

Wasting Time with God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship with God

(InterVarsity Press, 2001, 296pp)

Klaus Issler,

Professor Emeritus of Educational Studies and Theology

Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

Foreword by James M. Houston

When it comes to developing a deep intimate relationship with God, performance and productivity are not the solution. Rather, we need to spend time with God, simply enjoying being with Him. That's actually how every friendship grows. Starting with the question of how we can make space for God in our fast-paced lives, Klaus Issler looks at seven character traits and accompanying practices: Friendship, Humility, Trust, Commitment, Understanding, Apprenticeship, and Partnership. Together, these form a model for an all-encompassing Christian spirituality that will be of lasting value.

False fixed ideas about God and false assumptions about how God deals with believers can hinder the development of a more intimate relationship with God. But the promise is sure: **"Seek the nearness of God, and he will be near to you"** (Jas. 4:8). Since God is majestic and unique, there are certain basic steps to make room for God in our lives as believers. After discussing issues of readiness in Part 1, Part 2 is about expanding our intimacy and conversation with God.

Although the reading style is conversational and often personal, the discussion is based on an integrative examination of several areas - New Testament, theology, philosophical theology, and Christian spirituality (32 pages of endnotes). Each chapter ends with a pair of relevant spiritual practices as suggestions for "wasting" time with God (see summary Table 1.1, p. 31, Table 8.3, p. 246).

Indexes: Author, Subject, and Scripture

Main points of each chapter: [pages in brackets indicate a summary table or figure in the book]

Ch. 1 *The Quest: Knowing God More Deeply* False fixed ideas about God and false expectations and assumptions about how God relates with believers can hinder the development of a more intimate relationship with God. For example I make a distinction between God's parental love and his friendship love: the first remains constant, but the latter will vary among believers depending on our efforts to know God more. The promise is sure: "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" James 4:8. This first chapter introduces the main subject (overview of the book is on pages 29-30).

Part 1: Making Room for God

Since God is majestic and unique, there are certain foundational requirements to begin to make room in our lives for God as believers. These three chapters cover topics that actually are characteristic of any good relationship: preferential friendship love (Chapter 2), humility (Chapter 3), and getting beyond outward (i.e., physical) appearances to connect with the inner person (Chapter 4). But these matters are also uniquely applicable in befriending God.

Ch 2 *Friendship: Approaching the God Who Is Love* God's trinitarian nature and fellowship of eternal love sets the foundation for what is genuine Christian friendship and community. Furthermore, we

will need to grow deeper in our close human friendships if we wish to have the relational maturity to experience greater intimacy with God (e.g., 1 Jn 4:20-21). [p. 47, 53]

Ch 3 *Humility: Honoring the God Who Is Holy* Since God opposes the proud (Jas 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5), little headway can be made to love God more deeply unless we continue the project of humbling ourselves before God, for which task he offers his grace. Jesus is the premier example of it means to humble oneself. [p. 76]

Ch 4 *Faith: Seeing the God Who is Invisible* We must become convinced that this is a God-bathed world--that the immaterial reality is just as real as the material reality. Therefore, we must deepen our reliance on this invisible reality and our invisible God, if we wish to seek God and sense his presence more and more (2 Cor 4:18, 5:7). [p. 110]

Part 2: Deepening Our Friendship with God

With readiness issues discussed in Part 1, the matter of increasing our intimacy and conversation with God becomes the focus in Part 2.

Ch 5 *Commitment: Seeking the God Who Hides* We must seek God with all of our heart (Mt 22:37). Furthermore, God intentionally cloaks some of his presence--he is partially hidden--so as not to coerce our response, but to nurture our seeking him because we want to--as close friends do. At times, God also becomes silent--initiating periodic "dark nights of the soul"--to help move us through barriers that hinder our relationship with him. [p. 136]

Ch 6 *Communication: Hearing the God Who Speaks* In addition to his Word, God also offers his guidance (Jas 1:5) with situation-specific direction for life decisions through the counsel of others and through the inner voice [overview, p. 166]. God the Spirit indwells us, speaks to us and helps us enter into a supernaturally-assisted lifestyle (Jn 7:38).

Ch 7 *Apprenticeship: Yielding to the God Who Disciplines* We don't know all the reasons why God permits suffering, but we can be assured that various good outcomes can be ours [summary, p. 190] if we yield to God the Father's discipleship/discipline of our lives through suffering (Heb 12:5-11).

Ch 8 *Partnership: Asking the God Who Answers* God the Father invites us to pray and see things change. There is room within God's plan for our requests [p. 227]. God wishes to colabor with us and teach us how to reign with him--one aspect of our ultimate destiny (Rev 22:5). Furthermore, we can learn to improve our prayer requests to God.