

“How to Get Close to God”

Allan Pole on Saturday evening, August 27th, 2022



Theme: God does not have favourites, but He *does* have intimates.

Text: Luke 7:36-50

Here's a thought: Thomas Merton concluded, "Pride makes us artificial, and humility makes us real."

Early one morning fire broke out in a house on a narrow street. A policeman on duty sounded the alarm. Before the fire engines could get to the scene, however, flames were leaping high into the air. Suddenly a young man appeared at an upper window in his pyjamas. Firefighters quickly placed a ladder against the burning building. But to everyone's dismay, he refused to come down, shouting that he had to get dressed first. The firemen pleaded, "Come as you are! Come as you are!" but to no avail. They tried to climb the stairs from below, but wind-swept flames turned them back. When a rescuer attempted to enter through a window, the heat and smoke forced him away. Suddenly the stairs gave way, and the roof fell in. The man had waited too long, and the building collapsed with him.

How much greater tragedy awaits everyone who (as John the Baptist preaches in Matthew 3:7) refuses to "flee from the wrath to come." Many ignore or reject God's provision of salvation, safety and intimacy with Christ and choose to get dressed up in their clothes of self-righteousness. Their delay could cost them their souls.

We read of one such man in Luke 7:36-50:

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. 39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner." 40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me,

teacher,” he said. 41 “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said. 44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.” 48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” 50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” NIV

God looks for those who are:

Intentional (Luke 7:36-37)



Jesus' fame had become widespread, so He probably had many invitations for dinner. We can only guess at Simon's motives for inviting Him. Not all Pharisees were critics of Jesus, so Simon might have had a sincere desire to learn from this young rabbi. But Simon's failure to offer ordinary courtesies to his guest makes this motive unlikely. Simon might have planned to use the occasion to trap Jesus and criticize Him.

Simon might have liked to associate with celebrities. Jesus was very popular then, so Simon might have wished to bask a bit in Jesus' limelight.

Guests at a banquet customarily reclined around the table, each resting on his left arm and eating with his right. Their feet would be away from the table, making them accessible to anyone nearby. Uninvited persons would sometimes stand around the room's walls watching the guests - another way the host could flaunt his affluence and influence.

Unlike the relatively casual reception that the Pharisee offered Jesus, there was one who chased Him down. This uninvited guest was a woman of the town, a well-known sinner. While she is not explicitly called a prostitute, this is a

common inference. This woman had probably heard Jesus teach, and that He was at Simon's house. She came bringing an alabaster jar of perfume, which was named after a town in Egypt that made them.

Simon, a wealthy and highly educated religious leader, invited Jesus into his home and rather flippantly, disrespectfully and unknowingly entertained the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The woman showed a much better understanding of this young rabbi's identity. She intentionally pursued Jesus with reckless abandon, not considering what was probably her most treasured earthly possession worth keeping when getting to meet Him. Her perfume, after all, was much more costly than Chanel Number 5, perhaps worth more than a typical year's wages!

People often copy this Pharisee by wanting to appear religious, but this woman provides a valuable lesson for us, reiterated by the prophet in Jeremiah 29:11-13:

11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." NIV

The secret to getting close to God is to be so desperate that *everyone* and *everything* else pales in comparison. We are on our way when we abandon all other pursuits for fulfilment.

Have you been wondering why He does not seem so real to you? Chances are, you are not desperate enough to pursue Him. You are probably distracted by something or someone else. A starting point to change this is to ask Him to kick all the props out from under you and to bring you to the bottom of the spiritual ladder. You can then, in desperation, begin to focus on Him alone.

God looks for those who are:
Intentional

Humble (Luke 7:38-39)



Once in Jesus' presence, this woman was so overcome that she wept freely, her tears falling upon His feet. Then she let down her hair, an act considered quite

improper in public, and wiped His feet with her hair, pouring her perfume on them as she did.

Kissing another's feet was often done to express affection and reverence or before making an important request. Kissing the feet of princes displayed subjection and obedience.

Simon watched all this without saying a word, but he was thinking in typical Pharisee fashion. "If Jesus were a prophet, he said to himself, "He would not permit a woman like this to touch him." He concluded that Jesus was *not* a prophet.

The contrasts continue between the religious leader and this woman. He was dignified in his approach to Jesus, while she was most *undignified*. He was proud, and she humbled herself before Him.

Whales communicate with each other, and one message applies here. One whale sounded this caution to his dear mate, "Better watch it; when you get to the top and start to blow, that's when you get harpooned!"

What's true at sea is also valid on land. Two people who lived about a thousand years Christ exhibited contrasting approaches to worship: David and his wife, Michal. We read in 2 Samuel 6:14-16, 20-23:

14 David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, 15 while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. 16 As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. **20** When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" 21 David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel - I will celebrate before the LORD. 22 I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour." 23 And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death. NIV

King David and this woman in Luke 7 lived a thousand years apart and at opposite ends of the socio-economic ladder, but they both understood that if they humbled themselves before God, He would lift them up. They knew that pride was incompatible with closeness to the Lord.

American theologian Thomas Merton (1915-1968) concluded, "Pride makes us artificial, and humility makes us real."

How concerned are we with how we look when we worship? Are we worried that people might brand us fanatics? We limit our intimacy with God when we are distracted by this. We must decide what is most important - our relationship with Jesus or what people think of us.

God looks for those who are:

Intentional

Humble

Grateful (Luke 7:40-50)



Jesus knew what Simon was thinking, so He told a parable, a story to illustrate a point. In it, two men fell into debt - one for five hundred denarii and the other for fifty. A denarius was a coin worth about a day's wages. When neither could pay, their creditor forgave them both. Jesus then asked, "Which of them will love him more?"

Simon missed its significance and answered rather casually, "I suppose the one that had the bigger debt cancelled."

"You passed the first part of the test," replied Jesus. But Simon failed the second part. The woman came in humility, sought forgiveness, and did what Simon should have done as a proper host. Where the soil was dry and dusty, and the feet in sandals, frequent washing of the feet was not a luxury but a necessity for comfort and health. Under these circumstances, it was as much a part of hospitality for a host to see that someone washed his guests' feet as it was to provide them with food or a place for relaxation.

Simon had not offered to wash Jesus' feet when He entered his house, but this woman had bathed His feet with her tears. Simon had not offered Jesus a kiss, a customary greeting from a host for his guest, but the woman had continually kissed His feet. Simon had not anointed Jesus with oil, an act of courtesy and hospitality toward a guest, but the woman had poured her cherished perfume on His feet.

Jesus shocked his host even more. Jesus said to the woman in verse 50, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." To a pious Pharisee, such a statement smacked of blasphemy, for they rightly believed that only God could forgive sin. But they kept their objections to themselves, fearing that another challenge to Jesus would only add to their humiliation.

This woman was deeply grateful for her forgiveness. The self-righteous Simon, however, had felt no need to seek forgiveness because he thought he was not a sinner.

The Apostle John writes in 1 John 1:8-2:2:

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. NIV

Intimacy with God starts with recognizing that we are unworthy of such a relationship. Many people fail to realize how badly stained they are because they compare themselves to others, not to the Lord's righteousness.

Christopher Columbus set out for the Orient in 1492 and ended up in the Caribbean, thereby setting a pattern that has continued for more than 500 years: men still won't ask for directions.

Most people still won't ask for grace. We humans usually justify ourselves and dismiss our selfish wrongdoing as "no big deal." Remember that His grace has no match; it can overcome anything we bring into its light.

Luis E. Romero explains

(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/luisromero/2017/11/22/gratitude-the-ultimate-spiritual-practice-a-thanksgiving-special/?sh=1137a1802706>):

The word gratitude comes from the Latin root *gratus*, meaning "pleasing; welcome; agreeable." *Gratus* is also the root of related terms such as grace, gratuity and gratis, all signifying positive moods, actions and ideas.

Ardath Rodale (<https://www.prevention.com/life/a20435178/gratitude-and-grace>) describes it this way:

I like to think that gratitude and grace are like my two hands working together. Grace is the power, beauty, and love of God that is always around us; gratitude gives us the eyes to see it.

Have you been telling yourself that you and others are good? By believing this, you are making the excruciatingly painful death of Jesus Christ on the cross a waste of time. Have you been compromising in ways you know are contrary to the Bible? Have you been letting hurtful or unhelpful words slip out of your mouth? Confess, turn from it and receive His grace!

Please close your eyes and listen to this letter I found:

I had to write to tell you how much I love you and care for you. Yesterday, I saw you walking and laughing with your friends; I hoped that soon you'd want me to walk along with you, too. So, I painted you a sunset to close your day and whispered a cool breeze to refresh you. I waited - you never called - I just kept on loving you.

As I watched you fall asleep last night, I wanted to touch you. I spilled moonlight onto your face - trickling down your cheeks as so many tears have. You didn't even think of Me; I wanted so much to comfort you.

The next day I exploded a brilliant sunrise into a glorious morning for you. But you woke up late and rushed off to work - you didn't even notice. My sky became cloudy, and My tears were the rain.

I love you, oh, if you'd only listen. I really love you. I try to say it in the quiet of the green meadow and the blue sky. The wind whispers My love throughout the treetops and spills it into the vibrant colours of all the flowers. I shout it to you in the thunder of the great waterfalls and compose love songs for birds to sing for you. I warm you with the clothing of My sunshine and perfume the air with nature's sweet scent. My love for you is deeper than any ocean and greater than any need in your heart. If you'd only realize how I care.

My Dad sends His love. I want you to meet Him - He cares, too. Fathers are just that way. So, please; call on Me soon. No matter how long it takes, I'll wait - because I love you.

Your friend, Jesus.

God looks for those who are:

Intentional
Humble
Grateful

God does not have favourites, but He *does* have intimates.

