

Spiritual Intimacy

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[0 : 00] The theme of my sermon this morning is intimacy.

It's a word which can be used in several ways, but for our purposes this morning we'll be sticking with the definition you see on the screen there. A close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship with another person or group.

Infamacy comes from the Latin word infamous, which means inmost, innermost, or deepest. Could we have the slide stay up with that one?

Thanks. Cheers. You'll understand why later probably. We're going to consider intimacy in three different areas of relationship.

Firstly, within the Godhead, between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Secondly, between God and his church. And thirdly, between the members of God's church.

[1 : 13] And since the relationship between the three persons of the Godhead is fundamental to all relationships, we'll begin by looking at what Jesus reveals to us in John 17 about the intimacy within the Godhead.

In verse 21 of John 17, Jesus prays that all who believe would be one just as the Father is in him and he is in the Father.

Later in verse 22, he says that he has given his glory to his followers in order that they may be one as we are one, so that they may be brought to complete unity.

What he gives us is not a picture of a business relationship dynamic, not of formal acquaintances.

It's not surprising, really. What he shows us is a relational intimacy that exists between Father and Son, and one that God is gracious enough to reveal to us in his word.

[2 : 19] And of course, we should not forget the Holy Spirit when we're talking about the Trinity. And in 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says that no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

So when Jesus says he does the will of his Father, it's because he is filled with the Holy Spirit that he knows and is able to carry out the Father's will.

As John 3 says, The one whom God has sent speaks the word of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. And in Luke 10, we also get a glimpse into the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit when we read that he was, that is Jesus, was full of joy through the Holy Spirit.

Now, anybody who, meditating upon the events of Calvary, and seeing there Christ paying the penalty of their sins, which is due to God, thinks that what is going on is mere transaction, as if it were a business deal, has failed to grasp the relationship between Father and Son.

When Jesus cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It is the cry of a man who constantly spent time alone in prayer, who is constantly giving glory to the one who sent him, and constantly devoting himself to his Father as a true Son.

[3 : 53] When Jesus cries out, it is not to a faceless deity. It is the one whom he loves above all others.

It is his Father who loves him and sent him, who forsakes him in his moment of deepest humiliation. At the point where he is bearing the unfathomable weight of our sin, and the curse of that sin, his Father is not there upholding him, for it is God who presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood.

We read that in Romans 3, 25. And yet we see at the moment of Christ's death, Once more, the trust of Jesus and the faithfulness of God, as he says, Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit.

So this intimacy between Father, Son, and Spirit is something that's important to grasp, for no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

And if you're not a believer here today, then let me hold out to you this fact. Because God is intimately relational in his very essence, when he makes the free offer of salvation through faith in Christ, and when he says that he desires a personal relationship with you, and he does both those things, you may rest assured that relationships are not something new for God.

[5 : 44] They're not something he took on when he created mankind. Nor is it some false hope that he has held out to lure you in. God is the perfect model of relationship that all other relationships should have as their foundation.

And it also means that he does not need any of us to have a relationship with himself in order to fulfill something that was lacking in himself.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are complete and lack nothing. They have relationship within the Godhead, and yet God desires personal relationship with each one of us because he is boundless in grace and love.

And he chooses to make the most one-sided offer in all eternity to sinful people like you and like me. And since Christ has been so gracious in revealing God to those who believe through his word, we will find great encouragement when we grasp all that his word teaches us about God.

Since God in his very essence is intimately relational, we can expect that his relationship with his people will be likewise. So we consider the intimacy that exists between God and his church.

[7 : 21] Jesus prays in John 17, may they also be in us. He asks that the church be in God.

Not with, not alongside, but in. Now we've just seen what an incredible relationship the persons of the Godhead have. And here Jesus asks that the church be in relationship with them also.

Jesus goes on, Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory. And further down he says that he continues to make God known in order that the love the Father has for the Son may be in the believers and that Jesus himself may be in them.

This isn't a picture of a master and his servants or even his hired workers, though we certainly are called servants of the Most High.

This is a picture of what it looks like for God to adopt believers as his sons and daughters. The love that the Father has for Jesus' Son is the love that is poured out on his people also.

[8 : 38] As Jesus says later on in John, As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Throughout the Bible, God is presented as a Father, the true Father, from whom all other fathers take their name.

He's the only good and perfect Father and when he adopts us as his sons, he becomes our good and perfect Father. If we're tempted to doubt God's goodness as a father, then consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 7 to those who are following him.

He says, Anyone here who's a father, even if you're not sure you're entirely great at it, I presume you try to do good by your children.

Knowing then how much you who are sinful and imperfect love your children, should we not all expect that the relationship that God desires that his people, the Church, far excel, even the greatest father-son bond.

One of the greatest evidences of the intimacy which God desires with his Church is prayer. When Jesus is asked by his followers how to pray, he tells them to begin by praying, Our Father.

[10 : 23] He invites the disciples to pray with the same level of familiarity that he himself does. Of course, he expects the same degree of humility and honour too.

Prayer is not just a conversation with God like speaking with a friend. It's far more. When we speak with our friends, we can always be sure that they're really listening. They may be distracted by what's going on in their own lives.

They may not have time to stop and talk to us at all. When we ask things of our friends, we can't be certain that they're going to do them. We can't guarantee that their timing will be great even if they get around to doing them.

And it's incredibly unlikely that any of us trust our friends enough that we think they know us better than we know ourselves. And yet God, who is at once sustaining all of existence, hears us from wherever and whenever we call to him.

And God can always be trusted to fulfil our every need. And he can be trusted to answer prayer, but not always in the way we want or expect.

[11 : 44] Because God knows, and we must trust, that his answer is to prayer and the timing before we even ask. But he still wants us to ask.

And maybe it seems a little redundant that God wants his people to ask for what he already knows they need. I forget who, but someone likened it to the relationship between a toddler and their parent.

And a toddler often will ask their parent when they're hungry, Mum, what's for dinner? Mum, what's for dinner? Mum, what's for dinner? Mum, when's dinner? So they're not doing it because they don't trust that they're not going to get any dinner.

No, they do it because, implicitly, they trust that their parent is going to provide them with food. The asking is a sign of the trust.

And likewise, we didn't ask God if he's going to provide us with what we need. Like the parent of the inquisitive toddler, God can be trusted to provide, and yet he still likes to be asked.

[13 : 01] Because the asking, as I say, demonstrates where our trust is placed. And if we're not asking him, then there's a far higher chance that we're trusting ourselves or someone else rather than God to provide for ourselves.

Speaking of trusting God for our needs, God has no plan B. And that means that he always had a plan to redeem fallen man, even before we were created.

And how that plan is worked out, the Father sending the Son to die in order to secure our salvation, and the Holy Spirit applying the benefit of Christ's death to believers, shows again a glimpse into that intimate fellowship within the Godhead.

When Jesus commissions believers, to be his ambassadors and spreading the good news about him to the ends of the earth, he invites us to participate in this plan of salvation by making us the ordinary means by which people hear the gospel.

And that sentence would really blow our minds. And if it doesn't, then consider for a moment the story of Hosea, who you may or may not be familiar with.

[14 : 35] Hosea was an Old Testament prophet, and God instructed him to marry an unfaithful woman. It went about as badly as you might expect.

She gave him children, but she left him for other men. Now in Hosea's shoes, you'd probably think good ruins at that point, but at God's behest, Hosea instead goes and redeems his adulterous wife by effectively paying the bride price all over again for her to another man.

And if you weren't familiar with the story already, then you're probably thinking that Hosea is quite mad and that he got exactly what he deserved for marrying an unfaithful woman.

Here's the twist. Hosea's life is illustrating God's relationship with his people. God created people knowing that they would immediately turn their backs on him and go after other gods.

But he chose to redeem his people, and he chose to do so by something far more precious than the silver by which Hosea redeemed his life. He redeemed his people by the blood of his only begotten son.

[15 : 56] And not only that, but having redeemed us, he lavishes us with gifts and includes us in his plan to spread the good news of his redemption in order that everyone might hear and be saved.

And that's also why to reject the offer of salvation is to be condemned to hell. Because God only gave one way to be saved. And that way cost him more dearly than any of us could fathom.

So if you're planning on going away from here, continuing to reject Christ, then here's what the Bible has to say to you. Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.

Because Jesus stands at the door at Knox today. And you can invite him in today. We're not passive recipients in this relationship between God and his people.

Relationship is not a one-way street, though if you're a parent of teenagers, you may feel like it is sometimes. There can be no intimacy between God and his people if his people give nothing back.

[17 : 12] We show our dependence on God by our prayers. We show our gratefulness and devotion to him by our worship and service also.

So let us not be slow to desire a deepening of our relationship with God, but instead be active and intentional in using the means that he has given us to grow closer to him.

Finally this morning, let's consider the intimacy within the church and this is why I wanted that left up there so we remember the definition we're running with because I know it can be a word that has many different meanings.

I think I've yet to meet a Christian who doesn't recognize that the relationship between Christ and his church is the model for Christian marriage or actually all marriage.

Everyone knows that's how marriage is meant to be, I hope. So I'm going to take it as read that whether it's the reality or not because we're all fallen humans that at least this is recognized as the standard for the marriage relationship.

[18 : 40] But there's a problem I think which exists within the church today, particularly here in the UK and that is that marriage is the only intimate relationship which is recognized.

And keep in mind that definition up there while I'm saying this because I'm not saying it's something that's said aloud or explicitly but I do know two things for certain.

One is that there's an expectation that all of our young people will be married and the other is that once we are married a lot of us forget the need for other relationships.

Now the Apostle Paul famously said in reference to marriage that he wished all believers could be like him single and celibate since they could be more fully devoted to God.

But that didn't mean he went through life as a lone wolf. We see recorded in Acts and in Paul's letters how much he relied on and benefited from particular men like Barnabas and Timothy.

[19 : 51] And Jesus didn't have twelve disciples just for pragmatic reasons. No, they were his friends and constant companions. In Jesus case and Paul's case, their friendships didn't hinder their relationship with God and their relationship with God actually made their friendships better.

In fact, the best they could be. And that's a roundabout way of saying we need friends, but we need friends. And probably the men need to hear this more than the women, because I think women are better at close relationships than we are.

But we need close relationships with one another. At least with one other member of the same sex. Ecclesiastes 4.12 says that where one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves, and that cord of three strands is not easily broken.

Well, we could do worse than having one or two close Christian friends. When life's going good and fairly easy, it can be hard to find the motivation to form close friendships.

They take time, effort, and sacrifice after all. I think one of the repeated phrases in Jesus' prayer of John 17 is helpful for reminding us why it is.

[21 : 16] We need to have someone beside us in the trenches, as it were. in verse 6, Jesus describes his people as those given to him out of the world.

Immediately, he's declaring us as separate and set apart from other people. Jesus declares in verse 11 that he is no longer in the world, and so he desires that his father keep his people, since they are still in the world.

In verse 14, we're reminded that the world hates us, because like Christ, we are not of this world. However, in the following verse, he says that he does not ask that we are taken out of the world, only that we are kept from evil.

Again, he repeats that we, like him, are not of this world, in verse 16. And in verse 18, he says that we are being sent into the world, just as he was sent.

And what am I trying to make of all this? Well, since we are not of this world, and since this world hates us on his account, we should expect hostility on account of our beliefs.

[22 : 30] It means we'll feel isolated in many situations that life presents. We'll feel like strangers here. I was on holiday on the Isle of Lewis and Harris recently, which is, I'm sure you all know, the closest any of us can get to experiencing the new creation in this life.

You laugh, but it's true. But it genuinely is an incredible place, and it reminds me a lot of Sutherland, where I grew up.

And you're maybe wondering what this has to do with anything. Well, I now live in Falkirk, but I don't think I could ever call Falkirk home. It's where I live, but it's not my home.

See, when I go to the West Highlands and to the Islands, I feel like I'm home again. And it's actually really hard, coming back home after such a long time away.

painful, even. But I realized on the way back home this time from Lewis that that pain can be helpful, because it reminds me that none of this is my home.

[23 : 48] Our true home is where Christ is. And so it can be a helpful reminder for me, and if you've ever felt that as well, then hopefully it can be a helpful reminder to you that we're not supposed to feel entirely comfortable here.

Because like me awaiting a return to the north, we all await a time when we will be face to face with Jesus where he is, in his presence.

And when you're living in a place that isn't where you belong, that isn't home, then having people by your side who are facing the same thing is great support.

And that's why the love and support of our fellow believers is so important. And as a small aside, it's also why we can't possibly have unbelievers as our closest friends, because there is absolutely no way to trust and rely on them in the same way that we can on a brother or sister in Christ.

believe in we can't not be glory of Christ. Since Jesus desired that we are not taken out of this world, we have a duty in some sense to be ordinary members of society.

[25 : 06] You know, we don't want to shut ourselves off in hilltop monasteries or underground desert bunkers. And in fact, since Jesus sends us into the world, we are more than ordinary members of society, because we're a people with a duty to spread the good news about Jesus in this world so that people from all nations, tribes and tongues will come and glorify God.

Jesus' high priestly prayer demonstrates the close personal relationship which exists eternally within the Godhead. It also demonstrates the close personal relationship which God intends with his church.

And finally it shows that Christ desires for the members of his church to have the same sort of close personal relationships with one another. Towards the end of Jesus' prayer in verses 21-23 Jesus twice expresses the desire that we be one as Father and Son are one and that we should be in them as they are in one another.

And we see these three relationships brought together here because God's relationship with himself, his relationship with his people should be the model for our own relationships.

I remarked earlier that everyone probably recognizes the relationship between Christ and his church as the model for Christian marriage but it's also the model for our other relationships.

[26 : 38] As Jesus says in John 15-13 Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends. That laying down of our lives is unlikely to involve genuinely dying but we can certainly be putting our brothers and sisters first before ourselves in such a way that sets our own lives aside.

Friends, the pressure from outside the church in our country is growing every year. And now more than ever we need to be able to rely on those who will be at our side in the battle ahead.

And the devil is already winning if we aren't mirroring Christ in our relationships. I want to finish this morning with the encouragement that we can remember that one of the benefits of our relationship with Christ is that he has left his spirit with us.

So we're not relying on ourselves in our relationships with one another but rather on the spirit who brings peace and unity. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. May you bless it as we have heard it.

[28 : 13] Lord, we just thank you for all the glorious gifts that you give to us. Thank you that you've given to us one another.