIMACY: The Passionate Desire of the Soul

So as we explore together the possibilities and the realities of relationships and the ultimate kinds of relationships which we would call “intimate” ones, gather your parables and freshen them up as you look at them this time with a view to seeing the diamond from the top of the setting, not the bottom. Enjoy.

What do I mean by the term INTIMACY?

Intimacy, a fresh definition --

Intimacy is that state of being:

in which I know your mind

so well that I can speak your thoughts

in which I know your body

so well that I can properly care for it

in which I know your emotions

so well that I feel your pain and pleasure

in which I know your will

so well that I do not need for you to "spell it out"

in which I know your spirit

so well that I know the "why" of your every expression

and in that state of being I desire to:

care for your physical needs

feel your pain and pleasure

speak your thoughts

express through my persona your desire (will)

and never need to ask why, because I already know!

Intimacy in the human plane (flesh, carnal) may run contrary to intimacy with God (or others). In such a situation, I must choose which being I will hold intimate over the other, as I am forced to choose between contradictory desires in the ones I hold dear (intimate).

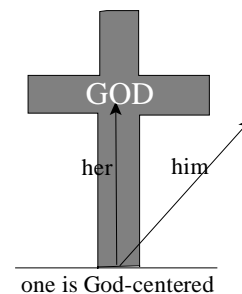
It is this conflict and subsequent choosing "between two" that causes jealousy!

Jealousy, God's for me -- God is jealous for me (my affections)! He wants to always be my FIRST LOVE, my FIRST CHOICE, in every situation. He wants to be my FIRST choice even over my affection for myself. Usually a spouse wants to be the first choice of their spouse. In some cases it is actually demanded. The problem is that since love is a choice, my activities which are allowed no choice in their expression are not the product of love and are not love.

Marriage is the closest experience to God's passionate love that is possible to have on earth. That is why I must consider that my intimacy with God and actually my experience of that intimacy with God should be more passionately pleasurable than my very best experience of emotional intimacy with my own bride.

God-centered marriages can only occur if both spouses are so absolutely abandoned to God, in their individual intimacies with God, that He is their ultimate lover and truly MOST SIGNIFICANT other! This is not a triangular arrangement of relationship where both spouses are leaning into God while in relationship with each other. It is rather a congruency of relationship with God for each spouse. Once both spouses are congruently in relationship with God, then and only then will they experience a God-Centered marriage.

The measure of tension in a God-centered marriage is the distance between the head of each spouse. Even if one is completely in perfect relationship with God, congruent in relationship (the same in every aspect),



the other's distance from God creates a tension which may even result in divorce!

Neither spouse can have complete intimacy with God unless they are **willing to** let the other person leave the marriage (or relationship) in order to have all of God!

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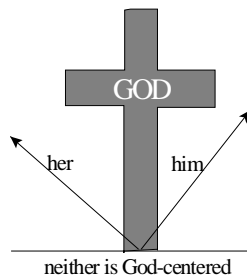
Notice: I DID NOT SAY, that you can leave the marriage (or relationship) in order to get closer to God, or that leaving a marriage will create intimacy with God (celibacy).

If you have two people who are in conflict with one another, there are several ways in which they can react to each other. One might be to exchange, tit-for-tat abusive words and/or actions. One might be to "drop dead silent" while the other rages. One might be to quickly apologize taking the blame (even if it is not your fault) in order to diffuse the conflict. Still another might be to call in a mediator to "manage" a dialog to some point of resolve. And so on it could go.

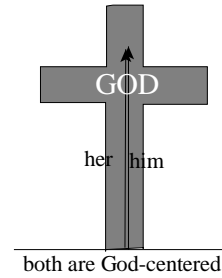
The ultimate in personal relationships, especially the very closest ones, would be for both persons to become "God-like." However, no two people in a relationship with each other ever reach "God-likeness" at the same time. However if even one reaches the place of very much "God-likeness," their completely loving and truthful responses can reduce the level of conflict to much more reasonable levels. Also be advised that the completely "God-like" responses MAY NOT BRING ANY RESOLUTION to the conflict whatsoever in the heart of the one who is not "God-like." But you can REST ASSURED, the peace that passes all understanding and the assurance of God's complete acceptance and affection will remove all "emotional" pain from the God-like one's heart and replace it with a grieving for the other's brokenness and misery. You see, God-likeness is SO OTHER CARING that the other person's

INTIMACY: The Passionate Desire of the Soul

pain becomes mine and I can truly desire that their pain be assuaged instead of feeling sorry for myself, and thereby inflicting emotional pain on myself.



These two other scenarios are also possible. Only one of them produces the peace giving fruit of righteousness. There are exceptions to these as we have all seen.



Your love for God must be so great that your love for your dearest human on earth seems like hate in comparison. It is a myth, yea, even a great falsehood, that “if I am intimate with God, He will heal all of my relationships.” Jealousy is a two-edged sword. It cuts both ways. That is why Jesus said, “... that if we come to Him, but do not hate parents, spouse, children, siblings and self, we cannot be His disciples!” Luke 14:26 paraphrased.

Every CHOICE you make
will cut someone,
and the cuts are deeper
for those who are closest to you.

The only ones who will not be cut
by your choices
are those whose love for you
is unconditional and “other-centered” toward you
-or-
those who don’t care about you in any way
and do not have any interest in anything you say or do.

There are degrees of selfishness, but rarely, if ever, the absence of selfishness in this life. However, I believe that Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Daniel, Paul, and a few others in scripture may have been close to selflessness. I also believe that some of the recent “greats” of the faith, like Tozer, Spurgeon, Chambers, Billy Graham, Mother Theresa and so forth may have also come very close to complete selflessness. Yet, even if complete “selflessness” is not possible, It is the single most “God-like” expression of love in the universe.

The apparent contradiction of Jesus’ words “...to love one another, yet hate one another...” are not contradictions at all. They are words of comparative measures of love. Jesus knew all too well that jealousy in the human heart will always manifest itself by attempts to “force” another’s choice. We might hear such words as, “Well, if you love me, you will stay home tonight.” -or- “I have needs, too!” -or- “It is your responsibility to meet my needs as my spouse.” And on it might go.

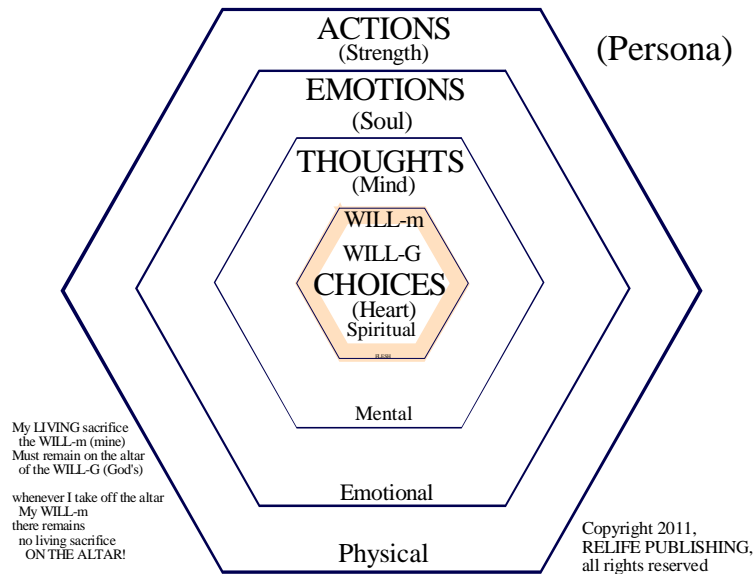
Granted, most of the decisions to be “away” from the home to spend time with others, on the part of either spouse, are selfish ones. Even under the guise of ministry, these “away” times are justified in order to cloak the real truth. In being away from home and with others we might feel “affirmed” or “just have fun” or “believe that God requires this “sacrifice of me” and so forth.

The ultimate test of my affection for another is the freedom which I give them to choose NOT TO BE WITH -or- NOT TO BE DOING FOR “ME!” And the ultimate spouse, for one who wants to have the ultimate love affair with God that is possible for themselves, would be one whose absolute affection for God and instant and complete

INTIMACY: The Passionate Desire of the Soul

—
obedience to His voice would direct their every choice and every expression.

Anatomy of the persona -- The parts of the persona, either divine or human, collectively make up the “image of God” in all of its fullness. As the highest of the created beings, humans are given these essential elements of life, which enable them to either be “god” to themselves and worship themselves, or to let “GOD” be their God, and submit every part of their being to Him.



As it says in scripture “...the Spirit (of God) Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God...” This clearly connotes that the will of man remains in tact when the Will of God is introduced into man’s “heart” at the point of salvation. The point of salvation is when a person invites the Will of God, through Jesus, to reside in his “heart.” As in Jesus’ summation of the Law and the Prophets as, “Love the Lord your God with all your HEART, SOUL, STRENGTH, and MIND,” He is actually creating the picture of the anatomy of persona which is reflected above. Congruency with diagram...

Intimacy in Relationship – anatomy of the persona

Most teaching about the persona either defines it as a single integrated entity, or a two part entity of body and soul or as three parts of body, soul, and spirit. In meditating on the statement of Jesus above, it suggests that there are FOUR PARTS which interact to create the persona in the image of God. Heretofore, as with all of my theological instructors, I was inclined to think of the persona as three parts and as a reflection of the trinity in heaven, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. I even assumed as they did, and taught me as well, that it was the Father who said, “Let us make man in our own image...”

Since it is the Spirit of God which wills (desires / chooses) things to be done as in the person of Jesus, then it would likely have been the Holy Spirit who “willed” the creation as we know it. It might also bear out that the Father is the “doer” as Jesus said, “... I only do what I see My Father doing.” So if the Holy Spirit is “willing” things to be, the Father is doing them in heaven and Jesus replicated on earth what He observed the Father doing, Jesus acts as the transfer agent of the activities of the Father at the choosing of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we at salvation invite the Holy Spirit (WILL OF GOD) to reside within us, we become the direct representation of God’s will fleshed out here and now, provided that we submit always to His Will.

Notice that the four parts of the persona include at the center the will. For a person who does not receive Jesus and by Him the Holy Spirit, there is only one will. That is the will of the man (human nature). He does not have the conflict described in scripture since there are not two wills working against each other. On the other hand, the single-willed persona can be nothing but self-centered and worship itself. It is not until the will of human nature is somehow convinced by faith to invite the Will of God into the heart

Intimacy in relationship – anatomy of the persona

that salvation occurs. Even the person whose actions and words drip with apparent “selflessness,” might be surprised or even appalled at the underlying motivations for those expressions. Likely for most of us, most of the time, our inventory of words and deeds would include many “selfless, other-centered” ones. However, there is a test which, when applied to these expressions, will betray even the most noble personality. (See: litmus test of motivation)

Most of the teachings about this phenomenon try to express the change as a “dead” spirit being replaced by a “living” spirit, or that a soulish man who has no spirit is imbued with the Holy Spirit and the dead persona comes to life. While this may be the prevailing thought aloft today, it does not best fit what is described in the scriptures just quoted. This teaching has grown out of the experience of fruitless lives of the vast majority of Jesus’ followers around the globe. There is a distinct and almost universal disconnection from the truths that set Jesus apart from all others. And this is largely due to theological babel which is learned from the logical approach (human nature - carnal) rather than the divine approach to Scripture.

The progression of every activity of every persona is this. There is a willing or choosing in the spirit (heart). This leads to thoughts (mind) that stimulate or generate a belief. The belief that is spawned, creates feelings (in the soul) about that belief. These feelings are actually the affecters of actions and words (strength) expressed by the physical body. Unfortunately when the actions of a particular persona are not acceptable at one level or another, the predominant way to cope with this is to try to modify those actions. Since the action began at the core of the persona, in the first place, would it not seem most productive to begin there in order to change the behaviors? So instead of

Intimacy in Relationship – anatomy of the persona

trying to correct the symptoms, we would then be correcting the disease.

Most missionary work around the globe is focused on making the actions of those who are converted to match the actions of the missionaries who present their message to them. This cloning process creates the proliferation of not just an activity set, but also a system of beliefs closer to the core. Even if the missionary has successfully introduced someone to Jesus and the person comes to salvation (that is right relationship to God), there is the process that ensues to make that “believer” look like a member of that particular missionary’s denomination or sect. In the process, the Will of God is replaced with the will of the denomination and its whole belief system.

So to be sure this four part diagram of the anatomy of a persona quite accurately shows how the relationship dynamic actually works. Now it is important to understand here that all relationships are two persona choices. This whole matter is discussed elsewhere in this treatise. Albeit in order for a persona in relationship with God to relinquish their “self” will to the “God” will within, there must be an absolute trust that God’s will only, ever, always has my best interest at heart (His Heart). Then and only then will I purposely choose to capitulate to God’s will over my own. And it is equally essential that I know beyond any doubt that God can and will do anything He pleases and is not limited in any way to the ways of human nature.

This depiction of the persona helps us see that the relationship with God which is birthed at salvation in us is a union of the highest order. It is no wonder, when we look at this diagram from the perspective of marriage that there is major conflict in many marriages. When we meet at the

Intimacy in relationship – anatomy of the persona

altar to commit our lives to one another, our individuality (will) remains in tact. As we discover the distance between what we will and what our significant other wills, there is no doubt that conflict is inevitable. The only way to resolve the conflict or close the gap of distance between the wills is to both submit to the Will of God as that alone creates congruency of wills.

Imagine one more thought along these lines. When I choose to subjugate “my” will to the will of God, His will evokes the mind (thinking) of God, which stimulates the soul (emotions) of God, which produces the action of God (as Jesus lived over 2,000 years ago). So, if I let God’s persona express itself through me to my bride, she can’t help but be touched by God. And God’s touch has so much greater capacity for compassion, empathy, forgiveness and mercy toward her in every respect. He alone knows the heart of every person, therefore He alone can treat her as she needs most to be treated. And I don’t need to guess any more. The “read my mind game” is over for good.

One other significant aspect of knowing my persona is to be able to distinguish between the symptom and the disease within my soul. Anger for example is a symptom of an underlying disease. So to attempt to control anger, or anger management as some call it, is to work on the symptom. Since symptoms keep recurring until the disease is cured, it makes almost no sense to deal with the anger without finding out its causal emotion. Granted, to temporarily manage the anger is appropriate until the underlying emotion can be identified. Once the emotion which has triggered the anger is traced back to the belief that spawned it, we can uncover the lie which we have believed and exchange it for truth. Knowing the truth is the cure.

Intimacy in Relationship – anatomy of the persona

Insecurity for example, rises within us when we believe that we are in a situation that we cannot control and may result in our harm or loss. The insecurity leads to anxiety or fear. These produce an overly strong reaction to things that are mostly unrelated to my fear. This expression of anger splashes the acid in my soul on those near me. Then both I and they sustain emotional damage that was neither intentional nor appropriate. Anger is basically an exacerbated delivery of the underlying emotion, it is not necessarily an emotion in and of itself. If fear is driving the expression of anger, then deal with the fear. To do so requires that we go the additional level deeper to the belief that fuels the emotion.

Gracious, the enemy of Grace -- Since we are all as humans, self-focused, self-absorbed, self-actualizing, and self-sufficient by nature and training, we will all be guilty at times (some more than others) of making someone choose between self and some other person. (This other person could be God.) And we can all try to diffuse the conflict that arises by choosing the one present with us over the one who is absent (or seemingly so, in the case of God). [We can even become politicians and say completely opposite things to different groups in order to be accepted by all and win their vote and thereby the election to whatever leadership position we desire to hold.]

In a similar manner and on a much subtler level, “gracious” (PC - politically correct) teaches me to NOT OFFEND another at any cost. “Gracious” also tells me to think before I speak and say nothing that would offend even one person in my hearing. “Gracious” causes us to be less than honest and sometimes downright dishonest with one another. “Gracious” might make me spend enormous amounts of time and energy in community trying to assess each of the myriad possible reactions to my expressions (words or actions), before I express myself.

This “gracious” assessment process often creates a silence that is nearly deafening. At best it creates silences of expression which diminish both the health and prosperity of any given project or relationship. At best it restricts the flow of absolute truth (honesty) and authenticity which are foundational to relationship and community. Since “gracious” not only requires that my expressions of thought or opinion or action DO NOT OFFEND, but also requires that my every expression be modified to suit all those around me, I am forced to limit my value on nearly every level to the expectation of the most tender personality (that

Intimacy in Relationship – gracious, enemy of grace

is the most easily hurt persona). The constant assessment of and guarding against reactions to my expressions creates an emotional prison which is deep, dark and lonely.

The more selfish the community becomes, by catering more and more to the easily hurt ego, the less productive it becomes. The community also suffers from shallow and distant relationships. And as with individual relationships, communities can only grow stronger and more harmonious with authenticity and other-centered cooperation. So as we apply GRACE rather than GRACIOUS to each truth that we deliver, the individual as well as community relationships become stronger and its members more fruitful. The primary difference between grace and gracious is that grace never sacrifices truth on the altar of overly tender egos.

Looking at the teachings of scripture for a moment, let me draw your attention to a few pertinent passages. In John 10, Jesus is quoted as saying, “I am come that they might have life and life more abundantly.” He is quoted again in John 8 “you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Another quote speaks to the normal way of relationships without God in John 14, “the spirit of truth, the world cannot receive...” Truth is truth. It is foundational. It does not change with culture. And if all persons would embrace absolute truth instead of their opinions about truth, there would be far more peace and harmony. And I am not referring to political or philosophical ideals. These can only be opinion, but since they are that and not truth, they do not need to divide us. Division is caused by one of only two things. We are divided by opinions which differ or by one or the other refusing to accept truth.

Intimacy in relationship – gracious, enemy of grace

Also, the expression of truth will not offend or “hurt” the feelings of the one who lives by it. Only those who do not want to abide by truth or be changed by it are offended by it. So if you are concerned about offending one another, give it up if it is a matter of irrefutable truth. However, grace requires that I not withhold truth for the sake of personal feelings. At the same time grace requires that I embrace the one, even if they consider themselves my enemy, regardless of our agreement about truth or opinion.

A few other biblical references to truth might help, should you decide to dig deeper. These are: Psalm 51:6; Proverbs 22:21; Jeremiah 9:3 & 26:15; Daniel 7:19; 1 John 2:4 & 2:21 & 4:6; Matthew 22:16; and Mark 12:14. For the purposes of this treatise, 1 John 3:16 - 23 might add focus and clarity.

Intimacy is a place where, regardless of my circumstances, my innermost delights produce joy and pleasure. When we are intimate WITH GOD, we are the pleasure OF GOD and He is our pleasure as well. Since the pleasure of God is greater than any human experience, we can rest assured that His peace is also in that same place of proximity to His heart - “no distance between heaven (His heart) and our hearts.

Prayer, a matter of pillow talk -- When my pleasure in God is so complete that it is never interrupted, I need not articulate audibly my thanksgiving - because it flows incessantly in my heart to Him. All of my former external proofs (performances for God to watch and applaud), become excess baggage and I drop them. As God and I walk arm in arm doting on each other, the only expressions (external proofs) are the by-product of my deep affection for, or obedience to, the precious words my lover, God. He speaks softly or silently into my ear or soul. Since He and I are fused in the marital union of our mutual choice, one cannot distinguish between His and my expression (acts or words) since they are one and the same (congruent: equal in every way).

Our mutual pleasure in one another is so great, that any who are seeking to love and be loved, know that they are loved by me (that is God fused in me) without conditions or changes! They are free to be themselves, say anything, do any deed, think any thought, and they will still be loved “as-is.” What freedom this brings to marriage and every other relationship. I (that is the fused personas of God and I) may desire for them to be changed, but only that they too will surrender themselves into this blissful union of love with God so that He is reproduced in another life, just as He was in Jesus!

Conversations with God can be either silent or audible. Audible prayer of an intimate lover of God is the fused (united agreement) words of two lovers whose hearts beat as one. Prayer is agreement with God. Prayer is God’s own heart expressed verbally by my lips. Prayer is both hearing and speaking. The audible prayer is simply to touch another with the love of God. The audible prayer of a lover of God

Intimacy in relationship – prayer, pillow talk with God

speaks ABSOLUTE truth in ABSOLUTE affection to and for the listener!

Those who are intimate with God, no longer pray “themselves”, but rather let the Spirit of God within speak for Himself through them. Those who are intimate with God will never restrict (filter with “gracious”) or opine (add their opinion) in the verbal expression of God! “The prayer of a righteous man avails much” is true because God (fused in and with us) never speaks idle words. His word never returns void. His word is always rife (full) with life and love and intentionality toward our good.

The prayer of an intimate lover of God is so radically different from the prayer of a “good” religious person or “eloquent” pray-er or so-called prayer “warrior” that it is often rejected. The heart of God is always “for” us, but until we become intimate with Him, we misunderstand much of what He is doing and saying. Some things which we might consider bad, and therefore not correct to pray, may be in God’s “good plan” for another’s life. And we can read the scriptures until we are blue in the face and still not know anything about what His word means to us. So when scripture is part of our prayer, it is not useful if we do not meditate on it to understand its meaning before we include it in our prayers.

When we understand what prayer is and how it applies to our every situation, it enables us to develop truly deep relationships not only with God but also with others. Until we leave father and mother (our own personal culture) and cleave unto our spouse (Jesus) we cannot experience the marital bliss of a perfect bride in the arms of a perfect groom. When we become one (united in heart, soul, strength, and mind) with Jesus, our selfish desires alone will separate us from His love. His love does not fail, only ours

Intimacy in Relationship – prayer, pillow talk with God

does. Yet ours will fail less and less as we become more and more in love with Jesus. It is His love that fills our love reservoir until there is no more lack on our part.

The Divine Union -- To be in union with God demonstrates itself in unbroken, unhindered fellowship with God. That is not to be misconstrued to mean that there will be no more “sinful” activities in me. But that the unconditional love of God will never stop flowing toward me. The cure for the “sinful” attitudes, acts and words which come out of me is living in a union (as a marriage union) with the Divine Being. This was made possible by the blood of Jesus, His personal substitution for me to pay for my wrongs. His blood was shed only once. It was shed for all sins for all men, for all time. Therefore, as I allow His punishment to be substituted for my punishment, God’s justice is satisfied. In this way, I am “forever” cured of my “sins” even while they are in progress! In other words, Jesus was punished enough for every sin I have or ever will commit.

The only perfection or holiness which I possess, in marital union with God, is GOD’S PERFECTION and HOLINESS! And even His Sacrifice for me is perfect and cannot be affected by anything I do. And His love is demonstrated time and again by this constant, instantaneous, complete forgiveness and the unmerited favor (grace) of God.

In the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, He states “... that we as humans know how to love our children (although sometimes it looks like some of us do not) and our heavenly Father, GOD, is an even better parent than we are. GOD knows how to treat each human being who is ever born in order to reveal Himself to them. He also knows exactly what circumstances or situations will teach each one who GOD is and that His unique parenting style for each individual is best suited to their own well being as it relates

Intimacy in Relationship – the divine union

to a wholesome relationship with GOD, their heavenly Father.

In my place of intimacy, the ultimate unity, the result of the fusion of GOD with me, His expression of Himself in and through me, will display His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His grace, and His compassion to those who cross my path. It is only in and through this place of this intimacy that the phrase "... on earth as it is in heaven..." becomes a reality. It is "fleshed out" in us, just as it was "fleshed out" in Jesus. God puts His Spirit within our "flesh" body in order to be able to relate up close and personal to others.

The only cure for jealousy my spouse may develop about my greater affection for God is for my spouse to develop a greater love for God as well. The Apostle Paul wrote that when one marital partner becomes a truly intimate lover of God, that their spouse may request the dissolution of the marriage in divorce. The divorce, if requested is to be granted. However, the true lover of God will not opt out of the marriage so as to help the other spouse become more loving toward God. As God never abandons any person, a lover of God remains committed to and loving toward even a difficult spouse. (Violently abusive situations are covered in other chapters. see extremes)

Intimacy with God also produces a dependency upon God alone for one's personal "make-over." God cannot repair the damage to my soul by making changes in someone else. When I blame others for pushing my buttons or making me "do" things, all I am saying is that I refuse to take responsibility for the button that is being pushed. The person who just pushed your button to make you flare up in anger, did not put that button in you. So if you truly want

Intimacy in relationship – the divine union

to have the things in you that cause you to react in ways you regret removed, then let God reveal them to you without your constant resistance to that revelation. When your buttons is pushed and you ignite, ask God to reveal what that button is connected to. As you gradually discover all the wires connected to your “hot” button, you can one by one disconnect them until you are one day free of your violent or unbecoming reactions.

As an intimate bride, surrendered, as it were, to the perfect groom, GOD, I will allow Him to do anything to me, for me, in me and through me to make Himself proud of me. If this involves verbal candor, painful or distasteful circumstances, tribulation, death of loved ones, material and financial devastation and ruin, I will submit without question, because I can trust Him to do whatever He needs to do, acting in my best interest always, “BECAUSE HE LOVES ME!”

Words spoken to me by another person, may hurt my feelings. GOD’s purpose in such communications is to reveal the “selfishness” or “self-centeredness” in me. This hurt is self-inflicted and is sourced in my pride. It could be embarrassment. It could be lack of appreciation for something I have done. It could be that I feel rejected. Both of these appeal to my pride and having my needs met by another human being. As my lover, GOD’s desire is to meet all my needs (love, acceptance, worth, and security).

If the one who speaks the word of truth that hurts my feelings loves me and only wants good for me, the emotional pain is self-inflicted since it was not intended by the speaker to be hurtful. However, if someone who wants to hurt my feelings speaks words which hurt my feelings, I might blame them for hurting me. Unfortunately, I am only emotionally hurt because of the pride within me and

Intimacy in Relationship – the divine union

nothing else. Consequently, the hurt feelings are again only the revelation of God to me of who I really am as opposed to who I may think I am.

In the place of intimacy with the Father, I trust His heart no matter what He does or allows to be done to me. He is my significant other. He loves me. He wants me to become like Himself! Again, the example of Jesus stands out again! In the place of intimacy with God, my identity is “with God.” My identity is determined by my marriage, not my behavior. Regardless of what I do, I am still my God’s significant other! God has invited me, and I have accepted, to be His bride with full marital privileges and responsibilities.

As the bride of God, God is my provider, my leader, my lover to sire children of the love of God through my womb! In the place of fullest intimacy with God, His Holy Spirit reveals to my spirit the very desires of God. From workplace to marketplace to home place to play place in every place, the Spirit of God, gives me utterance of the voice of God which speaks prolifically the love of God, which produces the life of God in others as He did in the virgin Mary.

Perfect Relationship -- As one who is my intimate lover, God loves me in the perfection of every possible relationship: parent, child, sibling, friend, and spouse. When I am fused with God in the Sacred Union He offers by way of the example and sufferings of Jesus, in this multi-faceted relationship, then and only then do I, too, become the perfect parent, child, sibling, friend or spouse to those on earth beside me. Any attempt to imitate a perfect relationship of intimacy without having intimacy will fail at some level and many times miserably.

How is it possible for me to have an intimate relationship with one whom I have offended greatly by my abusive behaviors toward them? In the confines of human experience, most would agree that this would be impossible. However, that is the marvel of the love of God which is so much greater than humans can express for one another. Therefore the command of Jesus to love one another just as God loves us cannot be attainable, unless somehow the greater love of God Himself is implanted into our persona.

It is essential to redefine what each relationship type would be in the ultimate or perfect form. Many of our relationships have been distorted by the selfishness of each one in each relationship. Let's take, for example, an abusive father will create a distorted understanding of what fatherhood is. We obviously know that our father isn't "right." Yet we may never extricate ourselves from our experience enough to consider what the proper definition of and character traits of a perfect father would be. And so it might be for each relationship type. At some level, often below our consciousness we project these imperfect traits in our earthly fathers onto the Perfect Father in heaven. And then we distance ourselves from Him expecting Him to treat us a wrongly just like our "broken" earthly Dad did.

Intimacy in Relationship – perfect relationship

In the beginning, before selfishness was introduced into the human equation and it began to distort every possible relationship, there were perfectly right relationships. And the beginning of the healing process for a broken human persona, is returning to the place of perfection. One must ponder what is meant by “perfect” father, “perfect” child, “perfect” brother, “perfect” friend and “perfect” spouse before one can determine to be one or know whether or not they are one. Yet, since perfection is elusive, we must not expect perfection from human personas. But we can expect God to be the “perfect” relational being in every relationship type. Once we start there, we can begin to trust, maybe for the first time, that there is at least one persona who can be trusted with every aspect of our lives.

Trust, a healthy perspective -- Trust is defined in Merriam Webster's dictionary as: a) assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something -and b) something committed or entrusted to one to be used or cared for in the interest of another. Most people take this to mean that I can only trust you if you will do the same thing in each situation that I would do or that you would handle things in the same way I do, if I leave you alone or in charge. Then when we are disappointed that this does not happen we become frustrated or downright angry. Once we have been disappointed by a failure of trust, we require many successes in order to re-establish trust.

I prefer to use this definition in what I believe to be a more appropriate and effective way. In relationship, I desire to know the other person in the fullest, deepest way possible. In the development of intimacy in the relationship, I come to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the other. And I am ready to step in to help in the areas of weakness and depend on the areas of strength. However, I know that if I misjudge the qualities of the other person, it is my responsibility, not theirs, if they do not act as I expect them to. My expectation is based on my own misjudgment or lack of intimacy with them at some level.

Now God, on the other hand, is the ultimate realist. As my creator, He knows exactly how I will react or respond in every situation. Furthermore, He knows that I am weak and foolish and have a history of messing things up. Yet, rather than deprive me of opportunities which I might botch, He gives me opportunities to learn how to handle situations better by trial and error. If He did not, I would not learn. So, God, as the greatest parent and teacher, let's me fail,

time and again without becoming angry with me. His patience is extremely great.

Yet if we come back to the reality of our human relationships, we can see that we, too, can cut some slack as others learn to trust. Take for example the toddler who is trying to learn to walk. They take a few wobbly steps and fall down. We clap and cheer. We help them up and encourage them to do it again. Again only one or two steps and they fall down. Instead of criticizing them, we applaud and praise their attempt. This goes on and on until they can finally walk. The catch is this. Once they fail for a longer period of time than we EXPECT that it should take, we get disappointed and begin to criticize. After prolonged failure we become frustrated and angry toward them.

In some situations, the toddler may just be slow in developing, but since the neighbor's kids or our other kids walked by a certain age, we expect that this child too should. If we do become exasperated and lash out and then later discover that this slower child has an inherent balance problem caused by ear infections that we did not detect, we are mortified that we were mean when there was a valid reason for the delay in progress. We only wish we could take back the mean words or actions and relive the situation. Unfortunately, that is never possible. That time is gone and the impressions we left are indelibly etched in the child's brain. One outcome might be that the child believes he is worthless or stupid.

In this same manner, we treat others in relationships with us. We place EXPECTATIONS on them which are not realistic. Then when they fail to perform to our EXPECTATIONS we become abusive toward them, either verbally or physically. There are some expectations which

Intimacy in relationship – trust, a healthy perspective

are generally accepted. Yet there is no basis for this. Each person is unique. Each person has their own learning rate. Each person has built in limitations. Some of these include I.Q. and acumen. Artists are born, not created by practice. Musicians are born, not a product of training. Rocket scientists have access to parts of the brain that are blocked to others. And on it goes.

In the mainstream of life, there are certain norms, which are held to be generally acceptable. These are put forth in a society as the rules of engagement. Sometimes they are called etiquette (or the rules of “gracious” ways). We set the rules of verbal communication and the rules for activities. These “norms” tend to create walls between us when they are violated by anyone in our path. However, for those who are close enough to us that we might be embarrassed by them, our reactions tend to be stronger and the walls between us get higher.

Now if we could take a moment to think about what this means. We might be sorely disappointed in ourselves to think that we are meaner to the ones we supposedly care about more deeply. Take the case of a young man who is sentenced to time in Federal Prison. Many people in the inner circle of that family will actually remove the entire family of the inmate from their circle of friends. In some cases, one parent will refuse to visit the inmate or even write them out of their will. Yet, the way of wholesome relationships is not to abandon each other when times are tough. If we aren't there in the hard times, what good is relationship at all.

A few months ago while I was meditating on relationships, this insight came to me. “Trust is knowing the other persona so thoroughly that I am not ever disillusioned with

them. It is that I will never place in their care, anything that I know they cannot handle or will handle in a way that is not acceptable to me.” In other words, I determined not to set people up for failure by entrusting something to them that either they will not handle well (by my preference) or cannot handle well due to a disability or lack of ability on their part. Even the Peter Principle in business betrays the foolishness of promoting a man beyond his capabilities.

Expectations, bars of my own imprisonment -- Shortly after this revelation about a better way to look at and deploy trust, I came upon this thought as well. Unrealistic expectations I place on others become the bars of my own prison which separated me from them and the joys of mutual friendship. It is only ever and always me who creates my own misery in relationships. I help set the relationship up for failure. Eventually these bars of unrealistic expectation, either yours or mine, will lock us out of the relationship altogether. So consider how many and how fast you might be able to take down these bars.

Some of the bars are expectations about etiquette. Others are bars about what we think are “age appropriate tasks.” Let me tell you about a real life happening here. I once commanded a corporation which delivered high tech solutions at very high prices. Our mantra was the highest quality at an affordable price. We had an office manager who was excellent in her duties. However, she could not put stamps on envelopes straight. So the task of putting stamps on our invoice envelopes was assigned to another person who put each stamp on perfectly straight.

You might ask, so what’s the big deal about straight stamps. Who cares any way. Well might say this, “When you charge an arm and a leg for your services claiming the highest quality, yet the stamps are crooked on your mail, how can you expect for us to believe that the quality of your high priced technical services is any greater than your quality with your invoicing process.” And whether you would believe this or not, such disparities made it difficult at times to collect on some invoices for that very reason.

Well as the task was reassigned, the office manager began to cry. She was embarrassed that she could not put the stamps

on the envelopes any longer. She thought that putting stamps on envelopes was a task that an elementary school kid should be able to do. One major flaw in her thinking created her emotional pain. She assumed that hand/eye coordination was an age dependent thing, which is not so. You are either born with it or not. No matter how hard I tried to explain that, she refused to be consoled. My final choice, let the person who did the best “stamp” job do stamps. And let the office manager do what the “stamper” could not, and that was run the office like a well-oiled machine.

The office manager’s reaction was not particularly atypical. Unfortunately though, the typical reaction is not relational or wholesome. It is based on believing a lie that said, “You are stupid if you can’t put stamps on straight.” You see this points out as well that we often inflict our own emotional pain. And one of the basic features of personal emotional pain is that it is caused in part by my own lack of objective assessment of my own strengths and weaknesses and allowing myself to be cast into roles which capitalize on my strengths and mitigate against my weaknesses.

So, as you continue down the corridors of life, taking as many personas as you desire into relationship with you, consider the importance that you be thorough in your investigation of who you are and who they are. That you be willing not to thrust them into situations in which you know they are destined to fail. Purpose in your heart (CHOOSER) that you will not treat them unkindly if they do fail. And do all you can to entrust as many opportunities as possible through which they might grow through failures into the place of success or determine that this particular task will forever be beyond their ability. And by all means,

Intimacy in relationship – trust, a healthy perspective

keep assuring them of your constancy of affection regardless of their successes or failures.

So as I see it, the responsibility of trust falls more on the shoulders of the one who wants to commit something to another's care (trustor) than upon the shoulders of the one in whose care something will be placed (trustee). If the object entrusted belongs to me, then the onus of selection of appropriate care taker is mine. If I have misjudged or not even bothered to discover the trustworthiness of another, I have only myself to blame if the object is lost or mishandled.

The unfortunate, yet all too common scenario is that we place something in another's care without adequate knowledge of their trustworthiness with the object entrusted to them. In some cases we even entrust something to someone who has never been and will never be able to handle the object to our satisfaction. Then we get angry and berate them for mistreating or mishandling the object in their care. So in essence we set them up for failure and then condemn them when they do. This would be like giving the keys to a fully stocked wine cellar to an alcoholic and asking him to keep alcoholics out of the cellar. ARE WE NUTS???

The bottom line of trust is at a minimum the mutuality of responsibility between the trustor and the trustee. Trust cannot ever expect perfection of the trustee unless that trustee is God Himself. Trust must take into account the abilities and limitations of the trustee. Trust can be extended without damage or distortion of relationship so long as the trustor takes full responsibility for the care of the object entrusted to another, otherwise, relationship will take heavy hits every time there is a trusting event. And the

Intimacy in Relationship – trust, a healthy perspective

“God-like” approach is to take chances but cover them with unconditional acceptance, undeserved favor, and absolute affection regardless of the outcome.

Fellowship, a contrast with relationship -- Now with God, there is a difference between relationship and fellowship. God never cuts off the relationship, but there might be a break in fellowship. Again, it is not God who steps out of fellowship, it is us. He waits silently and patiently for us to return to fellowship. He does not step away. He is not embarrassed by us. He is not disappointed with us. He knows we are weak and foolish and have a history of failures. But He is always there for us.

Recently, to my great dismay, a dear friend of mine was convicted of crimes that sent him away to prison for many years. I was immediately compelled to begin a dialog with him by letter about how the grace of God transcends our worst activities. I later decided to take a book about this amazing grace of God and copy it down to pages which I could mail to the prison. He ate it up like Christmas candy. After a few chapters, he commented that he did not agree with some things in the last chapter which had been sent. When I asked him to clarify so that I might try to answer his questions in this regard, he sent a stinging reply that he did not need to comment and that he did not need to believe what was in the book.

Well as you can imagine, preparing the pages of another author's book in such a way as to get them to him by mail was no small task. The amount of time I spent in doing this deserved at least some level of interaction about its content on the part of my inmate friend. Since he was only interested in interesting reading and not the application of the content to his situation, there was no compelling reason to continue in this laborious manner of correspondence. The only reason this was necessary at all was that the book was no longer in print so I could not send one to him any other way.

I did not cast him aside, he chose to disengage in the dialog. Since the only thing I had to offer him that would be helpful to him was to understand this grace described in the book fully enough to forgive himself and to develop an up close and personal relationship with God that would prepare him for life both inside the prisons and outside once he was released, there was no incentive to continue. I waited for him to be open to a dialog in this regard. As of this writing I have just sent him a letter asking him to reconsider not only a dialog about the book's content but also that I be put on his call list and his visitation list so that this dialog might occur face-to-face.

This exchange with my friend in prison, helped me to realize that relationships fail to be useful at all if either party is not open to challenges as well as encouragement of the other. Some look for friendships to provide constant encouragement. Others look for relationships to provide mutual financial assistance. Still others might expect relationships to provide agreement with respect to point of view or common world view. And so on we might go. I even had one relationship wherein the other was seeking a "persecution free" zone. And so long as he felt that I always took his side we were fine, but as soon as I voiced a contrary opinion to his, he stepped away.

One of the greatest effects of relationship is that we can agree to disagree on nearly any issue. The myth that if one is right the other must be wrong, needs to be cast aside. The truth is that many of the things which I hold dear are simply my opinion and not necessarily truth. Now my opinion might coincide with truth itself. Yet if I can accept those who disagree with me and embrace the difference of opinion, I am enriched and enlarged in thinking through these differences rather than isolating myself from them.

Possess then Pass It On -- You can never dispense what you do not possess. You cannot pour emptiness out on anyone or anything. You simply have nothing to offer. No prolific rhetoric can replace the activities which speak louder than words. No amount of foolery or deceit, can supply what does not exist. Only the constant supply of what is to be dispensed can enable the dispenser to be always flowing with that which it is constantly refreshed. This is true for both good water and bad.

So if you want to dispense the love of God, you must be filled to overflowing with it. To be filled with it, you must go to the source of supply. And when you go to the source of supply, you must possess the credentials (the birth right) which entitles you to draw upon that supply. Then you can in turn dispense it. Remember that since you as a human ARE NOT the source, only the conduit, you will run dry instantly upon disconnecting from the source.

As opposed to seeing our selves as pitchers carrying the water of Gods love, we should see ourselves as aqueducts who move the water of God's love. We are only for directing the flow of the love of God from one place to another as His channel of that flow. As the aqueduct can take no credit for the life giving water that flows within its banks, so neither can we take credit for the life giving love of God which flows through our part of the conduit of life.

Heroes, merchants of self-interest -- We have all heard or told stories about people of noble character. We applaud them. We extol their virtues. We may even put them on a pedestal in our mind as someone to be emulated. Yet deep down we may wonder if the whole story is known. We might wonder if their great works and words were spawned by some deep, strong sense of guilt and shame and were penances for it. But we prefer to believe that they were as noble as the story depicts them. We all want heroes and want to be heroes ourselves.

The classic stories of “Rescue the Maiden in Distress” are among the most popular of all. These stories not only appeal to the heroic within us, but also appeal to the romantic within us. These stories become our bread and butter with respect to our fantasies about ecstasies and agonies. They give rise to the fluctuations of our emotions as we read them. And they are our guiding light as we try to make our life somehow resemble them. We do all of this to satisfy our need to be significant.

Significance, to be sure, is important to every human soul. We want to make a difference. We want to have our life count beyond our life span. We want to affect lives in ways that produce positive changes in them. We want our own life to be fuller and richer for having helped others along the way. And we want to be identified by what we have done and appreciated for it. Most of all, we want to matter to someone else. (Now I could spin a few stories here to make this book of novel length, but I suggest that you stop for a moment or even a few days to reflect on and maybe even journal about your own favorite heroic stories.)

Now significance points us to that part of the human persona that determines the who, what, when, where, why,

and how of every episode of our lives. Granted we are affected by many external factors. But in the end, “We do what we want to do!” in every situation. Now, you say, “That is absolutely foolish! I often do things for others instead of for myself.” Hey, you are probably correct about this (at least at some level of consciousness). However, if you peel back the layers of circumstances and motivations surrounding each choice, you will most likely find some desire for yourself in even the most selfless of all your deeds.

Heroes on the battle field who give their lives for others are made of people who, in the heat of the moment, abandon themselves to the rush of emotion within to make a difference. Yet at the same time, most of these heroes do not expect to actually lose their life in the process. There is some sense of immortality that flares up in that moment, which accompanies the dangerous action. Some even have the subliminal belief that to die for their faith or for some noble cause, guarantees them some level of appreciation from God that might improve their eternal existence. (You may want to spend some time perusing various religious teachings to discover that most of them actually state this in their “holy” writings.)

Loneliness, the antithesis of relationship --

Nonetheless, let's get back to the issue of what actually motivates every persona on planet earth. All of life on earth is subject to motivation. When we are hungry, we eat. When we are thirsty, we drink. When we are lonely, we try to find someone to be with. And so forth we could continue for pages if not tomes. But apart from the physical motivations, the human soul is motivated at a much deeper level. There have even been experiments that prove that even if the physical needs of infants are met fully, they will die if they are not touched by other human beings. This points us to the deeper, more profound level of our existence.

At this foundational level of existence we find that we all have needs which must be met in order to give us freedom, pleasure and peace. It is freedom, pleasure and peace which has been sought after and even fought for over the millennia of mankind's presence here on earth. And we live and die on the altar of such pursuits. So if these are the essentials of our lives, it might be worth understanding what it is that, deep within the human soul, drives us to do anything and everything we do.

There are many ways to describe the elements of human need. We could argue for days, maybe even months, about the words we would choose to describe the needs of the human soul. But if you will bear with me for the purposes of stimulating our mutual thinking, let me present one way to begin. (Please take plenty of time to change all of this to fit your word choices and apply them to your own life and teaching.) For the sake of simplicity and usability let us define the basic needs of the persona to be: Love, Acceptance, Worth, and Security. I have chosen these, although there may be more or less or combinations of

these, to help in personal reflection. L. A. W. S. Is the acronym for the four words I have chosen to help me understand my behaviors which are sourced in my motivations.

Two persona choices -- Please, by all means, rewrite this section in your own words at your table in your own personal and private study. But let's begin here. We all have a need to be loved. Love is a choice. "He who would have friends must show himself friendly." Love is the glue of all relationships. Every relationship is a two persona choice (TPC). If I want to be your friend, I must ask you to let me be your friend. Unless we both choose it, it will not be. I can choose God to be my Father (or not as He guards my freedom of choice with all the power He possesses). In this case, God has already chosen to be my Father. If I am alone and want to be adopted into a family, no matter how much I may want to be a sibling or child in a family that would choose me, some family must choose me back.

Just as the creation of the relationship requires two choices (TPC), so does maintenance of relationship. Divorce is simply the unchoosing of one who has formerly chosen another. Divorce may be mutual unchoosing, but all it takes is one to unchoose. That is why relationships are so fragile. That is why relationships must be constantly nurtured. That is why relationships can only survive long term as both choosers (TPC) desire always to keep choosing one another.

The choosing of one another (TPC) to be in relationship is usually motivated by a need in the soul. Further, most marriages are predicated upon the expectation that my significant other will meet my needs at some level. Some marry in order to have sexual needs met. Some marry in order to find significance by helping another who is needy or who might reach a higher potential within the confines of this marriage. And on it could go.

Unfortunately, choosing another human being for relationship, which is based on having my needs met at a

fundamental level, is most often destined for failure before the relationship even begins. Desires in the relationship (even when they appears to be “other-centered”), may give rise to expectations which if not met will create turmoil deep within. This turmoil, based on either a failure to accomplish the desired improvement in the other, or their obvious disregard or disinterest over time in being improved, begins to churn in the soul of the care giver. When the churn reaches unbearably painful levels in the emotional center of the soul, “other-caring” turns into “other-loathing.” From here it worsens until the break in relationship (divorce) occurs, marriage or other relationship.

Truth, about self brings freedom -- The teachings of Jesus put forth this statement, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” For the most part, theologians and religious scholars and pastors and teachers tend to hang out with truth as those which are plainly stated in the scriptures. However, the context of the writings of the Holy Bible, in which we read Jesus’ teaching, is love from beginning to end. The scriptures start with a loving God, who loving created mankind, who desired to have a love affair with those He created, and even when they were extremely wicked, He made a way to restore the broken relationships that their “badness” had fractured, and God was so intent on that restoration that He introduced Himself into the human form and allowed Himself to be treated more abusively than any other human and crucified to die naked and suffocating to prove the full extent of His love.

(Unfortunately this was necessitated by the holiness of God which required that justice always prevail. So in order to allow us “hellians” back into the presence of God in the Garden of Eden, He had to satisfy His own justice. Since the “hell raising” we did required by law the penalty of death, He had to suffer that death for us. Then and only then was justice served in letting us go unpunished because someone had suffered that punishment in our place.)

For the truth to set a soul free, it cannot be abstract or external or apart from the persona itself. External truth puts us in bondage to a “perfect” standard of living in relationship. This external standard can not be satisfied by any human apart from the divinely imbued power of God. So in order to affect ourselves by truth, we must accept the truth about ourselves. First of all we have to see that truth or hear that truth from those outside of us who can see us

more objectively than we see ourselves. The universal blind spot of humanity prevents one from seeing themselves as through others' eyes.

We have all heard the expression, "... as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another..." Yet we skip merrily down the road paying no attention to the fact the iron must strike blows on iron to affect sharpening. We totally want the sharpening but not the attendant striking which must occur for that sharpening happen. This is caused by our tender egos and overly strong desire to be right and to hold onto our rights.

When we approach truth from an external perspective, we create rules of conduct and etiquette which govern what we say and what we do. The rules pile high. And they become virtually impossible to live by. The amount of energy and time it takes to live in accordance with these external truths is enormous. We try hard. We fail. We criticize our selves. We try harder. In a vicious cycle until we either die trying or give up altogether.

When on the other hand, we use the strikes of another to reveal the truth about us, we can first admit that we are not all that we thought we were. Then we can embrace who we really are. And once we can see the difference between these two, we can submit ourselves to the process of change. Now I am not suggesting for a moment that we embark on a journey into "behavior modification." That approach which has sailed on the prevailing winds for decades, if not for centuries, rarely produces permanent changes. You cannot solve behavior problems with radical forms of masochism or any form of self-restraint.

Behavior Modification, formula for failure -- The reason you cannot solve a behavior problem by forcing changes in behaviors is this. The problem of behavior is not a behavior problem at all. Behaviors are spawned by emotions which are spawned by beliefs. If what we believe to be truth about ourselves is indeed false, we act out in unbecoming ways because those beliefs make us feel badly about ourselves. Abhorrent behaviors emanate from the false beliefs. So if we uncover these beliefs, which are false about us, and discover and embrace the correct beliefs about who we really are, we have solved the problem rather than dealing fruitlessly with the symptoms.

Our beliefs might be that we are useless and worthless. This might trigger a rage because it is not fair that I am useless and worthless. This rage is then vented upon whoever is near us when that belief is triggered by someone pushing our button, so to speak. And pushing the button may be simply a word. So to disarm the button so that your reactions against the one pushing it will stop, we must identify the button (belief) that triggers the emotion, that triggers the violent action.

Some psychologists and counselors teach that instead of acting out of our emotions, we should carefully consider truth before we speak or act and then act out of truth. The problem with this idea, and it rarely, if ever works, is that the reactions which are spawned by deeply rooted, painful emotions are so instantaneous that it is too little too late to think about what you should have done or said. The ultimate cure for the violently reactive persona is not to eliminate the button pushing. That would require the death of all who would push it. Not practical or viable! The cure is the dismantling of the system of lies that one has come to believe about themselves. Once the lies are replaced with

internal truth about the inherent value, acceptability, and lovability of each persona, the button is rendered inoperative. In other words the persona is cleansed. Once cleansed, the persona expresses itself in wholeness.

This perspective came to me in an epiphany during a training session regarding anger management. As the instructor began to extol the virtues of thinking before speaking, I realized that this approach could never work for anyone who was natured like I am or who had a similar personality. As I pondered further, I realized that God Himself operates from emotion. God is love, the most desirable of emotions. But when God got pissed with mankind's willful, selfish, indiscriminate and wanton raping and pillaging of others to satisfy good old number one, that He maintained an anger so strong that He waited over a hundred years for the preparation of the ark of safety before He unleashed His wrath and silenced in death by drowning the entire population of the world except for those carried to safety by the ark.

I realized as well that since the mouth only speaks that which is plentiful in the heart, that my only hope would be to replace the nasty emotions in my storehouse of my heart with good ones. I choose love. That way when someone pushes my button, what would come forth, even before I could think about it, would be love and not the acid of my disdain or retaliation. Now this is obviously harder done than said. However with the cleansing of the soul comes the attendant power to do this as well. Because it is the cleansing of the persona that washes away the bitterness and malice using the cleansing agent, love. This love is of self, which makes me feel good about myself regardless of others' opinions or commentary about me. This wholeness enables me to not only love those who act kindly toward

me, but also to love those who would purposely do me wrong.

One of the mirrors of reflection which I use very frequently is the mirror of the original image in which I was created. As I see myself as the perfect reflection of my Father, Creator, God, I am strong enough and confident enough to realize that those who would spitefully use me, only do so because they are miserable because they believe the lies that cause them to feel lousy about themselves. In that state, as all of us are before the cleansing of the persona, they cannot help themselves. So I can now grieve for their pain rather than be angry with the reactions they express because of that pain. I can be patient with them. I can offer kindness in exchange for meanness and so forth.

Casting Motives --

One of Jesus' famous talks on the hillsides in Galilee includes this statement, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Though this truth is often quoted, it is seldom taught according to the spirit in which it was given. Jesus' was, after all, the most loving and kind persona in recorded history (both secular and sacred histories). Yet most religious teachers make the assumption that Jesus was referring to a mind that is not polluted with evil thoughts.

When contemplating the idea of "purity of heart," it is essential to consider the context in which it is used by Jesus. His teaching was all about "who God is" and "how God wants to relate to us." God IS love and has made us in His image to be lovers as well. When pure love is exchanged between two people, each will receive the communication of the other as positive and encouraging. Even constructive criticism is readily accepted and used to encourage and improve the one about whom the criticism is given.

Unfortunately, when the honeymoon is over, those same words of encouragement and steerage become venomous darts of a "beloved" enemy. Why this is true is not fully understood. But that it too often happens is generally known. So in essence, what happens is that the delivery of the communication may not change, but the reception has changed. Or it may be that both have changed. Nevertheless, what occurs is a corrupt communication which begins to erode the relationship. If not corrected, the relationship is destined to failure (divorce).

What Jesus meant when He talked about the "... pure in heart," was that the motive of the speaker (or doer) was right, wholesome, and intended for the good of the receiver.

He was not referring to sensuality. He was referring to relational purity. Relationships hinge on motives, ALWAYS. However the motives of a persona may be completely noble, yet received as ignoble.

What happens is this. When someone says or does something that hurts my feelings, I tend to step back but not engage in a dialog with the person in order to confirm that their intent was to hurt me. Yet, it is very likely that what hurt my feelings was not intended to do so. To be sure, some people will purpose to hurt our feelings. But the truth is that no one can hurt my feelings. Only I hurt my feelings (or let them be hurt).

Here is how this tends to work. You can likely play back some of your life's stories and see this for yourself. You speak to me in a sharp, curt manner. I assume you are angry with me or disappointed in me. You have had a very bad day and your tone of voice has nothing at all to do with me. Since I fail to take your "bad day" into account, I either start to argue with you striking back or I silently step away from you emotionally. This causes, although maybe only slightly, a fracture in our relationship. Continued occurrences of these encounters gradually widen the gap between us until the relationship is abandoned (divorce).

Now if, on the other hand, I had responded to your sharp, curt manner by considering two things our relationship could have actually been strengthened by the event. One of those things is that you are my friend and would never intentionally "hurt" my feelings. The second is that since you would not purposely hurt me, you must be experiencing pain in your own soul which I might be able to help with.

In the case of persons who are always mean to everyone, I could simply dismiss their sharp, curt manner as that they never affirm anyone and try to inflict pain on everyone. But in the case of a friend or lover, I have a vested interest in not dismissing them and to the contrary to be there for them in their time of misery and need.

It was Mothers' Day and a pretty one at that. My wife had gone to the beach with some of her teacher buddies for the week. I was at my daughter's home enjoying time with my two grandsons. Early on Sunday morning my 8 year old grandson shook me awake to help him prepare breakfast in bed for his mother. I was right there! What a joy to be able to celebrate my daughter's motherhood by helping my grandson prepare this special treat for her. I spent the morning with them, went to church with them and headed for home.

On the way to my home about 75 miles away, my son called to invite me to have a late lunch with he and his bride. Well what a nice thing for me to be able to help both my daughter and daughter-in-law celebrate Mothers' Day. And after a sumptuous meal with them I was ready to head home to relax. But that was not going to be the plan. God decided to slip another divine appointment in on me.

Much to my surprise, the Lord urged me to drive to the beach, buy some flowers for my own bride, and surprise her by this special touch for her on Mothers' Day. This would be the first time I had celebrated Mothers' Day with all of the mothers in my family. So, I headed for Myrtle Beach, about three and a half hours away. If I did not delay, I could be to the beach by around 10pm. So off I sailed, singing and enjoying the top down on the convertible.

Granted, it was a long ride, but my bride was certainly worth it. And I looked forward to her surprise when I arrived at her door with flowers when she least expected it. During the previous few weeks I had been trying to teach her this principle of hurt feelings often being caused by our own “wrong” receiving of others words and deeds. Well the lesson was about to unfold.

When I was about an hour from the beach, my wife called me to ask if I had fed the cats yet? When I told her I wasn't at home yet, she rebuffed me rather sharply saying that I should have been home long ago. I let her continue to express her dissatisfaction with me for a few minutes. When she finally asked me where I was, I told her, “I am bringing you flowers for Mother's Day.” The silence on the other end of the phone was almost deafening. The silence was broken by an apology and then a squeal of delight. We talked a little longer and then hung up.

A few minutes later, she called me back. She was really angry and hurt. One of her teacher buddies had acted like she was mad that I was coming to bring the flowers. I told her to give her friend the benefit of the doubt. After all they had been friends for over 30 years. And I reminded her that her friend was generally more excited about when her husband did things for her than when any one else's husband in the group did special things.

I urged my wife not to be angry, but assume the best motive of her friend and let it go. Nonetheless, when I arrived the Steak N Shake to meet her, she was still very angry and fuming about her friend's negative reaction to my coming.. To say the least, my flowers wilted in the heat of the emotional winds. Not too great a reception for a wild ride that would be a total of 7 hours and 350 miles on the road arriving at home after 3:30am.

The next morning I received a call from my wife. She told me how she had taken her friend for a walk on the beach and told her how hurt she was at the anger expressed about me coming down with flowers the night before. Her friend looked at her with an inquisitive look. "I wasn't mad with your husband. I was just shocked that he would come all this way just to bring you flowers and go straight back home."

I then reminded my wife that this was what we had been talking about for some time. We get our feelings hurt most often by assuming someone is trying to hurt us, when that is seldom their intent. The words of Jesus came through for us just a little bit louder that day. "... blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God..."

And so it is with God. Just like we presume about others' motives (often being mistaken and negative) we presume upon God's motive. We denigrate both the motive and the character of the one talking to us. Many times we even withdraw in silence. With repeated casting of wrong motives and withdrawals, we end up at a great distance from those we once loved, even God Himself.

Jesus words were not intended to be ethereal or philosophical. He was seriously trying to encourage His listeners to assume the best possible motive of others and to respond positively to them. Many altercations which happen in our society, road rage, jealousy, and so forth would not happen if we were simply "pure in heart" toward one another.

Relational cancer surgery, living and loving healthy --

The real truth here is that our brokenness and personal pain are what hinder us from living our best life, as Oprah Winfrey once heralded. Our healing is possible, but only through the surgical removal (by the scalpel of truth) of the disease in our souls which is the cancer of false beliefs about ourselves. So if you are experiencing a lot of frustration, depression, fear, anxiety or other such negative emotions, try to find a truth-full friend who will reflect what you cannot see in yourself. Let their iron strikes (words of truth about you) sharpen your eyesight so as to see and present for healing those things in you which are cancerous.

Once the persona is cleansed, the cancerous lies removed, we are free to love others selflessly. We are able to help others because we are not exhausted by our own illnesses. We become so happy with ourselves that we actually want to spread the joy around. And when others can no longer use lies and manipulation to enslave us and control us, we can move about to help others who are serious about healing for themselves. (You might liken this to the safety requirement of the airlines that you don your own oxygen mask first, so that you don't pass out before you can help others to don theirs.)

Many religious writings speak of personal sacrifice for the sake of others or a cause. Yet until we actually have a perfect sacrifice to offer, our deeds in behalf of others are likely to fall on those who will not only not appreciate it, but they will also get mad when our benevolence toward them stops flowing. The only way to minimize this abuse of our sacrifice is to be so clean in spirit that we can actually discern the motives and intentions of others. "I could never do that," you say. But alas, yes you could. You were engineered to be able to do exactly that. The only thing that

prevents you from discerning others' spirits is the distractions of the noise in your own sick persona. The noise caused by emotional turmoil blocks sensitivity to all but yourself.

The good news in this scenario is that when we normally think of a sacrifice, we conclude that someone must die. In some sense that might be the case. But in reality I can be a living sacrifice for others and not have to submit to my own physical funeral. I will have to die to some of the things I used to do to look out for number one. I will have to not do something for me in order to have time to do something for you. But that's ok. I get the immediate reward of seeing another blessed by my sacrifice. I get the eternal reward of the pleasure of God about my personal sacrifice for others.

Let me include a word of caution here. MOST RELIGIONS TEACH THAT THIS SELF SACRIFICE is the way to the healing which I have described in "Cleansing the Persona." This is putting the cart before the horse, so to speak. Certainly it is backward and therefore not functional. One scripture proclaims, "...faith without works is dead." So many run out to start good works to prove they have faith. Unfortunately it DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY. The natural by-product of faith is works. FAITH IS NEVER THE BY-PRODUCT OF WORKS. So we must reach that state of being in wholeness in relationships that our affection for others is so great that we cannot help but be other caring. It is like an overflow of our own internal peace and joy. And when the source of supply of that peace and love is God Himself, our well will never run dry. We will be a constant source of love and life without even trying. We won't be able to contain it. It will splash out of us. It will affect everyone who gets near us. And that is the ultimate in life.

Martyrdom is unbecoming and repulsive! So don't go getting off with some kind of martyr complex. No one is impressed. No one wants to be beholden to you. And no one wants to be around you, when you have a martyr complex. True martyrs don't go looking to become one, True martyrs have a humility and other caring that is beyond what most ever achieve. They generally have no clue that they will become a martyr.

On the other hand, those who become martyrs to causes that promote a martyr complex are mostly seen as terrorists. They are so devoted to some ideology or philosophy that they are happy to die and kill others while dying for their cause. Many innocents have been murdered for just such causes. Sometimes the cause about which they are zealous is a noble cause, but that never justifies murder of innocent persons.

So as you move on in your journey toward intimacy, love large, sacrifice for others only ever out of an affection for them, and keep the persona cleansed so that the supply of love from above will not be hindered by anything in you.

When love meets intimacy -- This might seem like an oxymoron. But it is not. We often are confused about what words mean. And in the case of the word love, there is extremely great variations in what people think love is and what love means. We often say we love things that obviously do not hold a candle to our affection for our most significant other. We sometimes even say we love vegetables. So my bride might think that I only care about her as much as I do vegetables. So it might be useful to create a baseline or a mutually acceptable definition of love. For the purposes of this treatise, we will restrict the definition to that which expresses affection for another human being.

The ancient Greeks in the time of Jesus of Nazareth had three words to define love. One was eros (erotic, sexual). Another was phileo (brotherly, familial). The third was agape (other-centered / other caring). Fortunately yet unfortunately there are also three words for love in the English language of today and for several centuries past. These are lust (self indulgence/self gratifying); like (trading favor/tit-for-tat); and love (selfless other caring). What is fortunate is that we have words to describe correctly what we want. Yet unfortunately we tend rather to use the word “LOVE” interchangeably with “lust” or “like.” There is no particular reason that this occurs. It just does.

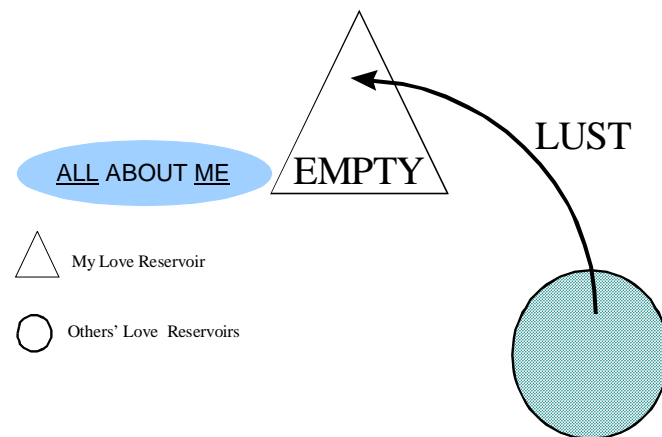
However, for the purpose of achieving the ultimate in relationships, we should call a spade a spade and call lust, lust and so forth. Let me be perfectly clear here. Most relationships are distorted or destroyed over the miscommunication or misrepresentation of our persona. What I mean is this. If I meet a woman and ask her to marry me, I tell her I love her and want her to be my wife. Yet the truth is that I want to marry her because I want to

have sexual relations with her. The word that would have been most accurate is to have said that I lusted for her and wanted her to marry me so that I could have sexual gratification and be morally upright.

Although, if I had been honest, she might have said, “No.” On the other hand she might have said yes to a completely honest admission that I just wanted her so that I could be fulfilled sexually. Maybe that would have been her reason to be married to me as well. At least by beginning with honesty we might have a better chance to have a long lasting relationship. The undermining problem here is that relationships based on “self” gratification rather than “other” gratification are more likely to end in divorce.

Let me offer diagrams with explanations to help clarify this most important of all communications.

DIS-GRACE OPERATING SYSTEM

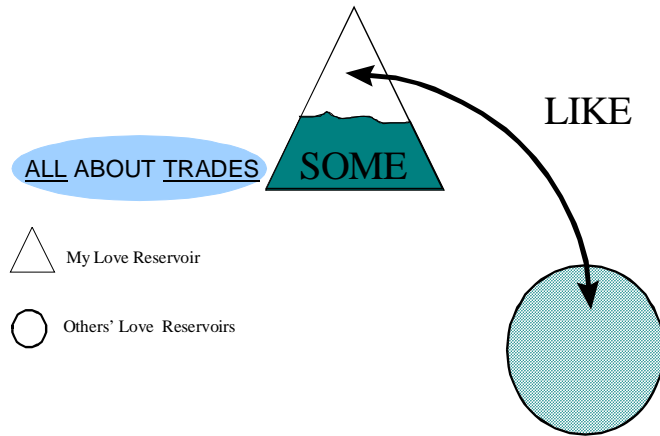


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In this first diagram we see that when we are completely needy, we draw from others for all of our supply of love. This state is essentially the form of love which is most correctly called LUST.

Intimacy in relationship – when love meets intimacy

PARTIAL GRACE OPERATING SYSTEM

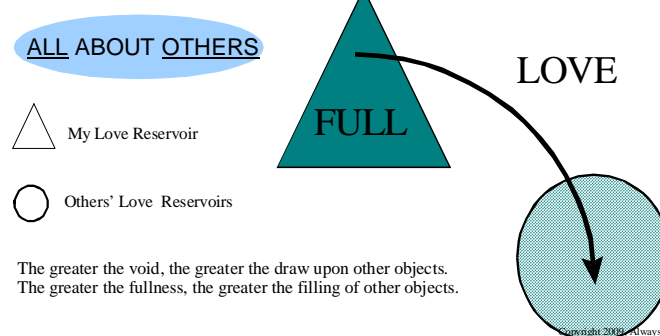


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In the diagram above we see the most common of human conditions wherein we have some love in us and need more. In this situation, we draw from others and sometimes let them draw from us. This form of love would be most correctly called LIKE.

Unconditional flow requires a fullness to overflowing.
Any deficit will cause a back wash.

GRACE OPERATING SYSTEM



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In this last diagram we see the most desired state to be in as we become better and better lovers. When we are so full of love that

Intimacy in Relationship – when love meets intimacy

we need no more and can dispense continuously, that might best be described as LOVE.

A helpful expression which I heard years ago was this:

“The essence of lust is getting

And lust can't wait to get!

The essence of love is giving,

And love can wait to give!”

I have obviously never forgotten this saying, but it has often helped me see my own selfishness time and again in my life.

The Garden of Eden: birth, banishment, return --

God made me for his glory. That is true. But the glory of God is to love and be loved with a God volume of love. Therefore in order for me to bring glory to God, I must be in relationship with God and love Him as fully as He loves me. Unfortunately I don't have the capacity to do that. But fortunately, God, like any perfect father, gives his children, who do not have anything to give him, that which He wants them to give Him back.

So God gives us this incredible, unconditional love so as to give us that which we need to give back to Him, that will bring Him glory. If you will remember, in the Garden of Eden, God made man and He said, "It is good." God made man, put him in a perfect place and gave him a perfect love. Night and day, every day, God walked in the garden and met with Adam and they communed and loved on each other.

When Adam & Eve were there together, this perfect love relationship with God continued and the glory of God was in the earth because we are on the earth and that God had given us his love to the fullest measure and we were giving it back. When the fall occurred Adam & Eve withdrew that love from God and squandered it on themselves. This broke the cycle of the glory of God.

From there began the process of the rest of God's plan, for His glory. His glory could not be complete until man had fallen. His glory could not be complete until man had fallen in love with himself instead of God. God's glory could not be complete until the love that the man, whom He had placed on earth to bring glory to Himself through this

divine love affair, came back to God of his own choosing and chose to love God back.

A God volume of love is still sourced only in the love of God being implanted in the man. While we were yet sinners, Christ (God) died for us. While we were yet loving ourselves, He went to the cross as a final and unequivocal statement of the God of the universe, "I love you fully!" Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friend.

When through His marvelous, providential sovereignty over our lives, God brings circumstances and situations into our lives so as to remind us time and again, "I love you child, no matter what you are doing. I love you as much on your darkest day as on your best day." God continued to repeat His words of love over and over in the circumstances of life for me which are His parables for me in my life to help me see His love for me. He had implanted His magnificent love in me so that I could give it back to Him.

All of the people on earth who do not respond in kind and give back to God the love that He implanted in them do not bring God glory. They try to bring glory to themselves. They wastefully spend this love on themselves and end up destroying themselves. A God volume of love that is not returned to God, but is hoarded selfishly, becomes like manna that turns to maggots. We become the maggots of the manna itself.

When the Apostle Paul spoke about the wickedness running rampant in those who choose to love themselves rather than returning God's love to God, he is actually describing this very thing, the manna that turns to maggots. When we

refuse time and again, over and over, to return God's love, which He implants, unconditional God-volume love, into our hearts, He then lets that love run so fully through us that it actually destroys us. Our wickedness runs so rampant fueled by a volume of love that was not intended to be wasted on selfishness, extracting everything from everyone around us which we could, foisting horrors upon each other of men and women abusing men and women until we completely destroy ourselves.

The magnificent love of God which has been given to each of us is not something to be trifled with, squandered, or heaped upon one's self. It is destructive when it is not continually dispense back to God. When we dispense the love of God, back to God, that is His glory.

Now when we look at the larger scope of humanity and we look at the kindnesses of man for one another and we look at the giving to one another, that giving, when it is a by-product of us returning the love of God in God volume back to God, people are blessed, restored and also drawn to that love of God. Our activities become some of the circumstances of their lives which are a part of their personal parables through which God will show them Himself, through which God will reveal to them that he is loving them with the fullness of the full volume of the love of the God of the universe.

When they too return the love of God back to God and join into the relationship with God in this magnificent love affair, they too become the glory of God. The glory of God is that He loves us without conditions, favors us when we do not deserve it, simply because he loves us and chooses to do so. The glory of God only occurs with respect to the glory of man being the glory of God in the earth when we

love God back in the same manner and give Him back His own love which He planted in us for that purpose.

The reason man is the highest of all creation. The reason there is no other creature ever having been created, not even the smartest animal or sea creature or fowl, is that God specifically designed the animals, fish and fowl for our pleasure. But God made us for His pleasure. He made us to be the glory of God.

Beth Moore has taught at numerous times that: The glory of God is in the earth. And the reason the glory of God is in the earth, is because we are on it. And the glory of God only occurs as we are on the earth when we simply give back to God that which is the most wonderful gift ever given to anyone and that is His full, immeasurable, immutable, unfailing, unconditional love.

So, rather than running from God, rather than heaping passions upon passions upon one's self, rather than drawing what ever you can extract from every one around you, looking out for #1, why not just turn around and give a hug to He who is #1. God, Jehovah, who sent His only Son (and part of the Godhead) to earth to make the final statement and give the final answer to the most significant and crying question in the heart of every man, "Do you love me?" God said resoundingly, "Yes!" in the person of Jesus on the cross, taking the punishment that was ours upon Himself..

Run if you like. Squander the love if you like. Destroy yourself and others if you like. You will find it not nearly as satisfying as you had hoped. In the end, most will find it

very dissatisfying and self destructive. But the choice is yours.

God is not interested in your service. God is not interested in your worship. God is not interested in your religious acts. Angels serve better. Angels worship better. But angels cannot be lovers of God as only we were created for that purpose. When we step into the love of God and are consumed by it, our service and worship are the natural affects of our affection for God. Both service and worship of a lover are more powerful and penetrating and permeating than all other forms of service and worship.

Step in to that which is the best of that the God of the Universe ever offered to anyone, anywhere. Step into the opportunity to be in the image of God, made to be an unconditional lover. When you love God fully with the love of God that He planted in your breast, you are the glory of God because those around you will actually see God and not you in what you do and say and they will be compelled to want the same love affair for themselves.

You will stop criticizing. You will stop heaping expectations upon others. You will stop creating misery, turmoil and emotional pain all around. There will be no interest in trying to be superior to others, to be seen, to be served, to be squandered upon. When you step in to the love affair and simply say "yes" to God and say "yes" to His beloved Son, who came to experience life at our level, communicate with us in our own languages, doing nothing but good, taking the punishment, which we deserved for our wrong doing by squandering God's love upon ourselves, and satisfying the justice of God which kept us from His presence due to our unholiness. He who knew no sin, paid the price for my sin, so that the justice of God

could be satisfied in my behalf, so that I could be reconciled, restored and allowed to return to the Garden of Eden in the place where God loves me with the fullness of His love and I love Him back with the fullness of His love which He implanted in me to do. And the glory of God is in the earth in me in the Garden of earth where I am right now.

The Garden of Eden is not a place somewhere on earth to be sought. The Garden of Eden is a place on earth that was bought. It was bought by the precious sacrifice of God of His own life proving the complete and unconditional love of God for His friend, me. when the love affair begins and roars to life, that ground upon which I walk is holy and feels like and actually is the fullness of the Garden of Eden and the love affair which began in that place.

Ultimate power bridled by ultimate restraint -- God's meekness is that He has the ultimate power as the sovereign of the universe and creator and giver of life to all. But that meekness also requires His full restraint in order that He does not destroy everyone who squanders His love on themselves. Because, if He destroyed all those who are self servingly destructive and only preserved those who are not, none of His glory of man in the earth [a love affair with god] could be His.

If at any time God began to destroy all those who did bad and keep alive only the good ones. There could be no love affair. There could only be love out of fear (love of-fear). And we would only be nice or good trying to return God's love out of fear. Yet since perfect love casts out fear, perfect love cannot coexist with fear. So the glory of God is in the earth because we are on it. But the glory of God is that God also gives us the free-will to choose to receive and return that love to Him or to raise our hands in defiance and declare "There is no God." or "I choose you not or believe you not." "I simply want to believe in science and me." And God says, "That is fine, because there is no pleasure for me, God, Jehovah, Creator of all, in having men and women who are nothing but puppets."

The God of the universe had to take the chance that every one on earth would squander His love on themselves in order to have the opportunity to have the utmost pleasure of a love affair with His created beings. Because you see love is a choice. But all relationships are two persona choices. You can choose to love me, but unless I choose to love you back, we cannot have a love affair.

So in order to have a love affair with anyone, God risked having a love affair with no one. He chose to love us and

offered us His hand in marriage, friendship, brotherhood, parenthood, and childhood. And in order for us to complete the love affair we must choose Him back.

There would be no pleasure at all for God for us to be puppets. So God dispensed His unconditional love toward us while we were estranged from Him so that we would have the capacity to have a love affair with Him. God chose to risk all because He knew that the pleasure that He would experience if even just one of His created beings said, "Yes, I love you back, I choose you back." His glory would be in the earth because His pleasure had been fulfilled.

Fortunately many come to the place where the personal parables God has put into their lives through the unique, magnificent orchestration of the circumstances through which each of us walk, so that we can know that He loves us through these circumstances and respond to Him. But the loving must be voluntary, otherwise it is not love at all.

Everyone who sees a couple who are in love with one another and watches them focus on nothing but the one beside them whom they adore, wants to have such a love affair for themselves. We are constantly striving to love and be loved. This is because We were engineered to be containers of a God volume love. But as containers of a God-volume love we are conduits through which that love flows. We will either be open to let that love flow through us or stop its flow to consume it selfishly. When it flows unhindered on through to others, the glory of God is manifest by the actions which result from that love. This flow enables others to experience through us that love and to step into their best possible love affair, a love affair with God.

Intimacy in relationship – ultimate power + ultimate restraint

So whether you are living in circumstances that cause you pain, grief, and sorrow and you want out of your misery, or whether you are the most religious person on earth and want more of the love of God, just say "Yes." to the love of God, receive it fully, and reflect it back to God.

Do you have intensity for God or intimacy with God?

Beth Moore related this story to us when she spoke at Phillips Arena in Atlanta at the Living Proof Live seminar "Full Redemption" in September, 2003. It was about how she came to have a passion for God's Word. As I relistened to this message in January of 2011 in preparation for using "Full Redemption" in a "WOMEN walking FREE" retreat at RELIFE Ministries International in May of that year, the Lord gave me pause and revealed one of the most significant truths to me that I have ever received in nearly 5 decades as a Christian. Read the story and then take in the revelation which follows:

Beth Moore speaking:

I was asked to teach a Sunday School class when I was in my mid 20s. By this time I was already doing a little speaking. But to be honest with you. I was the worst Sunday School teacher you have ever heard in your life. I'll tell you the reason why. Because it is hard to teach a Bible that you never even open.

An announcement in the church bulletin described a Bible doctrine class that was starting. I thought, O.K., alright I felt the call. I knew I was going to have to surrender. God was telling me, "You are pitiful. Go. Go. Go." So I went and here's what happened.

This dude, this wide, with a chest this thick, former football player, solid muscle, walks up to the podium and throws open his Bible and he begins to teach. I've never seen anything like it in my life. "You don't want to take this Word lightly!" he said loudly. "This is the God breathed Word! I suggest you inhale!"

I never even opened my Bible. I never wrote a note. While he taught, that big old football player cried over his love for the Word. He was the first person I ever saw teach with his white starched shirt pounding, because his heart was filled with zeal.

As soon as that class was over, I ran like a maniac to my car. I locked myself in it. And I screamed out loud, "Lord, I don't know what that was! But I want it! I want it! I want it! I want it!" And God took a stick to a stone in heaven. And He lit a match. And He stuck it in my heart. And I've had it ever since. When I stand up to teach, my heart just pounds, because I can't bear the joy of it. Sometimes I can feel God's presence so heavy on our heads I feel like I can't stand up! I can't stand up!

Later in the seminar Beth stated, "Some things are taught. And some things are caught."

God's revelation to the author of this treatise:

I knew that day that I needed to be "caught" with Buddy Walter's kind of zeal. But it was not until 8 months later that God revealed to me what it was that I really wanted to have as a believer. In May of 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland, as I hugged Beth in the receiving line after her taping of "The Patriarchs" Bible study, I felt like I was hugging Jesus and not Beth. I actually uttered those words. Not to her, but it just came out. I knew then and there that I wanted to be so full of Jesus some day that someone might hug me and think that they were being hugged by Jesus instead.

For the next two years, after God assigned to me a personal mentor such as Beth's Buddy Walters, I submitted patiently to all that my mentor had to teach me. I learned that I had developed an intellectual understanding of God and not an intimate relationship. Once released from mentoring in May of 2006, I knew that somewhere along that journey I had become passionate about Jesus and it showed in every area of my life, work, play, market, home, vacation.

God had promised to give me a passion for Him and had also asked me to take note of how my make-over had occurred so that I could share it with others. God wants every believer to be madly in love with Him. So as directed, I took note of the process or maybe more appropriately perspectives of God which changed. I know that the process is different for each person, but the Lord showed me that there are certain essential perspectives of God that every one must discover before they will become madly passionate lovers of God.

As the teachings for RELIFEic.org were put into transferrable form, these essential perspectives of God

became the focal point of the conferences and retreats. These perspectives are simple, Biblical, and irrefutable. They have nothing to do with doctrine, tradition, or denomination. They have only to do with the desire God has for every believer to be so "in love" with God that they cannot be silent about their lover. And this applies to any person regardless of color, race, or creed.

We had conducted men's retreats, MEN walking FREE, for a few months when we were led to create WOMEN walking FREE. In order to modify the teaching to be better suited to women, we were led to include these Beth Moore teachings. And as I heard Beth say that it was Buddy's zeal that had changed her life, the Lord said to me very clearly, "That was the wrong word. Yes, Buddy did have "zeal." But Buddy had something much much more. Buddy had intimacy." As I pondered what God had just said I realized that there is a tremendous difference between "zeal" and "affection," between "intensity" and "intimacy."

The Lord further clarified to me that you can have intensity without intimacy, but you cannot have intimacy without intensity. The major difference is this: *Intensity Leads with Ferocity and Spears while Intimacy Leads with Tenderness and Tears.* One reason the Jews do not recognize Jesus as their Messiah is that they were expecting an "intensely zealous" leader, but God provided and "intimately tender" Messiah. And the disciple should be like his master. As believer's in Jesus, we should be "intimate" not just "intense."

As I continued to explore the ramifications of this perspective I was overwhelmed at the simplicity and profundity it contained. Cooperation is fueled by tenderness while competition is fueled by ferocity. Most believers' intensity is mistaken for intimacy. Yet most

believers would prefer to be an applauded hero than an anonymous care giver. Yet our Master, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples the night before His crucifixion.

I then saw the disconnection between the church and her mission. We mistook the great commission as: "Go and convert people to Christianity, teaching them what to wear, what to say, what to do, and how to look like us." However, the great commission is this: "Go and make disciples who love like their Master." Then John 13:34 & 35 becomes true of the body of Christ. It is NOT our behaviors that lead people to Christ. It is our love, and only our love that will lead them in the way of our Master.

The icing on this cake is this. When you come to the point where you can love like Jesus (notice also Peter with Jesus in John 21), the Spirit of God can compel them by that love to become part of the Body of Christ. When your intimacy with God overcomes your need to intensely hammer God's truth into people, both saved and unsaved, you then and only then become a true disciple of Jesus. He loved unconditionally (both saved and unsaved). He showed mercy unconditionally (both saved and unsaved). He forgave unconditionally (both saved and unsaved -- Pharisees and Thief on the cross). And He unconditionally shows favor (both saved and unsaved).

The significance of this revelation is this. People without a marital relationship to God can live morally good lives, give to charitable causes, and treat each other with kindness. But **ONLY SPOUSES OF GOD can LOVE LIKE GOD!** When we fail to do so, we cannot be fishers of men, because LOVE is the only bait that draws them into our fishing nets or CATCHES them.

God is always the same, OR IS HE? -- This may not be true for you, but for most of my life I was puzzled by the fact that the Bible states that “God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Yet all throughout the Bible, there are myriad stories which would indicate that God is fickle and changes His mind and His ways all the time.

I did not waste tomes of time trying to figure this out. I simply lived my life in a state of confusion and wonder as to what God would do to me or for me in any given situation. I pondered quite often, “What is God's will in this or that circumstance?” I tried to use scripture as my answer book, but without an exhaustive index, I ended up playing “Spin the Bible” when seeking an answer to how to handle things.

Much of the time, I took stabs in the dark hoping not to offend God by making the wrong choice and “missing His will” for the matter. Sometimes I even felt like God might punish me with difficulties when I chose incorrectly. Yet I plowed on through hoping for the best. Maybe you have been there and done that too.

Fortunately, during my recent journey of discovery of perspectives about God that dispelled the confusion and brought clarity and peace, I came to this understanding. God is always the same! That is, His character, His nature, and His desire are always the same. While at the same time, His activities must vary depending on each circumstance. So appeared to be a paradox, turned out to be rather a paradigm. God Himself might state it this way, “WHO I AM, DOES NOT CHANGE, BUT WHAT I DO IS UNPREDICTABLE.”

Just as with all of our relationships wherein each person is different, so with God each person in the world is different. With varying personalities, affinities, and experiences, each person in our circle of relationship must be treated according to who they are, not a rigid set of rules. By this I mean that rules are stated to express the spirit of cooperation we desire to have between us and the other person in relationship with us. However, in healthy relationships we bend and flex the rules in order to accommodate each other's needs of the moment so as to nurture rather than control one another.

So when we look at God and that He has over seven billion persons to be in unique relationship with, His never changing nature prevails, but His activity set must be extremely varied to accommodate perfect parenting of each one. Also the fact that just as our human relationships change depending on maturity and circumstances, so does our relationship with God. So what He does in one circumstance may be quite different from what He does in a very similar circumstance which occurs at a significantly different motif in our experience of relationship.

So if you have ever been confused about the seeming fickle nature of God, remember that He IS love and everything He does is to promote love, but that may take on extremely varied activities in order to be the in the best possible relationship with each person on earth at every moment in time.

LOVE LIKE GOD!!! -- If you want to be a disciple of Jesus, love like Him. Don't think for a moment that discipleship has anything to do with activities and performance. If you could perform to God's level of satisfaction, Jesus died in vain. God wants what He lost in the Garden of Eden. God wants the relationship to be restored. HOLINESS as God defines it is "everything in right relationship." And it was that perfect relationship which Adam and Eve destroyed in the Garden. But we can go back to the Garden, by re-establishing the seamless, unbroken, fellowship with God that was lost by the original pair.

If what you are doing to improve your faith and relationship to God appeals to the heroic in any way, beware that you are only fooling yourself. Pride is the antithesis of Jesus' persona. You might say that pride is "anti-Christ." Unconditional love is the antithesis of lust which is self focused. Jesus' way is the way of tenderness (INTIMACY) not the way of ferocity (INTENSITY). However, being ferociously tender to the point of tears of identification with others' pain and sorrow IS THE EFFECT OF THE GOSPEL.

The Gospel of Jesus is "GOOD NEWS." The good news is this: God loves us as much on our worst day and he does on our best day. God is the ultimate, perfect parent. The good news is this: God wants to share Himself with us as the ultimate, perfect spouse. The good news is this: God wants to walk and talk with us all the time as the ultimate, perfect friend. The good news is this: God wants to watch our back and secure our safety as the ultimate, perfect sibling.

In short, the "good news" of the Gospel of Jesus is this: God loves us always, and wants us to love Him back. He proved it by giving His life for us. And He wants us to do likewise. If your affection for others is conditional in any way, it is NOT from God. Compare notes of 1 John 2 about relationships.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

love is perfect affection for another

hatred is perfect affection for self

sin is anything which distorts or destroys relationships

holiness is everything in right relationship

discipleship is relating to others as Christ relates to others

worship is the activity of the human soul

evidence of these:

the works which are spawned by love and holiness

works are either a by-product of love

or a manipulation, coercion, and deception

We have not because we refuse to receive! -- “you have not because you ask not...” (viz. ask with a closed spirit).

There are times when we wonder why people are so resistant to change. Even people who claim to be progressive and that they relish change, in many areas of life are the most resistant to change. And it is at this very point that most people cease to progress in their spiritual journey with God. Obviously this point is at a different place for each of us. Yet, there seems to be a place for most if not all of us to drive a stake in our spiritual ground and refuse to allow any further changes to our faith.

Interestingly enough, we actually believe, in some rather illogical way, that we are more than justified in doing exactly this. The justification seems to be largely the same for each one as well. At some point, the consequences of allowing any further changes to our ways of believing threaten one or more of our core beliefs. And to allow one of our foundational beliefs to crumble might radically affect one or more of the others.

A good example of this is a table talk discussion over a weekly breakfast which we affectionately call "**B**reakfast **I**n **G**alilee" as its primary focus is to be with our Master, Jesus, in conversation around the table which engages His Spirit with ours in an effort to improve our relationship with Jesus and with each other. The "BIG" breakfast is a sumptuous bill of fare that satisfies the most aggressive hunger. The dialog at the table is similarly satisfying to the most insatiable hunger for spiritual truth. The bottom line for the gathering is to keep all conversation aligned with our mutual desire to understand the Grace of God and His perspective on relationships. When ever the conversation drifts from this central theme, one or more of the people at the table

will request that the conversation return to grace and relationships.

One morning several months ago, a young man joined us at the "BIG" table and sat without much comment as he listened intently to the 10 or so others gathered there. He left without comment, not to be seen again for several weeks. When he did return, he talked quite a bit and asked numerous questions. He admitted that nearly everything he had believed had been either challenged or refuted. Yet that was certainly neither the intent nor the tone of the first breakfast. Yet as he stated clearly, "I knew that what you all were talking about had to be true because of the atmosphere of unity and mutual acceptance of all at the table. Over time, this man courageously faced the challenge of each element of his faith. He began to be comfortable asking God questions and getting some answers of his own.

In recent months in my own journey with God, my beliefs have not only continued to be challenged but also to be modified as God has revealed more and more truth or corrections to what I had formerly accepted as truth. As this morphing continues, I have found myself in juxtaposition to many who gather with me to engage in these conversations with and about God and his grace and relationship to us.

Obviously we all change or accept new truth at varying rates. Further, since each of our experiences of life is radically different, our journeys differ in vector, both direction and length. Obviously, they also differ radically in specific content. However, in the grand scheme of things the desire of God is that every one of us might establish the most personal and deeply satisfying of relationships with God Himself. In His sovereignty, while not forcing us to

do a single thing or violating our free will, He does manage our circumstances as the perfect Father to give us ample opportunity to know His love for us and to respond in kind.

Recently I have been frustrated greatly by my own spouse's contradictory expressions toward me and my expressions of what I believe to be "newly discovered" truths which are deepening my affections for God and others. It seems that time after time she will agree with some new truth when we are discussing it in private and then abandon me and take sides against me when in public venues someone disagrees with my "new" point of view. This was reaching relationship threatening proportions when we had a major blow up over a technological issue.

Now, mind you, I am a computer scientist by trade for over 4 decades. And the prestigious clientele and high billable rates for my services would indicate that I am at the top of the computer science class vocationally. Yet when she was describing a computer problem, I simply and accurately diagnosed it and gave her the solution. She immediately began to argue vehemently with me on this point. Now I go into a rage as I realize that this technology idiot has the audacity to claim that my natural acumen, high IQ, and incredible accomplishments in my field do not indicate that I am capable of an accurate diagnosis or cure on a matter of simplest gravity.

So after an explosion that might move a mountain or two and a string of epithets that would make my pastor run for cover and an intense statement of the insanity that her response contained and after I regained my composure and she stopped sobbing, I realized that my wife would likely have argued with Moses about one or more of the commands written on his tablets! So in these few moments

of relationship stress, one of the most profound of God's revelations to me so far has emerged. The revelation is this: "When something I say threatens another's beliefs about themselves, others or God, they will not only say foolish (if not insane) things, but they will also defend their foolish response to the death."

Now I am perplexed as to how we can dismiss so summarily another's obviously higher intelligence, or greater acumen, or superior training and make foolish, inane, senseless judgments about what they are saying in their field of expertise while we possess little or no exposure or knowledge of same. Yet, I guess maybe our pride is the source of all such foolishness. It does say in the book of Proverbs, "...even a fool, if he keeps his mouth shut might be considered wise..."

So having this new revelation at hand I can now stop associating my being "pitched under the boat," so to speak, in spiritual matters as simply a part of the normal modus operandi of the person who is rejecting my expressions of insights or revelations. Having seen this as their normal behavior puts everything back into perspective. You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink. In the same manner, you can offer every bit of wisdom, knowledge, insight, or revelation to others, but they will only benefit from those which they choose to receive and embrace.

The good news is that neither my wife nor I were carried to the undertaker today and that I will likely stop asking her to support me in any way as it seems obvious to me now that she can't help herself in these regards. The bad news is that given human nature and our pride which tends to protect itself at all costs, we are our own worst enemies when it

Intimacy in Relationship – receptivity, mostly low

comes to the embracing of "new" truth which could radically alter our lives for the good.

The mind of Christ -- Let THIS MIND be in you!!!

Philippians 2:5-8 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

If "GRACE WORKS," my brothers, it should produce in a disciple of Jesus Christ an exact likeness to the disciple's Master, Jesus Christ Himself. If "GRACE WORKS," it should produce men and women who are so empty of their original glory (pride) that they become so anonymous and insignificant, that all that is seen in them is the living, loving presence of Jesus Christ Himself. If "GRACE WORKS," it would produce in me that same attitude as was in John the Baptizer, who said, "He (Jesus) must increase, and I must decrease."

Yet the prevailing winds of "the Christian religion" among the men of NCS, are that once I have come apart from the organized church and become open with other men and authentic about who I am, both good and bad, that I should then pursue my "destiny." And this destiny, according to the now very popular John Eldredge, is to "find my calling and pursue it with all due diligence" and "to rescue the maiden." Yet these two things appeal to the herioc affinities of a man, which is essentially a PRIDE FULL pursuit.

If, on the other hand, once we have set ourselves apart from the "machine of religion," we learn to "LIVE IN OUR IDENTITY" which would be as Philippians 2:5-8 states as

quoted above, neither pride nor heroism enter the picture, both of which will cause me to encounter the RESISTANCE OF GOD rather than His assistance.

Our Identity, my dear brother, is that as stated in John's gospel in chapter 14 that the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit has come to abide within us. He has taken residence within our hearts, NOT TO EMPOWER US to live lives that imitate Jesus, but rather TO LIVE GOD'S VERY OWN LIFE through us. Any appeal to the pride of MY PERFORMANCE of my destiny (calling) or duty (save the world), is an appeal to the flesh nature in me and if pursued can do no other than increase my pride in having performed well FOR the Master. Yet, His desire, is that I will "get out of His way" and let His Holy Spirit within me, activate my persona (heart, soul, mind, and body) to actually BE JESUS, manifest again in the flesh RIGHT NOW and in EVERY NOW!

There is definitely a great move of God going on right now which is calling out His men and culling out those who are posers. Yet just because we come out, does not make us completely activated according to who Christ is. For now, it simply means that we are meeting in a different place where we are not hindered by the feminine influence of the "machine of the christian religion." Yet if we do not change the focus of our lives from our own "doing for God" to be "abandoned to God," we will have only changed the venue but not the value!

This entire treatise on "Ultimate Relationship" has been written that you might not only understand what it means to be intimate in relationship, especially relationship to God, but that you will also have been given insights and revelations which would enable you to release yourself to

Intimacy in relationship – think like this!

the control of the Holy Spirit completely. To that end, I continue this final chapter which exposes the scriptures about Our Lord Jesus Christ as it is the image into which God has predestinated that we as "believers in Jesus" will become IN THIS LIFE if we but choose to "... let Him increase WITHIN us, as we shrink back to let Him live INSTEAD of us..."

As we look at the life of our Lord Jesus, we see rather polar opposite character from that of the natural man.

He loved We lusted

He became anonymous

We want to be seen and applauded

He was other-centered We are self-centered

He was unconditional in His love

We are conditional in our love

He was a follower We want to be leaders

He was full of grace We are gracious

(not equivocating on truth while favoring always)

(compromise truth to save feelings)

He was selfless We are selfish

He was abandoned to God

We are infatuated with ourselves

He was responsive We are responsible

He was intimate We are intense

He was

He gave We want to be given to

He saw We want to be seen

He served We want to be served

Intimacy in Relationship – think like this!

His discipline is training

Our discipline is trashing

He led with tenderness and tears

We lead with ferocity and spears

He was available We are busy

He cared not about His reputation

We guard our reputations at all cost

He blesses We want to be blessed

... You might want to expand on this list of contrasts
between Christ and us ...

Obviously, in the first century, there was an amazing Christ-likeness in the believers in Jesus. They, knowing that it was very possibly could mean their death, as with Stephen in Acts chapter 8, still stepped into the faith. They abandoned all in order receive the forgiveness of sins and the very life of Jesus. Yet we stumble on, distracted by every thing around us, rather than being totally, only, ever, always attracted to our Husband, Jesus!

If you read the life story of Oswald Chambers, "Abandoned to God," you might find an amazing parallel to your own life in terms of trying to discover the image of Christ in your daily life. As with most of us, we strive to please God by discovering and using our spiritual gifts and our natural talents. Yet we become frustrated when we still have bouts with sin in our lives over which we think we should eventually have full victory but do not. Or we become exasperated at the constant turmoil of difficult circumstances and difficult persons with which we must contend. Or we become disenchanted with a lack luster life

where no one seems to want our Jesus. Or ... (you fill in the blank).

But, thankfully, Oswald came to the "end of his own self sufficient attempts" to live for God, and rather "abandoned himself to God." You see, living the Christian life is NOT POSSIBLE. Only Jesus could then or can now LIVE THE CHRIST-IN life (Christian).

So to be sure, no one can live for Jesus. Only those who abandon their entire beings and agendas to God will ever experience the life of Jesus, which is the glory of God, and our only blessing. The blessings of God are neither material nor experiential. The blessings of God are lives changed by the power of the living Christ within us. But if we keep the Holy Spirit of God at bay, or at best confined to a shoe box, in a closet, in a room, in the basement of our souls, our lives neither reflect God's image nor affect anyone else for His glory.

Again, to be clear about who Jesus was, is, and is to come, the attitudes and actions of the one into whose likeness I will be made are found in the four gospels of the New Testament of the Bible. Rather than to list them here, I suggest that you abandon all other pursuits of Scripture for a while and take the time to make your own list of the characteristics of Jesus life. DO NOT look for activity lists. LOOK FOR demonstrations of LOVE!!! Don't hesitate to chase through the rest of the New Testament for more perspectives of the character of Jesus.

As you create your list, ponder these thoughts from the powerful, pertinent, prolific pen of the Apostle Paul:

Philippians 2:1-16 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, :2 Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. :3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. :4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: :6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: :7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: :8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: :10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; :11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. :13 For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. :14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: :15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; :16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain.

PERSPECTIVES of INTIMACY

-- Attraction or Distraction

I do believe that, in our marriages, friendships, parental relationships, and fraternal relationships, nurture is essential to the promotion of longevity and satisfaction in them. As we attempt to become and/or remain in an intimate, passionate, devoted, and deeply satisfying relationship in each of these areas, we must do everything possible to increase attraction to and not distraction from each person in each relationship. Therefore, any and all teaching about attitudes, actions, and speech, should be focused on attraction rather than distraction or worse yet detraction from the nurture of each one.

Yet it never ceases to amaze me, that most people do many things that either detract from or distract from healthy relationships. While at the same time, they do very few things to attract them to the ones with whom they claim to have or desire to maintain relationships. An example of this would be marriage. This relationship is based on romance and mutual delight. There are very few things a man can do, for instance, to romance his wife. These include bringing her flowers, taking her to dinner, listening to her as she talks about what is important to her, calling her often each day just to chat, and so forth. Yet as the marriage matures, the man usually stops doing the romantic things and spends his time on distracting or detracting words, actions, and attitudes. When the honeymoon begins, neither spouse can do anything wrong. Over time, with enough distraction and/or detraction neither can do anything right. Then divorce is imminent. And so it is with relationships of all kinds.

Karl Marx once stated, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” And he was more correct than most religious

people care to admit, especially evangelicals. As a matter of fact, religious word, religious activity and religious attitudes are the most subtle and most destructive force in relationships between God and mankind. Since the supposed purpose of religion is to connect on to God, it seems almost insane that religious systems actually introduce myriad distractions and detractions from that connectedness. So it would seem more than sane to rethink and re-engineer religion, especially “Christianity” since its basic tenet and distinctiveness is its proclaimed “relationship” with Jesus.

-- Authenticity and Transparency

Most of us are familiar term, “poser,” which is basically anyone who pretends to be something that they are not. Another way of looking at this is “wearing a mask” to hide who we are behind a façade of what we want people to think about us. Either way you look at it, when we try to hide the things about ourselves that will cause people to reject us, we may be successful and stay in their good graces. But is ever we let down our guard, many will abandon us exclaiming that we have sorely disappointed them. Yet we have set ourselves up for this disappointment by keeping a secret about who we really are or what we really think.

One of the most useful things ever expressed to me by a marriage counselor was this: “You be you. Let her be her. Don’t try to read the other person’s mind and then present that “façade” to them. If you still have enough in common to maintain a relationship, do so. Otherwise terminate the relationship.”

Even the Scriptures bear this out in I John chapters 1 and 2. We are encouraged to walk in the light as Jesus did. Many

have tried to act like they think Jesus would have acted in His time. But the truth is that this passage goes on to explain that “walking in the light as Jesus was in the light” is to be honest with yourself and others. When we live authentically and transparently with no secrets we can then and only then have meaningful and lasting relationships.

Be completely honest about who you are before you ask someone to be your friend. If what they see is what they get and they choose you for who you really are, your chances of a long lasting and mutually satisfying relationship are exponentially larger than if you put on a façade to try to get them to “like” you.

-- Respecting the image of God

Knowing that we and every fellow man on planet earth was made in the image of God, cast the noblest motives on every interaction that is possible. Even when someone acts out of character, because of personal pain, brokenness, or dire circumstances, assume that devoid of these extenuating events, they would be noble. Instead of being angry with the manner in which they communicate with you, grieve for them and whatever it is that is causing them to act in a manner which is not consistent with their design.

-- Living in constant forgiveness

Reflect on our discussion about the Mark of Cain which is a direct statement by God Himself that anyone who metes out judgment on another will receive a seven-fold judgment on himself. Vengeance belongs to God alone. He will right every injustice. It is His nature. And that “vengeance belongs to God” is an absolute is confirmed by this mark on Cain. As a matter of fact, it is personally damaging to insist on taking out vengeance on others. And since we do

not have the authority to either condone or to condemn any one's behaviors, it is not only wise to leave all judgment to God, it is imperative for your own personal peace to release all others' expressions of life to God's purview and parenting.

Insert here >>>> 5 pages of "mark of Cain".

-- Receiving fluently from God

Most of the time, we expect little from God except for His stern words of disappointment when we fail Him. Yet we too readily forget that God is never disillusioned with us because He never had any illusions about us in the first place. He knows we are weak and foolish and have a history of messing up.

We tend to lose sight of the fact, that as the perfect father, God wants for everything to work out for our good and not our harm. He may be disappointed and grieve for us when we mess thing up, be He never stops loving us with the fullest love He possesses. Our problem is accepting this essential truth. God may challenge us with difficult circumstances to test our progress toward His perfect image, but He will never NOT love us.

The common graces of God are pouring out all the time on the just and the unjust. If we are not looking for them, we can miss them. Be on the constant watch for the good things in every situation and you will be amazed and delighted. We can give thanks until we become thanks or we can bitch and moan about the things that are not going just the way we want them to. Receiving the good things from God's hand is a choice. So choose His goodness.

Choose His steerage. Choose His point of view. And you will begin to experience His peace that defies understanding.

BoB to complete

-- **Drawing Near [Practicing His Presence]**

-- **My rights, my only offering**

-- **My pride, pulling the weeds**

-- **Abiding, my only need**

-- **The Comfort of God**

One of the most profound utterances ever repeated to me was shared by a friend whose pastor had made this statement as he walked from the pulpit toward the exit doors of the church. When later asked if those were notes in his sermon or spontaneous utterances of the Holy Spirit he replied, "I don't remember even saying those words." So it is my belief that God wanted me to hear those words as they sum up what is expressed in this book about experiencing the peace of God which passes all understanding. His words were, "The comfort of God is wrapped in my release of my control over my life."

INVESTMENTS IN INTIMACY: a personal journey

\$5,000 loan to FL couple [in need, helping others in need]

House journey 5166 [building, on bankruptcy]

Home Away From Home [displaced, but all the way home]

Always-There [hot line, crisis has no clock]

Meadow Grass [A prophecy, it keeps growing]

RELIFE [reaching Christians for Christ]

OAK Adventures [Finding God in nature, through nature]

Affection, spawns affects: you get to choose what you love
and the depth of that love

What we do with each other is determined by how we feel
about each other

Affects of intimacy

By-products: ministries, abundant life, freedom, peace

How it began:

excerpts from Rob Bell's "everything is spiritual"

quantum physics = relational strings of energy

DNA, a map in every cell for the entire body!

Why it went bad: the first divorce

Persona self worship

Give me, see me, serve me

If I did all of the work, but you got all of the glory, would
I be delighted???

Intimacy in relationship – new perspectives

If I say, “I forgive you,” but want to see you get your just deserts, I HAVE NOT forgiven you!!!

Anguish of change

First thesis “...neither do I condemn you”

Condemning / condoning Matt 7

“What is judgment ...?”

Cycles of Insecurity / Addiction

Insecurity, catalyst for addictive.

Cycles of Failure. / Grace

Insecurity, cycle of failure

Extreme situations -- tend to push us into our natural propensity to look for principles of wisdom to enable us to advise those who need counsel. We generally develop principles, in order to take the guess work out of the advising. And, although principles have value in giving us a good back drop or filter for the advice we give, they also leave us open to being poor advisors.

We have developed principles for civilized society (laws) in order to provide a “safe” place for those who wish to live in community to do so. These laws create well defined boundaries for behaviors which are acceptable for members of the community. When some in the society break the laws, the commensurate penalties for infraction are applied. When the laws which are broken are regarding violent crimes, the penalties include separation from the community in confined spaces for the protection those outside those confined spaces. Usually these confined spaces are called jails or prisons.

When we get into relationships, and that obviously is the venue for all counseling, we may establish principles otherwise called policies to use in a similar manner in order to protect persons from abuses as well. We tend to create even more policies because of the emotional consequences of abuses which are not of a bodily nature. Now to be sure, in the case where a counselor may not have adequate training or experiential wisdom, these policies would mitigate in favor of the safety of the one advised.

Let us take a specific example. A male counselee has revealed that his spouse is physically violent with him to the point of bruising and sometimes to breaking his bones. Our policy might be that he must leave the domicile so as to protect himself from bodily harm. (I specifically used the male as the victim for two reasons. One is that we mostly assume that it is always the woman who is the victim. The other is that we tend to make policies based on the assumption that we are protecting the maiden. These kinds of policies are sourced most often from our nature as men to be more protective of women than men.

Intimacy in relationship – extreme situations

Therefore the policies are biased, rather than taking into account several facts about men and women which are radically different from one another.)

The problem with policies of this nature is that they leave no room for discernment on the part of either the counselor or the counselee. They also generally mitigate in favor of bringing a temporary divorce (separation) in the relationship which may, in fact, be the very opposite of what should be done in the situation. And for certain, these policies, which are “iron-clad,” leave no room for advising the counselee to confer and “obey” the counselor above all counselors, God.

Many times the one who is being violently abused, actually starts the fight by poking the other person and agitating them until they can no longer tolerate the attack. In such cases it would take the patience of Job (or maybe God Himself) to refrain from the violence of the abuser thus invoked. In such cases it might be better to advise that they stay in the situation but change their behaviors. Of course the counselor must provide other advice which enables them to do this.

Long Stories Short -- In our “immediate gratification” society, we are often wanting to hear the short version of the other person’s story. Yet, unlike microwave cooking, telling abbreviated versions of stories cannot fully convey the message that the teller is trying to communicate. Since the purpose of all communication is to transfer information from one to another accurately and with proper understanding on the part of the listener it is better to tell the long version rather than risk that the entire communication is a waste of everyone’s time.

Image, if you would, that Jesus is sitting on the hillside delivering His famous “Sermon on the Mount.” He has been directed by God to say exactly what is recorded for us in scripture. But when He gets part way through His sermon, He senses a drift in the audience away from His message. As a consequence, Jesus, cuts the message short so that everyone can get on down to the watering hole for a drink. In this case, not only did the hearers on the hillside get short changed, so would all the generations to come.

Here are some hopefully helpful guidelines:

If the story is worth telling, tell the whole thing.

If you have nothing to say, “Shut up”

If you have something to say “Speak up”

If you have no interest “Gather wool” and let those
who want to hear the whole story hear it
and be blessed!.

Every man's war!

Cultures that rage against the soul, especially mine.

Describe culture vices which restrain our faith and limit our
receptivity

