



ILLINOIS Focus



Ron Aguilera, President

KNOWING JESUS INTIMATELY



How is your courage these days? When I think of challenging and difficult times, I think of the biblical story of Job. Job experienced the "valley of the shadow of death." He lost his children, he lost his health, he lost everything he owned... this was an extremely difficult time in his life.

As you can imagine, during that period, when he was going through his most difficult stage in life, it was not the time for him to BEGIN working on his relationship with God, so he then would have the strength to get through his trials. Fortunately, during those difficult days, Job ALREADY HAD a healthy relationship with God and could lean on Him.

I think of Abraham, when it appeared like he would lose his only son, or when Hannah desperately longed for a child but could not have one, or when David's son rebelled against him. Scripture tells us each of them sought comfort from God, and that it was their relationship with God that saw them through.

As we experience the challenges of the day, I want to encourage you to take time, especially during this "shelter in place" phase, to develop a closer relationship with Jesus, to

get to know Him more intimately. It is the best way to prepare yourself and to have strength and faith for crisis – current, or future. See, it is a vibrant and intimate relationship with Jesus that develops us and sustains us for whatever challenge, trial, or emergency, we might face.

Now, you might ask, "How? How do we begin, or best continue, this journey to a more intimate

the people of God would have read the Word of God.

I invite you to do that now, to start today. Pick one of the four Gospels and start there. Read through Acts of the Apostles, the story of the early church, and how God's Spirit moved in those days. Go to Proverbs, wisdom to live by, or the Psalms for worship thoughts and prayer.

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ISSUE FOCUS

KNOWING JESUS INTIMATELY

relationship with Jesus?" Commit to journey with Jesus through scripture... and there is no better time to start than today, in this coronavirus crisis.

Yes, there are all kinds of things occupying our free time right now. We've got books to read, we've got Netflix to watch, there's the internet and social media, and the list goes on and on. This means you have time to spend time in God's Word. The Bible is what Jesus was referring to when He said, "the scriptures testify of me," or "Have you not read...?" He assumed that those claiming to be

Jesus said: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). I want to challenge you to spend time getting to know Jesus more and more intimately through His Word in 2020. You won't regret it!

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& MORE



The espoused mission of the Illinois Conference remains, “We exist to make healthy, disciple-making churches.” How does “knowing Jesus intimately” play itself out in the context of a healthy, disciple-making congregation?

A scripture providing a window into this experience comes from John’s gospel. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and to have it to the full.” (John 10.10) The contrast is stark. Knowing intimately the One who brings life and brings it to fulness, to a wholeness, will lead the follower of that One to a fulness, to a wholeness as well. A religion claiming to follow this One will also be known as a people who bring fulness and wholeness.

Christian psychologist and author, Dr. Henry Cloud, defines character as the “ability to meet the demands of reality.” For people experiencing these ever-deepening relationships with this One who gives life, they will be the kinds of people developing their capacity to meet the demands of reality.

“
... THOSE WHO FLESH OUT **TRUTH** WILL BE
PEOPLE SEEKING **WHOLENESS** ...”

Bringing the full and whole sense of all encompasses this willingness (strengthened by the indwelling Spirit) to face what is and not merely to create deeper illusions—those distractions from what is before us. One of the themes throughout the testimony of the Spirit through the writers of scripture is that our reality outside the gate incorporates far-less-than ideal circumstances. The narrative of humanity grounds our experience in this reality. Viruses arrive on our doorsteps. Innocence dies. Distortions become a way of life. Mayhem permeates.

As such, I am compelled to ask, “If discipleship is a lifelong process, is that process strengthening us to meet reality and embrace the fullness of life despite the mayhem?” To spend much time in church never growing in the ways of the heart seems so counterproductive to our calling as followers of this Full-Life Giver. We talk of “truth” as though it were some abstract notion of something else by-and-by. And yet, this One who was the Truth fleshed out the fullness of life for our wholeness. Those who follow this “fleshing out truth” will be people seeking wholeness.

The disciplines of building that intimacy into a way of life are not provided as an end but as a safe place for development. We do not study scriptures to gather more knowledge. We do not pray as a way



Following Jesus DANGEROUSLY

John Gryns
Executive Secretary

of strengthening a “laundry list.” We do not share this Jesus with others to convert them. We do not fast, provide acts of compassion, nor any other discipline for the sake of discipline. These are all developmental tools so that our intimacy with the Life-Bringer leads us to become radically different kinds of people. And this “radically different kind of people” are the kinds of people who face what is and know that in that facing, unseen forces for life are present.

And part of this developmental process includes creating different narratives. Do the narratives we tell ourselves bring life or bring destruction—both to self and those around us? During our time of being sequestered, so many narratives were not about life, nor about well-being, nor about “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18) And it is precisely here, in this time, that the light on a hill can be seen. Let our narratives embrace the fullness of this life and the presence of the Life. We do not need the right circumstances to “rejoice always.” For this Life-Bringer redeemed all of your story—not just the clean version. And it is here we become different kinds of people.

Joshua Voigt, Pastor North Aurora Church
and Conference Prayer Coordinator

Intimate **PRAYER**



How do you want people to remember you? In Acts 13:22, the Bible calls David a man after God's own heart. Is there any better way to be remembered? What was it that made David stand out? I propose that David had an intimate relationship with God. But what is intimacy, and how can we have a similar relationship? If you ask someone to describe an intimate relationship, the most common answer would be a relationship between a husband and a wife. But intimacy, true intimacy, is much, much more than physical.

Intimacy happens in a vulnerable relationship. I trust my wife, and she trusts me because of years of communication. I do not hold any secrets from her. Early in our marriage, I would buy things impulsively and hide them, and then when she found them, I would say, "Oh, I got that a long time ago," embarrassed that I had been impulsive and foolish with our money. We talked about it years ago, and I started telling her right away when I bought something impulsively and eventually when I was thinking about purchasing something. I have told my kids they can tell mommy anything I do, and I never ask them to keep a secret from her. To me, this is the definition of an intimate

relationship. My wife knows my weaknesses and struggles. She knows my deepest, darkest secrets. I don't keep anything from her.

David had this same relationship with God. The Psalms are filled with David confessing his sins to God and asking for forgiveness. When Nathan confronted him about his affair, he immediately turned to God and asked for forgiveness and a renewal of their relationship. It is in this situation that David wrote Psalms 51 and one of my favorite Bible verses, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit in me..."

If we want this intimate relationship with God, we must become vulnerable, become real with Him. I was addicted to video games. I had them all, PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo. I wanted to get closer to God and was praying a prayer as such with the same answer always popping up in my head, "PlayStation." I didn't want to give up my video games, and my relationship with God changed when I finally admitted it to Him. I prayed

“ **...WE MUST BECOME REAL
WITH HIM...** ”

a prayer I have prayed many times since, "God, give me the want to want to quit because I don't want to quit." I told God, "Right now, if I am truly honest, I love video games more than You, but I don't want to love video games more than You. Please change my heart so that You come first." Do you know what? He did it! My wife and I went away to a funeral, and when we got back, we had been burglarized. To this day, I say an angel robbed me. My video games were gone, but everything else was there. That experience changed the way I looked at life. I still play games with my family, but it is not an addiction that I place before God. This experience completely changed my prayer life. It was not long after that I first told God, "I love you." True intimate prayer is vulnerable prayer, letting God know when you are not happy with Him, when you fall short, when you struggle. If you want to know Jesus intimately, then you need to let Him into the dark places of your heart. After all, He already knows all about it.



FACTS OR Feelings



Jonathan Burnett
Senior Pastor,
North Shore Church

both an aspiration and a mandate. It is true we can't perfectly attain this knowledge in this world. For the rest of eternity, we will continue to aspire to grow in our intimate knowledge of our Saviour. However, this statement affirms that no subject or knowledge is more foundational than knowing Jesus intimately. To know Jesus, we must not only consume facts about Him; we must feel Him spiritually in our lives.

There are those Christian groups who focus almost exclusively on a spirit-led, experiential form of Christianity that does not emphasize biblical truth. Then there are those groups who focus primarily on intellectual and informational Christianity and do not leave much room for the Spirit of God.

The Spirit inspired the pioneers, who shone rays of truth on the Advent movement, to write these words.

"Do not allow your minds to be diverted from the all-important theme of the righteousness of Christ by the study of theories. Do not imagine that the performance of ceremonies, the observance of outward forms, will make you an heir of heaven. We want to keep the mind steadfastly to the point for which we are working; for it is now the day

of the Lord's preparation, and we should yield our hearts to God, that they may be softened and subdued by the Holy Spirit." - The Review and Herald, April 5, 1892.

Ellen White saw that our challenge would not be leaning too far into the experiential, spiritual side of knowing God, but rather that we might have a tendency to become diverted from an intimate knowledge of Jesus by tantalizing theories. Many a sincere Adventist has gone through seasons in her spiritual life where most of her time is spent debating or discussing or watching DVDs or Youtube videos about some theory or idea while failing to have a real spiritual connection with Jesus.

I know this truth through personal experience. I have spent time and money studying things that I hoped would increase my factual knowledge of God only to find out it gave me no more spiritual power. The sad truth is that books, seminars, and speakers that focus on lifting up the Righteousness of Christ are often less popular among us as a people than those that promote theories or the observance of outward forms. Jude calls those who make money from God's people by offering them spiritual food, which does not have spiritual power as 'clouds with no rain' (Jude 12). These rainless clouds are gloomy. They block the sun and provide no water.

The solution is not to go to the opposite extreme but rather to come to the center. It is not "spirit or truth," it is not "fact or feeling," it's not "law or grace" - it's both.

"You will meet with those who will

Facts don't care about your feelings. Perhaps you have seen or heard this phrase recently in our increasingly polarised world. This statement is intended to push back against the perception that our world, our politicians, and our academics are more committed to saying things and promoting ideas that feel good and don't offend rather than speaking the factual truth. It is true that powerful institutions in our world cast truth to the ground and prosper (Daniel 8:12), but does that mean that facts and feelings are at war with each other? Does knowledge gained by information stand in opposition to knowledge gained by experience?

Jesus doesn't seem to think so. In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well. They had a wide-ranging conversation about important and controversial theological, sociological, and political issues of the day: the right place of worship, the prejudice between the Jews and Samaritans, and which group were the true descendants of Jacob, etc.

In this conversation, Jesus does not get stuck on either extreme. He calmly presents to her the fact that salvation will come to the world through the Jewish people. He also compassionately addresses her feelings about relationships when asking about her husband. As the conversation comes to a climax, Jesus explains to her that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:24 (ESV). For Jesus, true worship of God is based on both spiritual experience and factual truth.

As a conference, our focus is 'knowing Jesus intimately.' This is

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**“FACTS OR FEELINGS”
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4**

say, 'You are too much excited over the matter. You are too much in earnest. You should not be reaching for the righteousness of Christ, and making so much of that. You should preach the law.' As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa, that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law, and there will be sap and nourishment in the preaching that will be as food to the famishing flock of God. We must not trust in our own merits at all, but in the merits of Jesus of Nazareth."-The Review and Herald, March 11, 1890.

This may be a struggle for those of us who are not used to it. It was for me. However, Sister White prophesied that in the end times "One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other,-Christ our righteousness." The Review and Herald, Extra, December 23, 1890. I thank God that before Jesus comes, through His Spirit, He will help this people to come to the place where they worship Him in spirit and truth, where they know Him intimately, where they can look up and say, this is our God we have waited for Him, and He will save us.

- Jonathan Burnett,
Senior Pastor,
North Shore Church

CONOCIENDO A JESUS INTIMAMENTE

Luis Eguiluz, Senior Pastor, Central Hispanic Church

Sabias que el término "conocer" en la Biblia tiene una connotación no tanto intelectual o mental sino más bien basada en la experiencia y se relaciona con emociones de modo que puede alcanzar cualidades tales como: vínculo, intimidad, cuidado, parentela y reciprocidad (Exodo, JPS Torah Commentary, p. 5). Otro diccionario (NIDOTTE), nos dice que "conocer a Dios" está relacionado con atributos como el amor, la confianza, el respeto y la abierta comunicación (11: 313). El verbo yada (conocer) tiene una gran variedad de significados que va incluso hasta la intimidad física.

**...CAMINAR CON DIOS DE
MANERA PERMANENTE.**

Dios mismo nos invita a que lo conozcamos a través de una relación íntima, genuina y transparente. En Oseas se percibe este deseo (6:3) "y conoceremos y proseguiremos en conocer a Jehová". Más adelante en el versículo 6, Oseas menciona que Dios quiere que su pueblo le conozca personalmente antes que ofrecer sacrificios u holocaustos que no se hacen de todo corazón, que son puro formalismo y apariencia externa. En otras palabras, Dios quiere un relacionamiento sincero y profundo antes que un culto formal y externo sin ningún sentido de relacionamiento íntimo con Dios.

Nuestro Dios una y otra vez nos llama a volver a él, a que

tengamos un conocimiento íntimo de él. En Jer. 9:24 nos dice: "Más alábese en esto el que se hubiere de alabar: en entenderme y conocerme, que yo soy Jehová, que hago misericordia, justicia y juicio en la tierra". Esta experiencia la necesitamos todos los días. El lema de la Conferencia de Illinois para este año es "Conocer a Jesús íntimamente". En realidad es una invitación a caminar con Dios de manera permanente.

Solo podremos conocer a Dios íntimamente en la medida que caminemos con Jesús en una relación diaria. Podemos apreciarlo claramente en la vida de Enoc (Gén. 5:24), él camino con Dios. Si decidimos caminar con Jesús todos los días y permanecemos unidos a él estaremos preparándonos para estar entre aquellos que "siguen al Cordero por dondequiera que va" (Apoc. 14:4).

La experiencia que estamos viviendo de la cuarentena por el Covid-19, nos ha permitido buscar más a Dios, depender más de él, orar más por nuestra familia y aquellos contagiados y sufrientes. Muchas personas han aceptado a Jesús por las redes sociales, muchos se han reconsecrado al Señor.

Es tiempo de conocer a Jesús más íntimamente. Debemos

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INTRODUCING...

Douglas (Doug) Reeves grew up in Pendleton, Oregon. He is a 5th generation Seventh-day Adventist who has loved Jesus all of his life. He became a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist church at age 12. He graduated from Walla Walla College, now Walla Walla University, with a degree in business administration with a concentration in accounting in 1984. He has been a licensed Certified Public Accountant for 32 years and specialized in trust department auditing for 24 years. Among his varied career experiences, he worked for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists as an auditor; at Monterey Bay Academy as business manager; and has served as treasurer of the Nevada-Utah Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He is currently treasurer of the Hawaii Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. We welcome him as the new treasurer of the Illinois Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



Doug has been married to Cheryl for 35+ years. They have one grown son; Douglas Jr, and three grown daughters; Sheila, Lisa and Sharon. They have five grandchildren; three grandsons and a granddaughter in Oregon; and one grandson in Missouri.

Cheryl grew up in Hamburg, Pennsylvania. After attending college, she was a stay-at-home mom who homeschooled all four children at least through the 4th grade. Cheryl has worked various jobs for the last 14 years. Most recently, she has worked in the foodservice department at Castle Hospital. She loves being around people.

Doug and Cheryl have lived in a few different areas of the country, including Massachusetts, Texas, Washington, California, Nevada, and Hawaii. We desire to follow God's leading in our lives; we vowed early in our marriage that we would follow God where He leads. Cheryl and I ask for your prayers.

CONOCIENDO A JESUS INTIMAMENTE**CONTINUATION DE LA PAG. 5**

pasar más tiempo con Jesús, más tiempo con su Palabra y compartiéndola con alguien más. Muy pronto todo esto acabará y nos reuniremos con los redimidos de todos los tiempos. Oremos para que Cristo venga pronto. Recordemos que "el pueblo que conoce a su Dios se esforzará y actuará" (Dan. 11: 32).

- Pastor Luis Eguiluz Senior Pastor, Central Hispanic Church



Pete Braman
Ministerial Director

THE HEART OF INTIMACY

Intimacy is the experience and desire to know someone on a deeper level. True intimacy can only happen when we are willing to be known by another person as well. An intimate friend is someone we feel close to, someone who knows and understands us well. Jesus knows everything about us, from the number of our hairs to the "issues of our heart." An omnipotent, omniscient God who desires to know us intimately is both humbling and overwhelming. Jesus longs for us to be more than His "servants" who do not know their Master but as a "friend" who shares "everything" with us (John 15:15). Despite the denials, lack of trust, and constant misunderstandings from his disciples (and us), Jesus longing for intimacy with them (us) never wavered. His death on the cross, laying "down his life for His friends," is the ultimate act of love and trust (John 15:13). It should inspire our sense of awe and reverence towards Him. How can we embrace Jesus' appeal for greater intimacy with Him?

At the core of any close relationship is trust. Without trust, intimacy begins to deteriorate. We simply cannot be intimate with someone we do not trust. This is true in our relationships with each other, and equally valid with our relationship with Jesus. James' encouragement is an amazing promise: "draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). Many of us have wondered why Jesus had an "inner circle" of disciples. Did He favor them above the others? Peter, James, and John experienced things with Jesus that the others did not. Jesus brought them to Jairus home to view the raising of his daughter (Luke 8:50-53), witnessed Moses and Elijah and the audible voice of God at Jesus transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2), and Jesus brought them close during his prayer of anguish at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-39). These three disciples became Jesus' closest companions. It wasn't that Jesus had "favorites," but He responded to their trust and desire to be closer to Him. Ellen White stated that Peter, James, and John would often "pass the night with Jesus in this retreat" (Desire of Ages p. 686). We all need to create garden experiences of communion with Jesus. A place of stillness and quiet to hear the voice of Jesus. A place of prayer and contemplation. A place where we can hear God's voice telling us to trust and "listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5).



Intimacy is more than acquiring knowledge about God. Although knowing Jesus through His word is vital, and it can help fuel intimacy with Him, it is not always synonymous with trust. Jesus reminds us that many know scriptures but don't know Him (John 5:39-40). As we read His word, do we search for God's heartbeat and His love for us? God reveals His heart to us through His word. We rekindle intimacy when we "trust in the Lord with all your heart" and in "all our ways acknowledge Him" (Proverbs 3:5-6). His word is trustworthy, and obedience is our expression of faith.

The disciples just returned from a tour of mission service where Jesus had sent them out two by two. Their "intimate relationship with Him" compelled them to share their struggles and joys, successes, and failures. As with Jesus, an intimate friend seems in tune with the needs of the other. Jesus knew immediately that they needed rest. He knew they needed "leisure" and nourishment. He also "knew they needed much instruction." They "needed a place of retirement, where they could hold communion with Jesus." "It was their duty to rest" (Desire of Ages, p.360). Intimacy with Jesus is all about creating space to be with him. It is an essential place to find rest, nourishment, and instruction from our friend and Savior Jesus Christ.



CAMPMEETING AND CHICAGOLAND CONVOCATION 2020

CAMP AKITA

Sabbath August 15, 2020
"The Time Has Come!"

For thousands of years, Old and New Testament writers have been



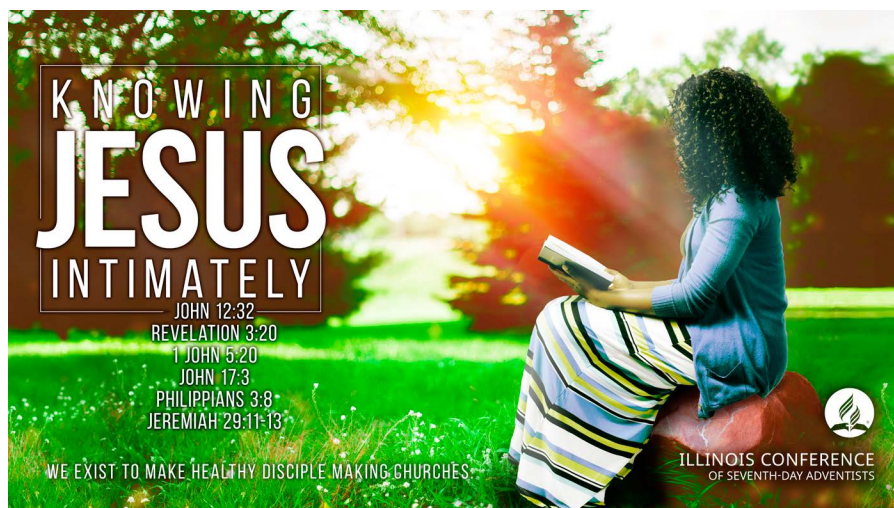
forecasting events that would occur shortly before the return of Jesus. If those prophets and apostles were alive today, they would be filled with exciting anticipation of seeing Jesus return. If these are not the last days, what else can we call them? The apostle Paul labels these days, "Perilous Times." Daniel calls it, "The Time of the End." Even the most non-religious recognize that the world is crumbling around us. What must the people of God do to be prepared and help others also to be ready?

The keynote speaker will be our very own Pastor John Lomacang.

HINSDALE CHURCH

Sabbath September 26, 2020

Our speaker will be Elder Bill Knott, Editor of the Review. Plan now to join us on this high day of worship!



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