

Psalm 26: Intimacy with God

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When I was in San Diego a few weeks ago I went to a grocery store and chose one of those carts we all hate. It was loud and obnoxious, and people would literally stare at me as I rolled by. While I was there I really wanted someone to look at me so that I could make some joke about it. I wanted them to be able to laugh with me at my misfortune. Why? Because I felt a burden and I thought that a little bit of a relationship would bring me relief. For them to acknowledge my awkwardness would mean that in a small way they knew my struggle and would say in a way, "It's ok."

If we really stop to think about it, isn't this a huge reason we desire not only romantic relationships, but intimate relationships? We want not only to have a familiarity with someone, but we want them to know us so well that they can see who we really are and say, "It's ok." I want you to think about the people in your life who you desire to have an intimate relationship with [could be the person you are dating, married to, one of your kids]. My guess is that if you were to achieve the sort of relationship I'm talking about here you would see it less as a reward [look what I've accomplished] and more as a relief [look at what I've been given].

Let me put it another way, I'm sure you've all been in situations where you feel alone, trapped, and fearful and all you wanted was someone to come alongside you, see you, understand you and say, "It's ok. I know, and we are going to make it through this." We know the gift of this type of relationship on a human level, but this morning we want to talk about it on a cosmic level.

This morning we are going to talk about intimacy with God. When we talk intimacy with God it is a kind of intimacy which is exclusive. The intimacy you have with God ought to be the single most unique relationship you have in this life. It should be the well from which you distribute the grace of intimacy to those who are in your life.

So what I want to do today is define gospel-intimacy and then I want to look at a text which gives us three phases of what intimacy looks like between us and God. I want to define gospel intimacy as this: **Gospel intimacy is knowing and being known by God through Jesus.**

So with that said let's dive into our text. Let's read together **Psalm 26:1-3.**

So here we have a Psalm of David. David was the greatest King Israel ever had, but his reign did not start out roses. In fact the pre-ruling story of David is one of him being rejected and belittled by his family, and then hunted and persecuted by the King he was anointed to replace. To top all of this off David's closest friend was the son of the crazed King who was trying to kill him.

So you can imagine the loneliness inside of David's heart. Does he turn to his family with whom he hasn't had the greatest relationship with? Does he turn to his King who is out to kill him? Or does he turn to his best friend who is the son of the King?

Maybe you've been in, or are in a similar emotional state as David. You are burdened, but you don't really know where you can turn on this human level for comfort.

As David is running, hiding and grieving he pens this song which begins with a plea to God, saying "Vindicate me." He looks at all which is pressing against him in life and he turns to the God of Israel and says, "Clear my name!" "Declare me right," "give me your blessing." The Hebrew word for "vindicate" is not simply a legal term. It is actually a deeply relational word which carries with it the idea of a restoration of peace. It is David asking God to meet him in his sorrow and say, "I know, I understand, and It's ok."

But what's interesting is on what grounds he moves towards God with his plea of vindication. Look back at the text: **Psalm 26:1-2**. David goes to God for a relational renewal and he asks for it on the grounds of intimacy. "Know my heart O' Lord, know my desires, try my heart and my mind." This is the first phase of gospel-intimacy we are going to look at tonight and it is: **The Danger of Being Known by God**.

This might seem odd to you considering the confidence that David is going to God here. But I want you to look once more at this text and notice the dangerous intimacy of his plea. Can you look at verses one and two of this Psalm and honestly say that to your closest relationship and not have any fear? Can you go to your best friend, your girlfriend or your spouse and say: "I have perfectly loved you and served you. I call you to examine, try, and see my heart and my mind. Look inside the deepest part of me and see that I have never been frustrated with you, I have never been antagonistic or bitter towards you, I have never gossiped or wished ill upon you."

My bet is that most of us would never want to bear that kind of inspection from those closest to us, but here David is asking God to do that. The same God who when he anointed David as king said, "The Lord sees not as man sees: man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Some of you might be thinking, "Yeah but he's God. He's going to love David and be kind to David even if he is sinful."

But remember our definition of intimacy. It is not only being known by God, but knowing God. At this point what does David know about God? Well he certainly knows this: **Exodus 34:6-7**. David knows that this is a God who will, "by no means clear the guilty." Sometime after David, the prophet Isaiah will say this in **Isaiah 33:14**. Can gasoline safely dwell in the midst of a fire? No. Can sinners safely dwell in the midst of a holy God? No.

David knew this God. So did a man you may have heard of named Martin Luther. Luther was a German monk in the 17th century who gave the whole of his young adult years to studying the God of the Bible. But the idea of knowing God and being known by God terrified him. With David's psalm in our minds look at the similar situation but different conclusion Luther came to: **"Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God"**

Luther knew the danger of intimacy with God. So does David respond differently than Luther because he thinks he is sinless? Does David think that he is the one person who has lived a life so perfect that he has warranted no punishment from God? No, and those who know the story of David know that his life will prove that he has deep sin inside his heart. So on what grounds does David willingly go to God with such a dangerous request?

Look at **Psalm 26:3**. David is able to pray such a dangerous prayer not because he is perfectly sinless, but because he is perfectly fixated on the steadfast love of God. There is something about this God and his love for us which acknowledges and atones for our guilt. This is the second phase of intimacy: **The Confidence of Knowing God**.

It's not because David was naïve towards God's justice that he moved towards him. David knew God so well that it led him and his sin into the very courtroom of the God who judges, and he did so with no hesitation. Why? If you were walking into a potentially life threatening situation, wouldn't you want to know the depth of certainty you have surrounding your hope? I know for a long time my intimacy with God would stop here: God loves me steadfastly and therefore I can have peace. But this is not necessarily ground for confidence.

Because the biggest question we need to ask here is: how do you know God loves you? In times of uncertainty, in times where we feel the need for comfort and relief, how do you know that in moving towards the God of the Bible we are able to receive God's love and not his anger?

It is good news that God loves. But it is only good news for me if God loves me. Do you see the distinction there? Let me put it this way. It is good that right now somewhere someone is preparing a perfectly seared medium rare fillet mignon. That is great. But unless it is prepared for me and given to me, the good news of its existence has no ramification on my life.

How do you who are sinful simultaneously look at our sin, turn to God and know with confidence that this steadfast love is for you? In this text we see David looking at a perfect and holy God, and God looking at a sinful and scared David and God is going to have mercy on him. Why? Did David dupe God? Was God just manipulated by David's sob story?

It reminds me of a short paragraph you may have read or heard before in the Chronicles of Narnia between Mr. Beaver and Susan: "Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"..."Safe?" said Mr Beaver..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Why would God vindicate or grant any relief to someone who is sinful? Because he's a good king. Because God looked at David, and saw David's heart for his own steadfast love. And God in his mercy did exactly what he had been doing since the days of Abraham, he saw his faith and counted it to him as righteousness. Meaning God saw David, his sin, his circumstances and his hope through the corrective lens of the greater David.

You see there would be another King of Israel from the line of David who would come. Another King who would be rejected by his closest family, hunted by men of his own tribe and crucified by their jealous hands. But this King really was perfect. This King didn't have to trust that God would be gracious to him, because he was the grace of God. And that King died so that he could give his intimate and perfect relationship with God the judge to David the sinner.

You see David's hope in God's steadfast love is only grounds for confidence because God's steadfast love came down to earth for us in Jesus Christ. For David, God's steadfast love and the vindication that came from it was a future hope. For us, it is in faith that we look back at Jesus and say, "There is the steadfast love which atones for my sins. There is my confidence and hope in the trials of my life."

In the 1980's there was a crazy cult which set up camp on a huge ranch in central Oregon. As the government was trying to shut down the religion, a small group of followers made plans to assassinate the then District Attorney in Oregon. When the plot was exposed the group fled to Germany where they couldn't be extradited and tried for their crimes.

Among this group was the woman who spearheaded the assassination plot: Jane Stork. She was a former Australian professor who followed the cult from India to the states. She stayed in Germany, safe from the US prosecution until something happened. In 2006 her son Philip, who lived in Australia, was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor and was given only a few months left to live. However the moment she left Germany she would be apprehended by US officials. At that moment the mother had to choose between two hard decisions: stay in Germany and never see her son again, or appear back in court in Oregon and plead for mercy.

That is what she did. In February of 2006 Jane Stork walked up the steps of the courthouse in Portland, Oregon and turned herself in. She plead guilty to all her crimes and said, "I actually conspired to kill Mr. Turner, it is up to me alone to face this terrible truth...No person has the right to do what I did. I'm truly sorry." She then explained that her only request before she was sentenced was that she be allowed to see her son in Australia. Like David, her only cry was, "Vindicate me!"

This was her only hope: to be known and heard by the judge, and for the judge to have mercy on her. Her hope was that in being fully known and fully honest, she would merit the favor of the court.

This was a court case which had occupied the state of Oregon for more than 20 years. Jane had already served three years in jail for the attempted murder of one other member of her cult, and now she stood before the judge after two decades as a fugitive with charges of weapons fraud and conspiracy to murder. After a time of deliberation the judge took his stand.

Judge Malcom Marsh addressed the court and Mrs. Stork who faced life in prison and granted her the freedom to visit her son and reduced her sentence to a mere five years' probation. In addressing the court he said, "I think there are times where justice trumps mercy, there are other times when mercy trumps justice...we have such a case here."

I sat on my couch and cried when I watch this story. Yet the gospel is infinitely more beautiful because God doesn't have to choose between justice and mercy. God doesn't need to cheat the system. God doesn't need to skirt the laws. If God merely gave mercy without dealing with sin there would be no justice, and it would not be for our good. But because God is perfect he provided the perfect solution on the cross. The cross is not where mercy beats justice, or where justice beats mercy. The cross is where mercy and justice triumph together in Jesus Christ. Where our sins are killed so that we may approach with dangerous intimacy to the throne room of God and say: see me and know me.

We all stand as Jane Stork, guilty of sins beyond comparison with an eternal sentence of damnation on the line. And if our hope is simply to be known, we have no hope. For we are truly guilty. But Jesus paid our sentence in our stead. He took our punishment so that we can be restored back to a right standing. My sins covered by Jesus' righteousness. My disobedience struck by Jesus' perfection. My failings, Jesus' victory. My weakness, Jesus' strength. Our hope then is to be known by God through this man Jesus Christ.

You must know this God if you want intimacy. If you want confidence you must examine his beauty.

There is love, there is steadfast, infinite, sin-killing, life giving, lovely intimacy in God, but it is only through the work of Jesus Christ that we have access to it. We may try in various different to relate to God in order to find confidence: we may turn to our performance, we may turn to our worship songs, find refuge in our large churches, or turn to our leaders as the way in which we will find vindication. But if we attempt to find intimacy with God outside of Jesus Christ we will never find the rest and relationship we are looking for.

This is a firm warning because Jesus in Matthew 7 Jesus says this: **Matthew 7:22-23**. So where then is our confidence before God? You see in this example these men and women came to Jesus expecting intimacy and what they pointed to was their works done in the name of Jesus, and Jesus says, I never knew you. I know when we went through this passage a number of months ago it caused fear in the lives of many people. "If we can do all those things in the name of Jesus and still hear the words, 'I never knew you,' then what hope do I have, how will I ever have peace before God?"

But did you notice the problem in Matthew 7? Jesus didn't know them. But in the gospel, we know Jesus. To be clear, in the gospel we know so many things: we know the hope and comfort of life, we know the reality of sin and damnation, we know the hope for salvation, the fuel for worship, the joy of life everlasting, but at the bottom of the Gospel, the very window into the storeroom of God's glory is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And if we know Jesus it changes everything. If we know Jesus through the cross, it is proof that Jesus knows us. If we know Jesus through the cross we need not worry this day for we know God rightly.

Brothers and sisters, often times the sins of others provoke in us a lack of trust, and a sense of fearful anxiety. Brothers and sisters, often times our own indwelling sin hides behind the veil of our hearts because we know that we are too scared to examine our hearts ourselves. But to know Jesus through the cross is to face the hardship which sin externally creates and internally condemns and find relief at the foot of the cross. **1 John 2:1, Hebrews 7:22-25**.

Brothers and sisters, to be known by Jesus through the cross is to be able move towards the God of the universe in times of emotional turmoil and hear with confidence: "It's ok, for my son has dealt with it."

This is the last and final phase of gospel-centered intimacy: **The Confidence of Being known by God**. Look with me at the last two verses of David's psalm and note the confidence he has in being rightly known by God: **Psalms 26:11-12**.

If you know and are known by God through Jesus Christ, you are on level ground my friends. To use David's word, you have been vindicated. You have been known, you have been set free.

Again, what David is looking for when he uses that word vindicate is much more than a declaration. He is looking for the restoration of perfect peace between himself and God which mends a community which had previously been destroyed.

Isn't that what we are all looking for? We look for it from the lady in grocery store, the judge in Portland, or the affirmation of our boss or significant other. But the disruption we experience is separation from God, so the only solution we will find is that relationship being restored through Jesus Christ.

For David, the stress of his world, the weight of his horizontal circumstances were ultimately made whole not through the removal of his circumstances, but by the reminder of God's present goodness to him in love.

For us this means this: Gospel-intimacy is not only our hope, it is our home. Here is what I mean by this. It is not a vacation home we visit. It is the room in which we live. It is where we begin to set up shop for the rest of our lives. We lean into this goodness and this mercy with clarity and confidence because we have seen what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Oh the joy of facing the successes and sorrows of our life with the certainty of a relationship with the one who has vindicated you. This is the dangerous intimacy of God through Jesus Christ.

Now, here are three things I want us to do with this intimacy in the immediate. Three motions we can make towards God and towards others which contribute to the grace we experience individually and corporately through the steadfast love of God:

Number One: **Examine your hearts and draw near to God.**

I want all of us to do what David did, I want you to go to God knowing full well the depth of your brokenness and go to God asking him to know you. We all have sins in our hearts which we would prefer no one see.

Now, I do not think that we have to be able to walk through every sin which we have ever done and give that over to God in order to be saved. That is a crushing task. But what we do know from scripture is that to conceal sins in our hearts and refuse to deal with them at the cross is to deny ourselves the joy and confidence of God's grace.

It might seem fearful, and in experience it is, but in reality if you are saved by Jesus there is nothing safer than this. For look at what the author of Hebrews says in **Hebrews 4:14,16**.

Number Two: **After going to God, go to someone else.** I want you to take that confession and bring it to another person in your life for help. This is how we seek to make this intimacy a home. We need the help of God's people to create a pattern of hope and grace in our fight against sin and hopelessness.

Go to your spouse, the leader of your community group, the person discipling you, or another believing friend and ask them for help in this area. A soldier may win a battle, but it takes an army to win a war. Seek help from others.

Lastly: **Remind others of this hope.**

The truth is, in encountering sin in our hearts we may face interpersonal and economic consequences. But we will never face eternal ones. That is the hope we provide others when dealing with their sin. This is how we show we value Christ above everything else. This is how we experience the greater joy which comes through knowing Jesus than the riches which come from this world.

I want us to serve other people with the hope we ourselves receive in the gospel. Look with me at the hope we can model to each other in **Ephesians 5:8b-14**.

Together, by God's grace, let us at Sovereign Hope move towards God in moments of uncertainty with the clarity and confidence that comes in knowing and being known by God through Jesus Christ. And in our joy, let us invite others to experience the same.