

**INTRODUCTION:** Scripture quotes are from the NIV or NASB copied from Zondervan’s Bible Study Library 5.0 Scholars Edition. Bold text is from AD, unbold text from the source quoted.

In much of present-day Christianity the time-honored concepts of Prophetic or Word ministry and Spiritual or Prayer ministry are largely overlooked. God as Trinity... Three-Persons in One Godhead, Christo-centric Spirit-filled faith, and the Gospel of Grace are all profoundly Spiritual. Christian Spirituality is not formulaic or self-serving, nor is it a pursuit to benefit one financially. God is Spirit and can be engaged through His revealed Word and prayer, as such our faith is profoundly mystical. Through the discipline of Word ministry, we come to know God as the Scripture masters our mind and conforms us to God’s will. Through the Spiritual discipline of Prayer ministry, we come to experience God and to know His love and goodness as our heart is conformed to God’s Heart. Christian mystics through the ages have intentionally pressed into God to experience His Presence and purpose in their life through the disciplines of Word study and Prayer. Experiencing the Presence of God Himself is the goal and relational intimacy with God is the reward of Christian mystics. Prayer is the vehicle for intimacy with the Spirit... for more on the primacy of prayer see the AD articles under the Spiritual Formation/Spiritual Discipline tab – quick links provided

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The ancients saw prayer as the means of encountering God, and as Christian Spiritual warriors their intent was the restraining of evil and furthering the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth. Sadly today prayer is often reduced to simply voicing one’s petitions that bear more in common with our childhood list of hoped for Christmas presents, than of God’s children in faith believing as agents of the light standing against the forces of darkness. Paul wrote of this mystical spiritual challenge for God’s people in Ephesians 6:12 – For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

This verse and its context demonstrate that Prayer *is* profoundly Spiritual. Since Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, prayer is our primary means of pressing into and communing with God (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-23). Prayer is much more than merely bringing our petitions to God, it is Spiritual connection and intimacy with God through His Spirit. In this article we will explore a few ideas presented by some well-known Christian mystics.

1. **PAUL THE APOSTLE** – Known as a great Christian theologian with his writings especially the Epistle to the Romans which is the clearest Biblical record of New Covenant theology in Scripture. The Bible identifies Paul as a theologian, a mystic, and an apologist. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines Christian Mysticism as – “the sense of some form of contact with the transcendent, often understood in Christian tradition as involving communion with God. Mysticism played an important role in the history of Christian faith and emerged as a living influence in modern times.” Wikipedia the Online Encyclopedia defines Christian apologetics as a "verbal defense, or a speech in defense" of Christianity. [It is making the case for God and Christ that helps to advance the Gospel of Grace.] It is a branch of Christian theology that defends Christianity against objections [from other philosophies or disciplines]. Christian apologetics has taken many forms over the centuries, starting with Paul the Apostle in the early church and Patristic writers such as Origen, Augustine of Hippo, Justin Martyr and Tertullian, then continuing with writers such as Thomas Aquinas and Anselm of Canterbury during the age of Scholasticism. Blaise Pascal was an active Christian apologist before the Age of Enlightenment, and in the modern period, Christianity was defended through the efforts of many authors such as G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. In contemporary times Christianity is defended through the work of figures such as Catholic Bishop Robert Barron, Ravi Zacharias, Lee Strobel, and William Lane Craig.

**The basis of Christian mysticism and apologetics runs deep. Where proper theology involves the correct thinking about God [IQ], the Spiritual Disciplines involve having a right heart [EQ] for God.**

**Paul in his preaching to the Pagan and Pantheistic cultures of his era, found it necessary both to build bridges for dialogue [evangelism] and to set apart God’s Way from the way of those cultures. Scripture records Paul’s example of Christian apologetics and mysticism captured in Acts 17:22-28** – Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something *unknown* I am going to proclaim to you. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything [from humanity], because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. *God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him*, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring’.”

**Paul was aware of Greek poetry and history, and employed this statement as a bridge to introduce the Gospel in terms the Greeks could understand. Zondervan’s NIV Bible Commentary states the following regarding this passage** – Paul affirms the oneness of humankind in their creation by the one God and their descent from a common ancestor. And contrary to the "deism" that permeated the philosophies of the day, he proclaimed that this God has determined specific times for humans and "the exact places where they should live," so that they would seek him and find him. In support of this teaching about humanity,

Paul quotes two maxims from Greek poets. The first - "For in him we live and move and have our being", comes from the Cretan mystic-seer and poet Epimenides (c. 600 B.C.); and the second - "for we are his offspring", from the Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315-240 B.C.). By [employing such well-known Greek] maxims, Paul is not suggesting that God is to be thought of in terms of the "god" Zeus of Greek polytheism or Stoic pantheism. Paul is rather arguing that the poets his hearers recognized as authorities have to some extent corroborated his message. In his search for a measure of common ground with his hearers, he is, so to speak, disinfecting and rebaptizing the poets' words for his own purposes. But despite its form, Paul's address was thoroughly biblical and Christian in its content.

**The historical context for this passage was a plague that ransacked Athens, where the poet-seer Epimenides was hired to deduce the source of it and resolve it. Epimenides deduced that a previously "Unknown God" had been offended, and suggested they establish altars "To an unknown god" and make an appropriate sacrifice to appease the god. In doing so, the plague was abated. Knowing this history, Paul makes use of it to introduce the Gospel. This precipitated Paul's defense of his preaching, arrest and trial in Jerusalem (recorded in Acts chapters 21-26ff). Paul's recorded testimony provided a clear Biblical basis for Christianity and a clear defense of his faith.**

2. **C S LEWIS – Is my favorite Christian writer hands down. He usually downplays his theological and mystical prowess by claiming to be more of an apologist than a theologian, but he is definitely all three. Lewis made a similar use of history as Paul's in Athens. Lewis has written extensively in how God's Moral and Ethical Law, which Christian's identify as General Revelation is written into the very fabric of the universe where it has been discovered by mystics in a variety of historical disciplines to lay a framework for the Gospel (Romans 1:18-32). In a book titled The Business of Heaven, edited by Walter Hooper, selections of Lewis' writings are topically organized. As quoted in the following passage, Lewis follows Paul's apologetic example of making God's Truth known. Understand that Lewis is not equating the "Way inherent in General Revelation" with the "Law or the Gospel of Special Revelation." That God designed underlying Truth within Creation, should come as no surprise, but rather it would be a surprise if God had not." God is not hiding Himself from Humanity, and His revelation of Himself in Creation is evidence He desires to be found. Thus, our highest thoughts should point us toward God. In this way, Lewis is employing the Way as a bridge for dialogue pointing us toward the Gospel.**

The Chinese speak of a great thing... 'the greatest thing' called the 'Way'. The Way is the reality beyond all predicates, underlying the fabric of all that was created. It is nature, it is the Way, and the Road. It is the Way in which the universe itself operates, the Way in which everlastingly emerge... stilly and tranquilly into space and time. It is also the Way which every person should walk in imitation of that cosmic and super-cosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar [of the Way]. 'In ritual' say the Analects, 'it is the harmony with nature that is prized' [above all else]. Similar to the ancient Jews who prized the Law as being 'truth' [above all else].

This conception [of the Way] in all its forms... Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Jewish, Christian, and Asian alike, I shall henceforth refer to for brevity simply as *'the Way.'* It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others are really false... in relation to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are [in relation to it]. Those who know the Way can hold that to call children delightful or old people venerable is not simply to record a sociological or psychological fact about our own emotions at the moment, but to recognize a quality which demands a certain response from us whether we make it or not.... And because our approvals and disapprovals are thus recognitions of objective value or responses to an objective order, therefore emotional states can be in harmony with reason [when we feel a liking for what ought to be approved] or out of harmony with reason [when we perceive that a liking is due but cannot feel it]. No emotion is, in itself, a judgment – In that sense all emotions and sentiments are 'a-logical' [being outside of logic]. But they can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to [the Way or Ultimate] Reason, or otherwise fail to conform. The heart never takes the place of the head – but it can, and should, obey it.

This thing called for convenience the Way, and which others may call 'Natural Law', or 'Traditional Morality', or the 'First Principles of Practical Reason', or the 'First Platitudes', or 'General Revelation'... is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgments. If it is rejected, all value is rejected [because its truth is woven into the very fabric of creation]. If any value of it is retained, by necessity all value is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgment of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems, or [as they now call them] 'ideologies', all consist of fragments from the Way itself, arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation [from that whole], yet still owing to the Way and to it alone such validity as they possess. If the pursuit of scientific knowledge is a real value [and I believe it is], then so is social, familial, and conjugal fidelity. The rebellion of new ideologies against the Way is a rebellion of the branches against the tree... if the rebels could succeed [in this mad effort], they would find that they had destroyed themselves.

**This discussion is obviously theology and philosophy of a profoundly mystical nature. This and many of Lewis' other writings including The Pilgrim's Regress, The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters, and The Space Trilogy – Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength are all imaginative allegorical apologies of profound mystical-Spiritual Truth. Lewis is a thinker, and his appeal prods those of us who are also thinkers.**

- 3. HENRI NOUWEN – Is a revered Catholic Priest, writer, theologian and Christian mystic who wrote 42 books, 51 articles, and whose work has been focused and released in 32 compilations. Nouwen's interests were rooted primarily in psychology, pastoral ministry, spirituality, social justice and community. Over the course of his life, Nouwen was heavily influenced by the work of Thomas Merton**

and others. Merton was an American Trappist monk, writer, theologian, Christian mystic, poet, social activist, and scholar of comparative religion; having written more than 70 books primarily on spirituality and social justice. Nouwen, after nearly two decades of teaching at academic institutions including the University of Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School, followed his heart in Christian social activism and went on to work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities at the L'Arche Daybreak Community in Richmond Hill, Ontario.

I have found that where CS Lewis' thought and appeal is more directed to the mind, Nouwen's is more to the heart. A mind that is strengthened by the disciplines of the Scriptures and meditating on them necessarily leads to a relationship with the One who revealed it to humanity. A heart that is softened by the Spiritual disciplines of prayer necessarily leads to relational intimacy with the One who draws all humanity toward Him. This combination of mind and heart disciplines are evident in both the Old and New Covenants of Scripture, and are core values of Authentic Discipleship. The following quotes are from a compilation on Nouwen entitled The Only Necessary Thing – Living a Prayerful Life compiled and edited by Wendy Wilson Greer.

Jesus leaves little doubt about the mystical meaning of prayer when He says, "Apart from Me you can do nothing; those who dwell in Me as I dwell in them, bear much fruit (John 15:5). Dwelling in Jesus is what prayer is all about. Life becomes an unbearable burden whenever we lose touch with the Presence of a Loving Savior and see only hunger to be alleviated, injustice to be addressed, violence to be overcome, wars to be stopped, and loneliness to be resolved. All these are critical issues, and Christians must try to [work toward] solving them; however, when our concern no longer flows with the Living Christ [within us], we feel an oppressive weight.... We may still say our fearful prayers, but we have forgotten that true prayer embraces the whole world, not just the small part where we live – from "Prayer Embraces the World."

The practice of contemplative prayer is the discipline by which we begin to see God in our heart. It is careful attentiveness to the One who dwells in the center of our being such that through the recognition of God's Presence we allow God to take control of our senses. Through the discipline of prayer, we awaken ourselves to God residing in us and let Him enter the whole of our life... our heartbeat and our breathing, into our thoughts and emotions, our hearing and seeing, our touching and tasting. It is by being awake to God in us that we can see God in the world around us. The great mystery of the contemplative life is not that we see God in the world, but that the God within us recognizes Himself throughout the world. God speaks to God, Spirit speaks to Spirit, Heart speaks to Heart. Contemplation therefore is a participation in this divine Self-recognition. It is His Spirit praying in us who makes our world transparent and opens our eyes to the Presence of the Spirit in all that surrounds us. It is with our heart of hearts that we see the Heart of the world. This explains the intimate relationship between contemplation and ministry – from "Clowning in Rome."

## SF 3.6 – Christian Spirituality and Mysticism

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Prayer is the bridge between my unconscious and conscious life. Prayer connects my mind with my heart, my will with my passions, my brain with my appetites. Prayer is the way to let the life-giving Spirit of God penetrate all the corners of my being. Prayer is the divine instrument of my wholeness, unity, and inner peace – from “Sabbatical Journey.”

“Come to Me,” Jesus says, “All you who are weary and find your life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon your shoulders and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your soul will find rest, for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” – Matthew 11:29-30

Here the deeper meaning of prayer becomes manifest. To pray is to unite ourselves with Jesus and lift up the whole world through Him to God in a cry for forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and mercy. To pray, therefore, is to connect whatever human struggle or pain we encounter – whether starvation, torture, displacement of peoples, or any form of physical and mental anguish – with the gentle and humble heart of Jesus.... Prayer is leading every sorrow to the source of all healing; it is letting the warmth of Jesus’ love melt the cold anger of resentment; it is opening a space where joy replaces sadness, mercy supplants bitterness, love displaces fear, gentleness and care overcome hatred and indifference. But most of all, prayer is the way to become and remain part of Jesus’ mission to draw all people to the intimacy of God’s love – from “Prayer Embraces the World.”

**Nouwen asks the question, “When I say pray, to Whom do I pray? When I say Lord, Who do I mean?” ‘Who is the Lord to whom I pray’ leads directly to another question... ‘Who am I who wants to pray to the Lord?’ This is true for all disciples... I am not defined by the quality of my thought or feelings, I am defined by the object of my thoughts and feelings. The greater the object that I am drawn toward, the more real and experiential that object becomes, and the more wonderous the experience of their presence. Other humans with whom I co-exist in this material reality of the ‘here and now’ pale in comparison to the Greatest Reality that gives Life and Meaning in the Supernatural Eternity where God resides. Nouwen goes on to ask, “Why is the Lord of Justice also the Lord of Love; the God of Fear also the God of Gentle Compassion?” Contemplation of the Supreme Being where Kindness and Justice, Forgiveness and Responsibility, even Peace and Vengeance... all of those qualities and attributes by which we understand God to Be, are perfectly displayed in perfect balance all the time. Humanity resides more in a world of duality where ‘either-or’ reigns... love and justice are never perfectly expressed and never completely in balance. God resides in a Realm of Paradox where ‘both-and’ reigns... all of God’s Attributes in perfect balance and perfectly displayed all the time. In such a realm, ‘fear’ is better translated as ‘awe and wonder’ as the creature is caught up in contemplation of the Creator.**

**Nouwen like so many other Christian mystics before him, sees prayer as a Spiritual portal into the Presence of God. Prayer is the means to consciously transport Christ followers into the heart of God,**



consciously pressing into God relationally. Such intimacy is transformational and brings with it peace and contentment. In this state of connection with God, we start to see God's priorities and perspectives, and our life comes increasingly into alignment with Him accordingly.

4. **THOMAS ASHBROOK** – Is the founder of “Imago Christi” – The Covenant Community of Spiritual Formation Ministry. It is a web-based community of Spiritual Formation Missionaries affiliated with Church Resources Ministries (CRM) that can be found by this link <https://www.imagochristi.org/> . I had the pleasure of meeting Tom and experiencing first hand Imago Christi's Spiritual Formation Discovery leadership training years ago. It was a profound and deeply emotional Spiritual experience. All these years later I am still impacted by the freshness and intimacy of my Spirit life with God. The following link to the AD website is much of the fruit of my experience at the three-day event - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Maturity/SF%202.2.1%20-%20Spiritual%20Journey%20Discovery.pdf> . Tom is a Lutheran Pastor who studied Spiritual Formation under a Trappist Monk Brother Boniface, who taught Tom the prayer disciplines of “how to ‘be still’ and finally to just ‘be’.” Tom went on to write the book Mansions of the Heart, an exploration of the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth of Teresa of Avila. Tom wrote his doctoral thesis on Teresa of Avila, and my reflections on his book can be found on the AD website at these links... but please read the book!

Part 1:

<http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Maturity/SF%203.1%20-%207%20Stages%20of%20Spiritual%20Growth%20-%20Part%201.pdf> and

Part 2:

<http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Maturity/SF%203.2%20-%207%20Stages%20of%20Spiritual%20Growth%20-%20Part%202.pdf>

Tom had been asking God the same question I had been asking and many who study discipleship at AuthenticDiscipleship.org have asked... “Is this all there is to the Christian experience?” Meaning corporate worship on Sunday and occasional studies at home. In his forward to Tom's book Eugene Peterson wrote:

There is far more to the Christian life than getting it right. There is living it right. Learning the truth of God, the Gospel, the Scriptures – involves understanding words, concepts, history. But living it means working and praying ourselves through a world of deception, of doubt, and suffering, a world of rejections and betrayal and idolatry.... We cannot have God on our own terms, domesticated to our requirements, reduced to our ideas of what we think God should be doing. Prayer is an emersion in the way God is present with us whether we understand or like it or not.

My learning of the Christian life, along with that of most of my friends, had pivoted on Martin Luther and

John Calvin, brilliant and comprehensive thinkers, writers, and exegetes about God and the Scriptures. For them, reforming the Christian life was primarily (but not entirely) a matter of recovering right thinking, understanding doctrine, interpreting Scripture. Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross worked from the other end. They took up matters of the soul, reforming Christian living by taking seriously the life of prayer and recovering the ways of prayer. They gave themselves to discerning the illusions and pitfalls that interfere with receiving what God is giving. And the illusion of reducing prayer to a self-help project with little concern for relationship and love, adoration and mystery.

### **Tom goes on to write:**

Jesus died on the Cross to redeem us in God's love, not just to save us for heaven, fix us, deploy us, or shape us up.... It is clear in Scripture that God's ultimate goal for your life is for you to live fully and freely in His love, and to respond by loving Him as well. God has no other ulterior motives; He just wants you to be His son, daughter, friend, co-worker in love (John 3:16; Matthew 22:37-38) .... Why then, is love for God a more basic spiritual growth goal than holiness? Scripture makes it clear that holiness is the product of a loving relationship with God; we cannot attain it by our own effort (Romans 8:1ff). Holiness is a result of a transforming intimacy with the Trinity, and a secondary goal rather than a primary one.... From a Biblical perspective, a loving relationship with God produces the fruits of holiness, service, and wholeness.... Living fully in God's love for us is the goal, not our perfect love for Him. God's love for us is a gift, received fully in Christ's Lordship in our lives. Our love for God is the product of simply receiving His love in faith.

**And these quotes are taken from several passages between pages 26 to 28! Suffice it to say there is much to commend this book for! It is a great read, and the discovery events well worth the time and effort. If you are unable to do so, please take the time to work through Stages of Spiritual Growth and Spiritual Journey Discovery at the above AD links.**

5. **TAYA SMITH** – Worshiper with Hillsong UNITED – Worship is essentially coordinated musical prayer. It is not merely singing songs and enjoying the music, it is much deeper and more profound than that. Taya says that worship is about “Being Honest before God.” “Worship is a Spiritual Weapon” Smith said recently in a video where she shared her thoughts on the subject. The Worship song “Oceans” is probably one of Hillsong UNITED’s best known and Biblically content rich worship songs. Listen to it on YouTube at the following link - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy9nwe9\\_xzw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy9nwe9_xzw)

**Taya was interviewed in the following promotional article:**

The musician, whose voice is featured on the incredibly successful [Oceans song](#), shares there have been times where she experienced going through “heavy” things and worship was used to cut off “things I don’t need to be thinking about or feelings that are quite heavy and would hold me back from what I’m actually meant to be.”

Smith gets emotional and candidly opens up about her leadership struggle as she recalls times when she’s



questioned “the very thing that you’re singing over people.” Despite the doubt she’s struggled with, Smith attributes the kindness of God to help her realize that worship is about being honest before God.

“We worship in spirit and truth...sometimes it’s embarrassing because you bring all of yourself before God and there’s like... ugly parts.” To be completely honest before God requires bringing all of yourself in his presence as you worship, and this means we have to bring the “ugly parts” like our doubts and our evil thoughts and feelings.

“I’ve experienced the kindness of God in those moments when it would have been so easy to pull away and go ‘I actually can’t do this and it’s not for me right now.’” Instead of discouraging Smith from leading worship, she says those moments caused her to “press in and go after the things of God and put the words in my mouth when I needed to believe it.”

**There are many worship songs that are unfortunately redemptively weak, but Oceans isn’t one on those. Oceans is a full-throated affirmation of Christ’s Lordship and trustworthiness. We walk in the shallow end, but the Spirit calls us to go deeper. We settle for baby food, but the Spirit invites us into a repast fit for an heir to the Throne of Grace. Christian mysticism is a vehicle where God invites us into the unknown where wonder and riches abound.**

- 6. DAVE HANSEN – Dave is well known in his home town in Ventura County and in the surrounding region where he has served the local churches for 45 years. Dave is a true man of God. Scripture documents Jesus’ the inauguration of His public ministry in fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah as recorded in Luke 4:18-19... “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to *preach good news to the poor*. He has sent me to proclaim *freedom for the prisoners* and recovery of sight for the blind, to *release the oppressed*, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” **This was a glimpse into what would become Dave’s ministry. Dave is a humble man of great faith who has endured much in obedience to his calling. Dave was a trail blazer in what is now known as “Deliverance Ministry” – freeing people from the effects of demonic spiritual oppression. Many local pastors would seek him out and bring the spiritually oppressed to Dave and some would wait with him praying as he ministered to them. Sometimes deliverance occurred after a short time, other times after many hours of Spiritual prayer, finally the oppression would lift, and the captive would be freed. Dave has ministered to hundreds of people after working all day, often counseling folks five to seven evenings a week. A number of those who have been freed have gone into full time vocational ministry... me included.****

I met Dave in the summer of 1974. I had been heavily involved in Eastern metaphysics as an anthropology student at UCSB where I studied world religions focusing on Hindu, Native American Indian, and Tibetan Buddhist cultures. I was on the verge of studying with local Eastern masters and exploring their ascetic life, when a “chance” [ordained] encounter led to my spending an afternoon with Dave. As we talked I found that Dave’s experience and understanding of the occult and metaphysics resonated well with my own. After several hours of dialoguing and he revealed to me a better

understanding the Spiritual world, of a God of Love who welcomes all who would hear and follow... and I prayed to receive Jesus as my personal savior and Lord. Dave then invested a Saturday a week for the next two years discipling me as a follower of Jesus. Dave and I are dear friends and our families have grown up together in faith. I am one of hundreds of people who has been impacted by his ministry, and I cannot properly express my love and appreciation for this man of God and for the many adventures we have had together. Dave is now in his late 70's but he still has the same spark of life in his voice that I've come to know so well. Thank you and love you Big Brother!

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:**

There are probably many reasons... some of them good... why people prefer not to enter into the deep end of the pool of Spiritual life. When my son was a toddler we restricted him to the steps of the pool. He wasn't ready for anything more than that. But when he matured, he ventured on into the deeper end. Now as a YWAM missionary he has decided to live in the deep end of the pool... and he belongs there. He speaks internationally on the Character of God. Can you imagine? God is his Friend... the One with Whom he's most intimate.

I often wonder why people settle for so little, being content with the light stuff splashing in the shallows [figuratively speaking]? God is always inviting us into something better, something deeper, and something richer. CS Lewis once wrote comparing earthly things to the riches of God... like "children playing in a mud puddle on the side of the road, because they cannot imagine a day at the beach." There's a visual.

I think one reason why people often settle for less is that they don't have a clear view of who Jesus is and who we are in relationship to Him. The Apostles and their writings in Scripture constantly taught a "High Christology" – meaning a high view of the Person of Christ. Many modern pastors often teach about Jesus as our friend, as our spiritual guide, as our companion... and these things are true, but Jesus is much more. Some liberal pastors teach about Jesus' possessing "God Consciousness" something we all possess in some measure, but they shy away from teaching about Jesus being God in the flesh. Bishop Barron explains this theological perspective in this excellent short video on the topic of "Ontology" – the theology of being. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UG77k-xLpz8> Having a proper understanding of who Jesus is and therefore who I am in relation to Him is at the heart of Christian Discipleship and mysticism. A warm and fuzzy approach to Jesus may bring more people into the conversation, but if that is where you leave them you've done them an extreme disservice. The Christian view of God as "Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit – Three Persons in One" is messy, but it is what the New Testament teaches. In fact, the New Covenant is based on this Triune Nature of a very complex God who is "all in" on the redemption of humanity. Thinking rightly about God is foundational in how I orient myself to God.

So, here's the challenge, you can know God Personally, and you can trust God. Step out in faith on God's terms. God invites us into relationship, and when we respond to God in faith believing the transformational process of discipleship incrementally leads us further up and further in.

Don't be stupid... don't be fearless. Start with measured steps of faith. Think about someone like me... who God called into business, and then years later into seminary and ministry. Thousands of Christians are currently employing the discipling resources of [www.authenticdiscipleship.org](http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org) every year, and hundreds of young people are being impacted by my son's ministry and teaching every year... all because of our answering an invitation to respond to God and answering His call to serve Him by serving others. Imagine what God can do with you... life was intended to be a participatory adventure with God. I encourage you to do the work of disciplined discipleship. Look for where God is leading and dare to follow Him.

In summation my friend Bryan Bode wrote the following:

"It never ceases to amaze me how something that I might say one day because it is what is on my mind and what is feeding my soul might be the thing I forget and need to be reminded of just a week or two later. Thank you for reminding me of what is important..."

"Jesus died on the Cross to redeem us in God's love, not just to save us for heaven, fix us, deploy us, or shape us up.... It is clear in Scripture that God's ultimate goal for our life is for you to live fully and freely in His love, and to respond by loving Him as well. God has no other ulterior motives; He just wants you to be His son, daughter, friend, co-worker in love (John 3:16; Matthew 22:37-38) .... Why then, is love for God a more basic spiritual growth goal than holiness? Scripture makes it clear that holiness is the product of a loving relationship with God; we cannot attain it by our own effort (Romans 8:1ff). Holiness is a result of a transforming intimacy with the Trinity, and a secondary goal rather than a primary one.... From a Biblical perspective, a loving relationship with God produces the fruits of holiness, service, and wholeness.... Living fully in God's love for us is the goal, not our perfect love for Him. God's love for us is a gift, received fully in Christ's Lordship in our lives. Our love for God is the product of simply receiving His love in faith."

Amen Bro!