

# Spending A Day With Jesus

## Part 4

What would it be like if you went to a doctor who only knew only one drug, and she prescribed that one drug for everything. Constant headaches? Penicillin. High blood pressure? Penicillin. Failing eyesight? Penicillin. Arthritis? Penicillin. Pretty soon I think you would change doctors.

When people become Christians we usually tell them to spend between 30 minutes to one hour a day reading the Bible and praying in what we call a "quiet time". Now that's good advice, but it's not the only way to spend time with Jesus and develop a relationship with God.

Several years ago I decided to get a Spiritual Director. A Spiritual Director is a person who is trained to help someone else grow in their relationship with God. Because I was a Baptist Pastor I wanted to find someone who was outside of my Baptist family, who would bring a different perspective on my relationship with the Lord. So once a month for over a year, I met with a lovely Presbyterian widow. She loved the Lord, and she tried to help me connect with God in the way she found the most helpful. She was a contemplative person, and found that if she lit a candle, sat very still and quiet for 30 minutes or so, she would feel very close to the Lord. I tried it, and I didn't feel close to the Lord at all. I just kept thinking of all the things I wanted to do, and got more and more fidgety as time went on. I just wanted to do something! I persevered with this for over a year, and finally I quit. Staring into candles did nothing for me. I'm an activist. I feel closest to God when I'm serving Him.

### **What Is It That Triggers A Sense Of Closeness With God For You?**

What constitutes for you a deep and meaningful spiritual encounter with God that feeds your soul and makes you want to keep going as a follower of Jesus?

When he is writing to the Corinthian Christians the Apostle Paul says this;

***"Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body."***

***(1 Corinthians 12:14-20)***

Paul's point was that we are all very different in the way we function and that difference is actually by God's design. We're not clones. God is immensely and supremely creative. When He made you and me he threw away the mould and made something new and different. We recognise the truth of that when we talk about spiritual gifts. The bible talks about the different ways we are all gifted. We recognise that our styles of worship are different. Some people really connect to God through a smells and bells High Anglican worship service. Others connect with God through a loud all out Pentecostal dance around the floor. So we have recognised our differences in some aspects, but in terms of developing our relationship with Jesus, too often we expect each other to be the same. God made you a unique and special and individual in how you relate to Him. What is normal spirituality for me is quite different than what is normal spirituality for you, and the person sitting next to you draws close to God in different ways than both of us. How many of you are left handed by inclination? Only a few decades ago left handed people were forced to write with their right hand because right handedness was considered "normal". Within the church we have had a kind of unwritten or unspoken assumption that every Christian draws close to God in the same way, as if there is only one way to encounter God or feel close to Him.

Let me suggest seven examples of different pathways to spirituality. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list, but see, which of these best strikes a chord in your heart.

### **1. The Relational Pathway.**

God created some of us with a great need to interact with other people in order to feel God's presence. For these people, belief in God and their experience of salvation is deeply personal and

real, but they need the stimulus of others to keep them focussed. They have great difficulty relating to God when they are just on their own.

The concept of solitude, for instance, sounds more like solitary confinement – almost a punishment. Studying the Scriptures all on their own is like doing boring homework. Yet put those people in a group to study the Scriptures, and the study becomes dynamic and exciting. These people hate worshipping alone. But put them with a crowd of other worshippers and they get enthused and energised. The relational Christ-follower needs the stimulus of other people to be able to pray. Prayer on their own is a real chore and usually doesn't last very long. However, in a group they feel like they can pray for hours and hours. When these kinds of people hear other Christians talking about doing a silent retreat for seven days; that would feel like alienation from God for them. They couldn't imagine what they would do with all that time without interacting with other people. For them, communion with God means communion with people. Their primary pathway to closeness with Jesus is through relationships with other Christians. They are energised by being with fellow Christ-followers.

## **2. The Intellectual Pathway.**

There are some people created by God in such a way that their mind has to be engaged before any significant spiritual progress can occur. Some of you here are like that. For you the best part of the service is the sermon, and if you're honest, some of you just suffer the music, no matter how good it is! These are the kind of people who can sit in meetings where passion-filled testimonies are told of deeply moving encounters with God - everyone else in the room is moved to tears, but it doesn't touch these people in the same way. It's not that they are unspiritual. They just encounter God differently.

People who approach God down the intellectual pathway love reading deeply stretching literature or books that are four inches thick. They gravitate to intellectual events and lectures that prove truth with logic and reason. Their mind and will has to be absolutely convinced, and when it is, they feel connected with God. The great thing is that when people like this get their mind convinced about the Christian faith there is no stopping them. Nothing will shake their conviction.

When men like Martin Luther came to clarity on "*the just shall live by faith*", or John Calvin became convinced of the doctrine of "*the sovereignty of God*", the Christian church was shaken to its roots and radically reformed. Deeply intellectual men become passionate followers of Jesus. Charles Colson was a lawyer in the White House. When he became convinced about the truth of Christianity, he became unshakeable in his faith in Jesus. He is now writing some marvellous books that are helping the church think through issues confronting our times. For these kinds of people, emotion doesn't register high on their personal Richter scale. Their heart and feelings follow behind their mind.

People on the intellectual pathway have often been criticised for their lack of apparent passion and emotion. But they are fully devoted followers of Jesus - it's just that their way to God is via intellectual stimulation.

## **3. The Serving Pathway.**

There are some people created by God who feel closest to Him when they're serving Him. They just love to serve the Lord by serving other people.

These are the do-ers, not the relational people or the thinkers. They're often quite quiet and unobtrusive. You don't see them on the stage or in the limelight. They're usually out the back with a tea towel in their hands or a paint brush. If you were to ask them when they feel closest to God they probably won't say that it's during a prayer meeting or a Bible study or a church service. They feel most alive in Christ when they're serving. When they sense that they are an instrument in God's hands and doing something that contributes to growth of the Kingdom of God that's a deeply spiritual experience. They come away from it feeling so much in love with the Lord.

If you want a good example of someone who drew close to God by serving, look at Mother Theresa in Calcutta. She would hold the dying, emaciated body of a beggar on the streets – she saw her hands as the hands of Jesus. She encountered God by serving the poor. Because that's the way she was wired, she expected that everyone else would feel close to God if they served too. Listen to what she said when she dedicated a convent in North Carolina in 1995.

*"God died for you and me and for that leper and for that person dying of hunger and for that person on the street. It's not enough to say that you love God. You also have to say that you love your neighbour. Love to be true, has to hurt. This requires people giving till it hurts. Otherwise it's not true love. Be the good news to your home people first. Find out about your next door neighbour."*

Mother Theresa couldn't think of a better way to show God she loved Him than by serving.

#### **4. The Contemplative Pathway.**

Throughout church history there have always been a group of people who felt like they marched to the beat of a different drum than the rest of Christianity. Rather than loading up their calendars with relational events and intellectual lectures and serving responsibilities they tend to guard their time alone very jealously. People on the contemplative pathway love to spend endless time alone with the Lord. Being around lots of other Christians drains them. By contrast, being alone with Jesus energises them. Solitude and quietness ignite them. Give them a Bible or a good book, or a poem or a journal and they can disappear for days. Being alone with God is like food for their souls.

Contemplatives often have very sensitive spiritual antennae. They're not usually very practical people. These are the sort of people who run out of petrol on the motorway or forget to check the oil and water in the car. Not because they don't care, but because they are often more engaged with God and His Kingdom than they are in this world. Contemplatives often feel out of step with the rest of the church. They're inward and mystical and often wonder why other Christians can't see what they see in terms of the beauty of God's creation, or evidence of huge pain in the world.

A lot of deep and meaningful songs that we love to worship God with are written by contemplative people. They're often the conscience of the church. They call us back to caring for the poor or what it really means to live in God's kingdom. Proportionately contemplative people are usually in the minority in the church, but their pathway to closeness with God is no less valid or necessary.

#### **5. The Activist Pathway**

If there is a group of people who cannot understand the contemplatives it's the activists. They are the complete opposite. Activists are happiest when travelling at the speed of Mach II. They feel closest to God when they're juggling several balls at the same time or scrambling to meet half a dozen pressing deadlines. Activists need a challenge-intensive environment. If they don't feel stretched and out on the edge, Christianity is boring. I have a friend who is like this. He was Pastor of a large church with multiple staff with more than 1500 people attending on a Sunday. While he was doing that he also led a denomination of 35,000 people. And while he was doing all that he was studying for his doctorate, being a good husband and father to his three kids.

Often the activist Christian drives people crazy and they're perceived as scary people to be around. They appear to bite off more kingdom work than can possibly be chewed. Other people feel sorry for them or try to get them to slow down. However these kinds of people really like riding rockets! Activist Christians love to catalyse other people into meaningful ministry and when they do so, it's a deeply spiritual experience. They get a real buzz out of seeing other people mobilised into serving God.

If you ask an activist when he or she feels closest to God they'll tell you it's when they're out on a limb, when the battle against evil is the fiercest and the only hope of victory is through divine intervention – that's when they sense God's presence. They're not the best of pray-ers, but when they collapse onto their pillows at night time having fought a huge battle or led a church through the fire or given every last ounce of their energy to the cause, they feel deep intimacy and fellowship with God.

Some people wonder if God made a mistake when He made activist Christians. On the contrary, they're some of the highest achievers who have moved and shaken the church over the centuries. John Wesley was an incurable activist. In his ministry he travelled in excess of 400,000km without the aid of cars, trains or aeroplanes. He preached 40,000 sermons and produced 400 books without a typewriter or computer. He mastered 10 languages and at the age of 83 was annoyed that he could not write more than 15 hours per day. He also complained in his diary of an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 in the morning!

Activist Christians sometimes make other Christians feel tired simply by looking at them! They're driven, self-motivated, freaks! But that is the way God has wired them. For them, slaying dragons is a deeply spiritually renewing experience.

#### **6. The Creation Pathway.**

These are the tree hugging Christ-followers. They come alive in the spirit when they get away from the concrete city and out amongst nature and the splendour of God's creation. The creation pathway leads people out into the mountains, or down to the beach, or into the bush or the desert. In open spaces their awareness of God is dramatically enhanced and they are overwhelmed by all the metaphors of God's greatness that they see in creation.

On the creation pathway, a sunrise is a profoundly spiritual experience of God's new mercy every morning. The splendour and majesty of God opens up their minds to passage after passage from the Bible. In contrast, the intellectual merely recognises that it is not in fact the sun coming up or going down, it's merely the earth spinning on its axis, and the activist misses the scene altogether because he's already on to task number 15 for the day and hasn't got time to sit and watch the sun come up!

Ask a creationist where he or she feels closest to God and they'll tell you it's a no-brainer - out amongst nature. That's where they most encounter God and renew their spirit. The splendour and magnificence of God's creation screams out at them. If that kind of pathway resonates with you, you need to own it and incorporate into your lifestyle significant times when you can get out of the city and enjoy God.

#### **7. The Worship Pathway.**

There are some Christians who are deeply and profoundly renewed in their spirit through worship and music. For them the essence of a church service is the time given to worship in song. The sermon is important and nice, but once that's over can't we get back to a time of worship as well!? In the context of sacred music and heart-expressing lyrics they feel the presence of God. They see the shekinah glory of the Lord descend upon the church and they bask in the ecstasy of praise and adoration. If you go into their homes or travel in their cars there's always the sound of praise music on the CD player. It deeply ministers to their soul and calms their anxieties. They love to sing and they lose themselves in worship.

Through the charismatic renewal of the past few decades, there has been an assumption that the worship pathway moves every genuine Christian. We've tended to give the impression that to be truly spirit filled and open to God means to be profoundly moved in worship and music. People who don't shut their eyes and raise their hands have been judged as unspiritual and not really in love with Jesus.

#### **Which Are Your Meaningful Pathways?**

These seven pathways to spirituality are not necessarily exhaustive and they are certainly not exclusive. There may well be more than one pathway that helps you connect with God. You may also want to experiment with other pathways that you have never tried before - go for it! Some of the most meaningful times I have had with the Lord are when I have stepped out of the way I usually build my relationship with Him, and try something new.

So tomorrow you are going to spend a day with Jesus. Discover the ways that you enjoy being with Him the most, and go for it!

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