

HABIT SEVENTEEN

Be Intimate with Your Heavenly Father

*“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God.”*

John 3:1

In this final chapter, we turn our attention to the intimate nature of our relationship with our heavenly Father. In considering intimacy with God, we maintain our respect, amazement, and awe at His glory, grandeur, and excellent greatness, yet add something else. If we only respect God in His greatness and awesome power, we miss an important view of Him. We must also consider His gentle, soft, and tender side — our view of Him (as Daddy) and who He wants us to be to Him (His own little boys and girls). You cannot be whole without balance. We must balance our perceptions of the strong and dynamic side of God by our grasp of His tender and approachable side if we want an accurate portrait.

I took a six-month sabbatical/mission trip to South Africa and India. During the trip, I conducted an experiment to learn increased effectiveness in ministry — I increased my daily amount of prayer time. Indeed, I became more effective in ministry. An unexpected result, however, was a new closeness to God.

Two Aspects to God's Greatness

During the four months in India, I was blessed with numerous occasions to introduce audience members to the two glorious thoughts mentioned in Chapter 13 (Grasp the Bigger Picture) — God is both big *and* near. If He were only big and powerful but not near and caring, He could help us but would not. If He were only near and caring but not big and powerful, He might be able to sympathize but He could not help us with our problems. It is the combination of His great power and His nearness that makes Him so wonderfully unique. This is extremely different from the Indian polytheistic concept of many violent and distant gods whom helpless humans try to placate to avoid evil. The fact that the true God is both big and near means that He both can and will help us.

Every time I shared these thoughts, my listeners responded with joy. I explained how God was not only big and powerful (*able* to help) but also near and caring (*willing* to help). My Indian listeners could easily note the contrast between the God of the Bible and India's many gods. In discussing these profound theological truths about God's power and willingness to help, I never used the words "transcendence" or "imminence." Nonetheless, it was my intent to share these grand ideas in terms they could easily grasp — and the interpreter could easily translate.

That illustration sets the stage for a discussion of our intimate relationship with God as our Daddy. We cannot fully understand all God's greatness by merely considering His creative power, majesty, wisdom, and perfect knowledge. There is another tender, intimate, and equally wonderful side of God's greatness — He is also near, warm, friendly, tender, accepting, and approachable. We may have to change our perspective to appreciate this tender side of God, but seeing things from God's perspective is what we want. As God gives us the ability to see things from His point of view, we should expect changes in our

We must balance our perceptions of the strong and dynamic side of God by our grasp of His tender and approachable side if we want an accurate portrait.

perceptions. If we view things from a new perspective — with God-given perception — we can appreciate the ideas in the following paragraphs.

A Unique Opportunity for a Paradigm Shift

Upon our return from India, I decided to take three days to be alone with God while my experiences abroad were fresh in my mind. I asked God to give me His own debriefing so that I could process what I had learned from Him through prayer. I also wanted to fully understand what I had learned about the process of learning through prayer. The increased power in preaching and teaching and new insights into old truths during the six months abroad were profound, and I did not want to slip back into my previous pattern. I wanted God to show me His priorities and value system. What was important and unimportant to Him? What was valuable and of no value to Him? What was worth pursuing and what should I hold in relative disregard? I determined I would adjust my own value system to conform more perfectly to His. I was seriously asking for a change in paradigm. The India trip was over and responsibilities in the United States had not yet resumed. I took advantage of this time “in between” to ask God for insight.

The Bible says, “Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:8). From the use of the word “near,” we can assume that God wants a close relationship with us. He prefers that our relationship is close, not distant; soft, not hard; warm, not cold. He wants it to be friendly and intimate, not adversarial, resentful, or characterized only by things like awe, respect, fear, and reverence. Those responses are a natural aspect of a relationship with a Holy God. However, we miss an important part if we miss the friendly and intimate aspect.

Perhaps my prayer to draw close to God fueled my own accompanying efforts to draw close to Him. Immediately, I began my morning times of prayer by imagining myself at the base of a raised platform on which God sat on His glorious throne. I would say something like, “Father, here I am in the midst of glorious splendor streaming from Your mighty throne. In all the light, brightness, color, shimmer, fragrance, and glory of this place and in the midst of the sound of multiplied voices singing, exclaiming Your greatness in praise so that the ground trembles with thunderous volume, I lift my voice in awe at Your greatness and majesty. I prostrate myself before You with my

face on the ground, out of profound reverence and humility; I acknowledge Your superiority and exceeding greatness.” Imagining myself in God’s throne room and expressing myself in this way made my praise more real, conscious, and meaningful to me than merely saying the familiar words of praise I have used for many years.

After praising God in this way for some moments, I usually proceed to another step. I typically say something like, “And now with caution and awe, I lift my head from the ground to look on Your beauty and lovely face. I see You smile and nod to me. I receive it as Your invitation to ascend the steps and I approach Your throne. You are smiling and encouraging me to approach even closer. I climb up on Your lap, lay my head against Your shoulder, and, place one arm over Your shoulder and the other around Your neck. I whisper with deep feelings in Your ear, ‘Daddy, I love You. Daddy, I love you.’”

After several moments of speaking intimately this way with God, I descend from His lap, throne, and platform to proceed with my normal routine of prayer and intercession for the day.

However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to pray in clichés when you are on His lap talking with your Daddy.

Some Advantages of Taking Time to Linger on Daddy’s Lap

During the six months of increased time spent in daily prayer abroad, I continued to draw closer and closer to God. It became easier to spend the increased amount of time in prayer each day. I learned to enjoy a more relaxed pace, moving from praise to prayer, lingering as long as I wanted on each point. I knew I was experiencing a spiritual change that continued upon my return to the United States. On the morning of January 2, 2003 — more than a week after my three days of debriefing alone with God — I proceeded to pray as described above with one major change: At the point in my prayer when I normally descended from God’s lap, throne, and platform, I had a deep longing to linger on God’s lap. I told Him so and He invited me to stay. I proceeded through the remainder of my prayer time staying on