

Let's Fall in Love with God
Chapter 7: The Great Obstacle to Intimacy
(John Henry Alan, edited by Bob Clarkson)

{ Slow, now ! }

Who Do You Trust?

"Trust in the Lord with all thine, heart and lean, not unto thine own understanding in all thy ways, acknowledge Him. And He shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 Notice that this verse indicates that we trust God with our entire being, while we refuse to even lean in the direction of our own wisdom.

Tozer writes: The Apostle Paul was a man who knew what he believed and where he stood. He knew God and was confident with a great cosmic confidence. Yet that same man was the most distrustful of himself. As great as Paul was, he did not trust himself. Before man Paul was as bold as a lion. But before God, Paul could not say too much against himself. When he was in front of God, Paul actually had no confidence in himself at all. His confidence in God was in reverse proportion to his confidence in himself. The amount of trust Paul had in himself, was as little, as the trust he had in God, was great.

What do I mean by self-trust? Simply it is the respectability and self-assurance that comes through education. It is what you learn about yourself and what your friends tell you about yourself and all the best that you may give yourself. *Self-trust* is the last great obstacle to

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living abandoned to intimacy with God.

On the one hand we want to be intimate with God, but on the other we feel unworthy of any such relationship. We never quite get there because we seem to be continually fighting against our egoistic longings. The one who conquers his own ego, trusting not in his own strength, but in God's power, triumphs, and will be the happiest he has ever been on earth.

Resisting God

Acting against God is the cause of all that is bad. All good comes from God whose goodness is limitless. Self-distrust is so necessary in this quest, that without it, you will be unable to achieve the intimacy desired. This will leave you the victim of the very least of your passions. Our corrupt, selfish nature too easily inclines us to a false estimate of ourselves. It continuously leads us back to dependence upon our own strength. God desires to see in us, a frank and true recognition of this most certain truth. All the virtue and grace, which is within us, is derived from God alone. Nothing good can be initiated by us. Not even a single thought, which would be acceptable to Him, comes from us.

The Sin of Self-Control

How on earth can self-control be considered sin?, you ask. After all we teach this as a virtue. We raise our children to become responsible adults. "You need to

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control yourself.” Yet in so teaching, we often leave out an essential aspect of wholesome relationship which requires us to release control to others, so as to show them respect or give them honor. Unfortunately, we often take self-control to the extreme. Tozer writes, “Self (personal sovereignty) judges God and man. It holds God to be less than He is and man to be more than he is.” No matter how much we study and learn about God, we somehow still believe that God is less than He is and we are more than we are. The sin of self control is when we fail to release control to God when we think that we can handle the situation we face better than God could.

What God desires of Christians is that they would simply reflect His glory on earth. So what stands to be gained by abandoning to intimacy with God, is the radiance of God beaming from our lives into the darkness of this world. Whatever good is expressed by us, comes from God Himself. To become this reflection we must completely and radically become distrusting of self.

Dealing with self-trust

The very antithesis of trusting God is trusting self. Obviously God is much bigger and smarter and capable than I am. So it seems that my insistence on being in charge, as opposed to letting Him be in charge must border on insanity. Taking this into account, it would make the most sense to expose every event where I refuse to follow God’s lead. Since trusting myself over trusting God is the exact opposite of living abandoned to intimacy with God, He is very intentional about revealing it to me.

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God is the one who will expose my self-trust. Let's consider four ways He does this.

[1] Experience An Intimate Believer

I believe that one way to deal with self-trust is to actually *experience another person who has found intimacy with God*. Brother Lawrence was one such person whose story is contained in "The Practice of the Presence of God." He wrote that "... for 40 years, He was never once out of the conscious Presence of God. When I took the Cross and decided to obey Jesus and walk this Holy way, I gathered that I would have to suffer a lot." Then he said something rather strange, "For some reason, God never found me worthy of much suffering. He just let me continue to trust him. And I put all my self-trust away and I've been trusting in God, completely." Brother Lawrence was living abandoned to intimacy with God.

[2] Realizing Sources of Relative Truth Were Self-Trusted

In my personal experience I did as everyone does. I found my truth by believing what sources I trusted to teach me about God. My relatives were my primary source. My church leaders were likely the secondary source. And, of course, the Bible (that is my particular interpretation thereof) was a close third.

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Doctrinal Obstacles

Doctrine can be a hindrance to intimacy with God. We can believe the whole counsel of God and our life may still be plagued with pride, to such an extent that it hides the face of God. It is such *pride* that prevents us from experiencing *intimacy* with God. This cannot be corrected by a lecture on correct doctrine. Rather we need the Holy Spirit to reveal someone who actually lives in this intimacy. And we need to ask Him to do whatever it takes to reveal the true condition of our soul. We need Him to help us give up all of our relative truth which we got from our relatives and trusted sources of our childhood and embrace the absolute truth of God on each and every issue of the life of faith.

Goodness of Adversity — Good, Bad or Useful

[3] Physical calamities we encounter and hardships we endure expose our self-trust.

God teaches us the truth about ourselves through the challenges of difficult people and difficult circumstances. Many people have a hard time believing that God would actually bring physical harm to our bodies. Yet the scriptures bear out the fact that physical pain is one of God's most effective means of dealing with an undisciplined self. He uses them to create a teaching moment in our lives. Instead of asking, "Why me, Lord?" or asking "Please take it away.?" We should ask, "What does this mean, Lord?" And "What do you want me to do?"

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God Uses Suffering

God makes no mistakes in our lives. He is very intentional toward every child He has. His intention is always to draw us into intimate relationship with Himself. Job said, "Yet though God slay me, I will worship Him." If my life was to become a continuous stream of adversity, but through it God was bringing others into intimacy with Himself, I would be fine with that. Actually that has become my greatest desire, not the suffering part, but knowing God's heart and caring more about others finding their way to God than my personal comfort or pleasure or even my reputation.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of physical suffering imposed by God. But probably Job stands out above all the rest. A casual reading of Job's story may not get to the real message of God in it. Certainly he was a good man and the scriptures bear this out. One problem that God addressed near the end of the story, was that Job was a good man and he knew it. So there was a dialog about God's majesty and supreme sovereignty.

But the primary message God wanted to convey to the world is that the glory of God should exceed all other desires. God wanted to show Satan that Job would love and serve Him even if God removed all of the natural blessings from him. God also wanted us to see that God does what He does to bring glory to Himself. That includes what we call bad as well as what we call good.

Incurable Maladies

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Dealing with our pride and self trust is essential to being in relationship with any other being and especially God. The suffering God sends will sometimes not be curable by anything. Our suffering can be either physical or emotional. The only cure for such an ailment is accepting it with joy, renouncing all complaining and telling God that we want His glory, not our healing. It is only when we endure, undeserved hardship, with a positive attitude, that God gets glory! Even our personal safety and security can be threatened and cause us consternation and concern.

Travel Mercies or Divine Opportunities

I stopped asking God to give me safety in travels. One day I was fully occupied in ministry for God. Near the end of the day, I found myself sailing off the highway at seventy miles an hour. While the car was left in total ruin, I survived the crash with only a few scratches. I reflected quickly on at least seven decisions that day. Any of them made differently would have prevented that accident.

As I was transported to the hospital for scans and tests to be sure that I was medically sound, I cracked jokes and shared the love and protection of God with the EMTs. Since that time I have also been able to use the pictures of the wreck to get the attention of students in my public school classrooms. It initiates conversations about the fragility of life, the importance of healthy relationships and pursuing the object of our faith with the intent to make Him our most significant other.

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Seized Opportunities

I would not have traded that accident for my safety on the highway that day. In reality I am completely safe always, without the selfish prayer. When God is finished with me, He will take me home. I cannot stop Him. Nor can I force myself into His eternity. I cannot step into eternity and into His Presence until His appointed time for me. Even suicide cannot defy God's timing. Look at the statistics that over 90% of all attempts fail.

Are You A Wannabe ?

Do you **wannabe** a *ho hum* Christian? Do you **wannabe** *respected, admired and emulated* by other believers? Do you **wannabe** *large and in charge* in your particular Christian Community? Do you **wannabe** a *prosperous, successful* Christian? Go ahead. I heard the saying many times growing up, "There is none so dumb as them that **wannabe**!" It was used in the sense that if you want to play dumb, you might get away with something. However, I have observed in my life that the very ones who **wannabe** somebody special, are the ones who are the dumbest when it comes to spiritual matters. For example, those who **wannabe** recognized and applauded as great prayer warriors, may speak the most intense and eloquent prayers, but God refuses to listen to the *proud* prayer of anyone.

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If you only knew what your are missing. When you get to heaven you will know. Then you will wish that you had given everything you had, including your dearest significant others, in order to be intimate with God Himself. All you have to do is to truly desire to love God. Simply start the journey to living abandoned to intimacy with God with this simple prayer. “Lord I want all of You and will let You take any thing or person from me in order to have You. I can’t do this myself, but You can. So please take me as far down as necessary to empty me of my selfishness and fill me with the fullness of Your love.”

[4] Extreme Trials and Temptations

Another means which God uses to develop distrust of ourselves is *extreme trials and temptations*. Many have concluded that once a person is born again, that’s all there is. We should now have trouble-free lives. Others believe that being filled with the Holy Spirit is the apex of the Christian experience. But if our Master, Jesus faced His greatest temptation after He was filled with the Spirit, why would it be any different for us?

Just Make It Go Away

Many Christians run from or try to pray away trials and troubles. When they succumb to temptation they try to hide from God until their behavior improves. But we miss the most important point of temptation. It is *not* to make us fall into condemnation. All temptation is the very opportunity to learn how weak we are and to

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develop strength and endurance in God. How we deal with struggles, are the mirrors of reflection of our progress toward living abandoned to intimacy with God. Every time we succumb to temptation it is because we are still trusting ourselves. We have not yet learned to trust God with everything.

Stop Groveling

Many believe that repentance is to be an extended period of self-condemnation after a moral failure. We need to start with repentance. But we need not repent again. Since repentance is a change of mind about who pays for our sins, it is like crucifying Jesus again, when we grovel in condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1 Intimacy cannot occur until we just turn everything over to God. That is the final repentance in abandoning to intimacy with God! It is the repentance from self-trust. Jesus paid it all! Stop trying to help Him!

Turn It Over

If you did something last week, you're ashamed of, feel conviction and condemnation about it, then immediately turn it over to the Lord. Tell him about it. What is the purpose of these severe trials and temptations that sometimes cause you to fall? They are not to show you that you're not a true Christian or that you are a lousy one. These are to show you that your heart hurts for your lover whom you have offended and you are becoming more intimate with God. The Lord is trying to teach you

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that last lesson so that you rid yourself of self-trust. The closer you are to God, the more tender your conscience is before the Lord, and the more severe your trial and temptation may seem.

God Will Undermine Your Self-Trust

God purposes things to happen to you until you recognize and admit what you do not know. Neither your pastors, nor your family, nor your friends will be able to help you. God loves us too much to let anyone but Him reveal the truth about yourselves. He is teaching us to trust Him, not people.

Trusting God in the Closet

You claim to love God and spend time with Him in prayer. But your tendency is to trust yourself with everything outside of your prayer closet. You rarely see the truth of this. And you certainly would not want to ask another brother to reflect to you how he sees you. You would rather hear nothing but affirming words, even if they are not true. Well, unfortunately for you, it is only “the truth about *you* that will set *you* free.”

Trust and Endurance Training

God is not in the business of judging us. When He allows or purposes temptation in our lives, it is intended specifically for teaching us endurance and trust. God only wants his children to grow and develop into full fledged Christians. Sometimes in order to accomplish this,

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God must send us through severe and harsh trials and temptations. But the destination is absolute abandon to intimacy with God. He is enabling us to give our self-trust over to trust in Him such that He gets full control, Lordship, of our lives.

Look Diligently for the Footprints

I reflect upon the first and likely the most helpful thing God uses in dealing with our self-trust. It is this one simple thought. *Humble yourself under the authority of one who has already taken that journey or is a long way into it.*

Look around for the footprints of those who have abandoned to intimacy, trusting God completely. There are some where you are right now. Only your pride will keep you from seeing them. Only your pride will prevent you from following them. Only your pride will keep you from abandoning yourself to intimacy with God.

Humility Is A Must

Humble yourself enough to follow the footprints of the man or woman who is intimate with God. You will find all of these footprints going in the same direction. You will also find that they are going in the opposite direction from the average Christian. You will find them to be going against nearly every Christian you currently know. But, you will find that they follow the footprints of Jesus. These are the ones who will treat the adulteress, Samaritan woman, tax collectors, drunkards, irresponsible, socially

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unacceptable ones with the same compassion, mercy and love as did Jesus Himself.

Rejection of the Church

You will also discover that they get much push back from the church, like Jesus did with the Pharisees, the leaders of God's own religion! They're all going in the same direction. Look carefully, and you'll see some of them backtracking a little occasionally. But you will also see that they find their way at last and go straight back into the place of intimacy with Jesus. Intimacy never requires any particular behaviors. However, *intimacy* will nearly always affect behaviors in a positive way. To be sure, *unconditional love*, is the most compelling word of the Gospel and its most effective means to bring people to salvation.

The Final Answer: Trust God

We cannot interpret Philippians 4:13 such that we think God will make us strong so that we can do all things. God either does it for us in our weakness or we blunder on into it and He has no part in it. Either He leads the dance or we step on His toes. Do not try to do anything for God. "I can let God do anything through me." That is a better translation of that verse. But I must let go of all control and let Him be fully in charge. God loves us enormously and desires to use us for His purposes here on earth. However, we cannot both be in control. True Christian maturity - spiritual *perfection* is trusting God enough to be abandoned to intimacy with God!

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