

THAT WE MAY KNOW HIM

Intently and Intimately

Relating to

Jesus Christ

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outskirts
—press

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my three daughters,

Ashley, Asia, and Antoinette.

I pray that you continue to grow closer to Jesus

and allow Him to truly be Lord.

Each day with Him is a step closer to discovering

the reality of His love, sacrifice,

and commitment to you as His followers.

With all my Heart, Love Dad.

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Introduction

THERE IS A longing in the heart of every follower of Jesus Christ that only He can satisfy. However, there are times when we tend to gravitate toward material and tangible things to deal with life's challenges. But, once the effect of these things wears off, we recognize that something is still missing. It's the hunger and thirst of the soul. It is a desperate cry for something much deeper than what can be purchased or acquired. It is the divine connection between the disciple and his or her Lord that fills all voids. Nothing can make us complete greater than the unconditional, unlimited, uninhibited presence of Christ. He alone is our source and there are no substitutes. He is the ultimate foundation of our peace and focus in life. Apostle Paul made one of the most touching statements, which has continued to ring in the hearts and minds of Christians for 2000 years. He said "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:10).

The context of the statements is not about having a perfect knowledge of Christ, but being acquainted with Him. Being close to Him. Relating to Him. To know Him is to come closer to Him, to receive His words, and have intimate fellowship with Him. To know Him

means to surrender yourself and declare Him to be the foundation of life (John 14:6). It means relinquishing your presuppositions and allowing Him to teach and lead you in His way. To know Him means having a conscious and deliberate trust in Him. It means willfully placing your faith in His person and His work. This means relating to Him on the deepest, most intimate level of your existence. It means giving Christ all that you are — raw and open — just as He gave you His all on Calvary's cross. There, He was open, vulnerable, and stretched wide to show you that nothing could separate you from His love (1 John 4:19). He allowed you to see Him in a most undesirable and unwelcomed condition so that you would have the courage to open yourself to Him the same way. He is saying to you what He said over 2000 years ago which is, "Come to Me" The bible declares that "All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The effects of sin have left us broken and morally stained; yet, in His eyes we are still desirable. The question I often ponder when I consider how much He loves me is, "Why?" Then, He softly whispers, "Why not?"

We are His beloved—we who have made the decision to follow Him into everlasting life. We are His workmanship, that is created in Him for every good work (Eph. 2:10). Yet, above all, He calls us to come closer to Him. Just as Christ outstretched Himself, we must be willing to do the same on our level. The outstretching of our arms is a symbol that we are inviting Him into our secret places. It is an indication of submission, surrendering, and separation. Submission, because we yield our way to His way; surrendering, because we shed self and humbly come to Him; and separation because we unplug from whatever stands between ourselves and Him. This is a love relationship at

the highest level of life. It is inseparable and eternal. It's the foundation for both spiritual and practical living. What a mistake it would be for the followers of Jesus Christ to look for some other source to sustain our joy and peace. He is our ultimate! Unfortunately, there are many who have crossed the threshold of salvation but have not taken the time to cultivate their relationship with Christ. He is there waiting and will continue to do so, with patience, until they realize their true need for fellowship with Him. Furthermore, there are Christians who are attempting to make themselves happy by equating good fortune, positive thinking, and material possessions as part of their relationship with Christ. The fact is, Jesus doesn't need those things to make the Christian experience worth living. He is our life. That is what makes living out our faith worth it all! Good days or bad days, He is our life. Good fortune or misfortune, He is our life. Whether we have positive thinking or worried thoughts, He is our life. Whether we worship in a beautiful sanctuary or an old warehouse, He is our life. With friends or without, He is our life. When we can say, "He is our life" with certainty and confidence, everything will be put into perspective. We see life through His eyes. This only comes by having a relationship with Him in spirit and in truth.

There are many Christians who know "about" Him, but have taken very little time in really getting to "Know" Him. It requires nothing of us to know about Him. However, getting to know Him requires time, process, and sometimes pain. It is no overnight thing. The experience with Christ is a journey, and each day we discover more about Him. Many people can quote the bible and give expositions of theology and biblical passages with precision; but they have yet to have a deep and enriching encounter with Christ. Nicodemus was a ruler of

the Jews but he had no encounter with Christ (John 3:1-16). He was well versed, but lacked a fundamental understanding concerning the kingdom of heaven. Like many people, he needed to go beyond his own presuppositions and discover what it means to know Christ.

Relating to Him changes and transforms us into His image. We see and live differently. The blinders are removed and the words that we read become rhema (living). How many people in the bible received information about Christ or were well versed in the Law but did not have a life-changing relationship with Him? They *knew* about Him but did not *know* Him. It's one thing for people to hear about you or to know details about you; but it's another thing to spend time with you and get into your world. To know Christ entails more than going to church, hearing sermons, and gaining details about Him. To know Christ is to unpack the reality of His person and to step into His world. It means investing your time and your will into growing in a life-changing relationship with Him.

The early disciples knew that something spiritual had taken place in their lives. As they experienced His teachings and saw the miracles He performed and the people He reached, they knew there was more to Him than what appeared on the surface. They wanted to go further with Him — beyond His meetings and public gatherings. They wanted to spend time with Him privately. They wanted to hear more about the kingdom of God and eternal life. They sat and listened to the depth of wisdom He spoke; and the more they experienced Him, the more they wanted to dedicate their lives to His cause. This was not some fanciful attraction or infatuation. It was a true knitting of their hearts with His. They could not turn back if they wanted to because His way of life had become inculcated in theirs. There were

no comparisons to or substitutes for it. They discovered life, and it would set the course for all of their relationships and undertakings. Jesus blazed a trail in their hearts that only He could walk. They refused to incorporate any other doctrine, creed, or paganistic view with Christ's. Apostle Paul declared that He didn't know anything but "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). The disciples in Scripture serve as a prototype for disciples in all time periods. They gave their lives to Christ, and not the parts that they felt were expendable. They were sold out! They weren't perfect people, and in most cases, they showed their flaws; but, one thing is for certain, they remained committed to Christ in the midst of some very real challenges. They characterized what it means to know Him by the quality of their lives.

Do you have a hunger for Christ? Do you desire to go beyond just knowing details about Him and enter into a life-changing fellowship with Him? Do you desire to dig beneath the superficial surface, that you may "win Christ" (Phil 3:8)? Do you have an insatiable desire to transcend being religious and just going through the motions of being a Christian? If the answer to the aforementioned questions is "yes", then let's take this journey together. I have been a Christian for a great number of years and my walk today is just as real to me as it was the first day that I invited Jesus into my heart. I desire to help you in a most basic and encouraging way to go beyond the barriers of tradition. Some people really make the way to Christ difficult, with their heavy knowledge and overbearing instructions. In the purest and simplest sense, reaching for Christ only involves an open heart and a willing attitude. Those are the basic prerequisites for beginning and maintaining an incredible relationship with Jesus Christ. This book offers some fundamental objectives in getting to know Him.

It is designed with you in mind and will: 1. Encourage you toward gaining a Christ-centered perspective, 2. Draw you into a closer fellowship with Him, 3. Help you move toward spiritual maturity, and 4. Help you live in submission to His Lordship. So, let's get started with renewing, reinforcing, and reviving your spiritual focus. It's time to strengthen your devotion to Christ and go to a new level in your relationship with Him!