

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. (James 4:7-10)

Before their sin, Adam and Eve experienced perfect intimacy with God in Eden. When they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they severed their intimate relationship with their Father and Creator. That loss of intimacy is demonstrated by the fact that they hid from God (**Genesis 3:8-9**). Before eating the fruit, they had felt close to God, afterward they hid from Him, trying to keep their sin a secret.

God had a plan to restore the relationship—that plan for intimacy, being drawn to God, with humankind is revealed throughout Scripture. It is described in terms from a Bridegroom, to a Father, to a Friend. How can we draw near to God in these ways in our lives today?

Our Bridegroom

One of the most striking pictures of intimacy between God and His people in the whole of Scripture, is the image of a groom and a bride, or as a husband and a wife. Isaiah wrote: *“For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts”* (**Isaiah 54:5**). Even the Law given through Moses speaks of the love of God for His people in this intimate way. *“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”* (**Deuteronomy 7:7-8**)

This verse describes God’s love for the Israelites using language that evokes a man’s love for a woman. The verb “set His love” [khashak] means to love, to be attached to, to cling to. As well, “love” [ahavah] is translated variously in Scripture as love between man and woman, God and mankind, intimate friends, and father and child. We can see the enduring nature of God’s love for Israel.

God’s relationship with Israel is a true love story. Marriage imagery continues throughout the prophetic writings, as in the following: *“As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you”* (**Isaiah 62:5**). *“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD* (**Jeremiah 31:31-32**). *“I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion, And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you*

will know the LORD” (**Hosea 2:19-20**). The word “know” [yada], means “to know intimately, to perceive, to understand and experience.” To know God means that we experience Him intimately.

This descriptive intimacy certainly does not stop with Christ. He is spoken of as a bridegroom and His people, His church, as His bride. Paul writes: “*I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin*” (**2Corinthians 11:2**). The Revelation often speaks of those who are the Lord’s as His bride (**Revelation 19:7; 21:9; 22:17**).

Our Father

Only in the sense of creation is God the Father of all mankind. In the intimate sense, that terminology is reserved for those who do His will. For instance, listen to this statement in the Law: “*You are the sons of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God ...*” (**Deuteronomy 14:1-2**). Believers in Jesus understand that those from any nation can be grafted into His people, becoming the children of God through the obedience of faith in Jesus. As Jesus Himself said, “*My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it*” (**Luke 8:21**).

Jesus authoritatively revealed deep intimacy—how many times did He say, “My Father”? Then He teaches all of us to pray by beginning with “Our Father,” denoting a shared, intimate relationship among all of His children. Jesus also used of the familiar Aramaic title “Abba” (**Mark 14:36**). Paul also writes that the Lord’s people approach their Father through adoption in the same way: “*For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’*” (**Romans 8:15**). In fact, the New Testament has over 165 references to the Fatherly nature of God.

With the attitude of child to Father, we are more likely to achieve humility before God. With a spirit of humility before God, we are more likely to achieve patience as we seek Him in what can be a sea of demands for our time and focus. Just as we invest in important human relationships—disconnecting from distractions, offering undivided attention and showing interest in the other person—we must also create opportunities for intimacy with God that will keep building a relationship of intimacy and a willingness to cultivate the relationship.

Times of intimacy with God increase our knowledge of Him and His character and prompt us to live out His character—as Jesus did. “*By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him [Jesus] ought himself to walk in the same manner as He [Jesus] walked*” (**1John 2:3-6**).

Our Friend

Abraham, as the friend of God, showed a unique trust and faithfulness to the Lord throughout his life. In return, God entrusted him with His covenant and shared with Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom (**Genesis 18:17** see also **Amos 3:7**). The Hebrew word for intimate friendship can also be translated as cushion, couch, or pillow. The root means “to support oneself whilst leaning or reclining.” Jeffery M. Cohen writes in an article entitled “Abraham’s Hospitality” that this

picture of Middle East hospitality is in fact “a hallmark value of Jewish tradition” that evokes images of Abraham’s tent marked with cushions and comfortable areas for his guests to recline. These guests included angels whom Abraham bowed down to in humble respect, inviting them to recline as they enjoyed the lavish meal he and Sarah had prepared for them. Abraham enthusiastically invested in this intimate time with these acquaintances.

We are exhorted to “not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it” (**Hebrews 13:2**). We are exhorted, even more so, to develop and practice the faith and trust that moved God to call Abraham His friend. As God did not withhold His plans from Abraham, He also does not withhold His plans from His friends today.

Jesus said, “*You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you*” (**John 15:14-15**; see also **James 4:4**).

It is God’s intention to have His people in a “drawn to Him” relationship as the bride, as the sons and daughters, and as His friend. We who follow Jesus can be confident that “*that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (**Romans 8:38-39**).