

Pathways to Rededication and Intimacy with God

The Alliance for Christian Fellowship
International—A Division of Alive, Inc.

Introduction

All of us need to rededicate our lives from time to time as we grow in God's grace and learn to love Him. There is no middle ground in the Christian life - Jesus said, "If you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth." Therefore, we need to be aware of the pathways that lead to an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father through Jesus our Lord.

In these end times there are many pathways in life - some lead toward intimacy with God and some lead to worldliness while some lead to a dead end. Because all of us need more intimacy with our heavenly Father, the Alliance is offering you four such pathways from our existing literature. We believe that these messages are not only pathways to intimacy with God, but they are also pathways to individual rededication and revival in the Church.

Pathway I

Which Commandment is First?

Christians everywhere have taught and been taught the command of Jesus to go into all the world and share the Gospel—and well they should. Millions over the centuries have come into the kingdom of God because of the obedient fulfillment of the great commission. However, many Christians do not feel comfortable in sharing the Gospel—some even feel guilty for not doing so. They have not been taught to get to know Jesus personally, to love Him, to desire to obey him. Jesus said “If you love me you will obey me.” Trying to obey without a loving relationship with our Lord is exactly what the Pharisees did during the ministry of Jesus. They were relying on their own “works” without allowing God to prepare them for ministry through the communication that comes out of a personal loving relationship. That is exactly what happens today. Christians try to obey the great commission without first obeying what Jesus called the greatest commandment.

They asked Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” We all know His answer: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.” Then He said that the second greatest command is like the first—we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (to want the best for them as we want the best for ourselves). The second is like the first because when we love God, we love who He loves—He loves us and our neighbors. To obey the second greatest command, it is necessary to first obey the greatest command. The progression is to (1) love God, (2) love who He loves—our neighbor, and (3) out of love for our neighbor, share the Gospel. The first and second commands are so alike or interconnected that obedience of the command to share the Gospel becomes a very natural thing. Surely then, the great commission is the third greatest commandment. But, we should not begin with the third greatest—we need to begin with the first.

If we do not love God in an active exchange of love, we surely cannot love our neighbor with God’s kind of love. And the key to loving God is to consistently receive His love—to be motivated and empowered by

the love of the God of the universe. If we don't receive God's love, we cannot give it to our neighbor. But, if we have a personal loving relationship with our heavenly Father, we love who He loves—His love passing through us causes us to want the very best for our neighbor. Of course, the very best is Jesus. So when we love the Lord and our neighbor, we want to fulfill the great commission. Here we have two ways of fulfilling the great commission. Without a personal, loving relationship with our Lord, we love our neighbor with human love. If we don't love our neighbor with God's love, the only desire to fulfill the great commission comes from our emotions or a sense of duty or a desire to "keep the law." This, of course, is used by God because when the Word of God is presented, it never "returns void" (without effect) (Is 55:11). But the Christian that is doing his duty is not benefited because God's love does not pass through him. The great commission can be fulfilled in this way but that is not God's intention. He wants us to be servants as Jesus was a servant—a real servant wants the very best for those he serves (God's kind of love). With a servant's heart, the Holy Spirit enters in (Ac 1:8)—then we are not

only more effective in fulfilling the great commission, but we are also built up in God's grace through the activity of a personal, loving relationship with our heavenly Father...that is revival!

Our heavenly Father loves us very much and wants us to return His love—to be at home with Him now and forever. Many people have repented of their sin and received Jesus as their Savior but then, because of some circumstance, have withdrawn—they have never entered into a continuing, personal, relationship with God the Father through Jesus our Lord. They received the love of God as they received His loving forgiveness but they did not realize they could dwell in God's love—to have a permanent home with Him through an ongoing, loving, personal relationship. The temptation is to look upon salvation as a one-time experience that qualifies us for heaven, but it is so much more than that. To be saved from our old sin nature and actually enter into a new life with our heavenly Father is surely the greatest blessing of God. But there is a second blessing and that is to have a permanent, ongoing relationship with our Lord. Jesus

described it as abiding in Him or being in union with Him.

The promotion of the teaching of a personal, loving relationship with our Lord is a sure way to revival. It will not only put down legalistic thinking about the great commission but it will also enrich many Christian lives with the power of an exchange of love with God. After all, He created us for fellowship and without relationship, there is no fellowship. With fellowship there is revival.

The Greatest Commandment as Stated by Jesus

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

(Dt 6:5-7)

Pathway II

Ever-Increasing Faith

All of us desire more faith, and we can have it by developing a loving relationship with our Lord. Is it not true that we trust and have faith in people we know, and that we have even more faith in them when we have developed a personal, loving relationship with them? Surely the answer to that question is yes!

It is a personal connection with someone of good character that causes us to have faith. Well, our heavenly Father has perfect character and He already loves us. Does it not make sense to exercise the “measure of faith” that we already have and let it grow? Faith, like a muscle, grows when it is exercised. As faith grows, we receive more and more of God’s love and give Him more and more of our love. It becomes a wonderful cycle of love and faith. All of this is expressed in one sentence in Galatians 5:6. It says, “Faith works through love.” Faith is a verb; it is active; it involves us with God and works through the communication that comes out of a loving

relationship. If we want more faith, we must allow it to “work” through a loving relationship with our heavenly Father.

Most of us desire that we will be and become all that the Lord wants us to be in this life and the life to come, and that is possible for all of us.

Here is the personal witness of Paul from Romans 8:38 & 39, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul, like all born-again Christians, had realized that Jesus paid the penalty for his sin on the cross and Paul received the loving forgiveness of our Lord. But he did not stop there—he continued to receive God’s love. In that process, God’s love became so real that he could make the previous statement which has helped millions to know that they can experience God’s love every minute of every hour of every day. With the sure knowledge that nothing can ever separate us

from the love of God, we can enter into ever-increasing faith.

The question, then, is, “Is ever-increasing faith the way to revival?” The answer to that question is a resounding, “YES!” In II Chronicles 7:14, our heavenly Father promised revival if we humble ourselves, turn from unrighteousness, and seek His face as we pray. But none of this is possible unless we first receive His love. When we do that, we are not only greatly blessed but also are empowered to return His love. Out of this exchange of love we are already seeking His face. Seeking His face is seeking a personal, loving relationship with the One who created us and loves us so. We then can not only hear His voice, but can also have fellowship with Him and actually become a friend of God. Once a friend of God, how could anyone fall away and fail to trust Him more and more? All of this occurs as a result of a faith that increases as we—through love—exercise the “measure of faith” that Scripture says God has already given us. It is the love of God that carries faith to completion. Remember that “there is faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love” (I Cor 13:13). So, we must

receive God's love and express our love for Him in as many ways as we can—even out loud.

Because “faith works through love,” it follows that the more love we have for God, the more faith we will exercise. We then have ever-increasing faith. A life that has that kind of love and faith has not only the hope of revival, but also the hope of continuous victory in the Christian life. That is the way to revival and beyond—the way to be all our heavenly Father wants us to be in this life and the life to come.

Pathway III

Are You Hearing God?

Many Christians complicate their relationship with their heavenly Father by not realizing that He is more loving than any physical father could ever be. We all need to realize that, as God's child, we can return His love and enter into a Father-child friendship. That Father-child relationship makes it possible to hear God, because there is a communication in prayer and in Bible reading that was never there before. In thinking about hearing our heavenly Father, I think you will agree that it is necessary to hear Him if we are to fellowship with Him—to become His friend.

All of us need to hear that “still, small voice” of God so that we can receive His guidance and know more and more about the plan He has for our lives. We need a friendly exchange (fellowship) with Him all through the day. We need to allow Him to speak to us by placing His thoughts in our minds. We need to hear Him in reading the Scripture as He reveals truth to us. We need to seek to hear Him much as children seek

the guidance of their parents as they develop a friendly exchange of love with them.

Becoming as Little Children

If we are to hear God, we must humble ourselves as little children. We try so hard to be sophisticated adults, not realizing that God desires for us to be “as little children.” God does not look upon His people as sophisticated adults—if we are Christians, we are “children of God.” Of course, older children can become rebellious, but little children are naturally trusting, teachable, and submissive to their parents; they depend on them. Is that the way you are with your heavenly Father? Or are you a sophisticated adult?

God wants His people to be responsible for what they say and do, but He wants them to be as little children in their hearts. Jesus said, “Anyone who humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 18:4). The desire to be sophisticated adults with God makes it difficult to humble ourselves as little children. The way to hear God is through an on-going Father-child friendship. Out of

a trusting, teachable, and submissive attitude, we can truly commit ourselves to God—He then makes it possible for us to grow in His grace by the power of His Holy Spirit.

It takes strength or power to live this life and God has very clearly promised it to us. Jesus said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Ac 1:8). Our heavenly Father, through His Holy Spirit, gives us strength to be successful in life—to be what He wants us to be. If we are to have the help and strength we need, we must seek that Father-child friendship with a repentant heart.

Repentance

Most of us, most of the time, do not realize that we are sinful. We deceive ourselves. The Bible says, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rm 3:23). “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I Jn 1:8). Sin is not just lying and stealing—that is the result of sin. Sin is separation from God—the absence of love and the absence of a desire to obey.

It is only when we see the reality of our separation from God that we can become truly sorry for our sin. And it is only when we repent (turn away from separation), that we can gain fellowship with God. When we repent, we open up that Father-child relationship that is so vital for our spiritual growth. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I Jn 1:9). That is the way to receive what Jesus did for us on the cross including the ability to hear our heavenly Father.

You Can Hear God

You may be a businessman, a housewife, a church member, a deacon, an elder, or even part of the church staff, but if you are not hearing God, you need to become as a little child in your heart. God will give you the power to humble yourself as a little child and truly repent of your separation from Him. Ask Him to forgive you and fill you with His Holy Spirit every day. Realize that God loves you as an individual and ask Him to teach you to return His love as all friends do. All loving relationships are characterized by an exchange of love. That is the way to a real Father-child relationship.

It is also the way to hear God and to be heard by Him.

Being Heard by God

In any exchange of love, each person is focused on what the other says. Where there is an exchange of love, we not only hear the other person's voice, we also understand what he is saying. Out of that understanding of what our heavenly Father is saying, faith wells up inside us. As we exercise that faith, our prayers are answered. As faith and answered prayers increase, the relationship deepens and we begin to share our whole life with our heavenly Father. That is fellowship with the living God because we are hearing God and being heard by Him.

Pathway IV

Abiding in Jesus the Vine

I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit (Jn 15:5a).

For a long time, I skipped over this quotation of Jesus thinking that I was bearing fruit because I was a witness and a minister of the Gospel. How wrong I was! The subject is spiritual fruit and I came to see that the results of witnessing and ministry are not the fruit Jesus was talking about—He was talking to us personally as born-again believers. The spiritual fruit of a Christian is listed in Galatians 5:22 & 23: “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.” Spiritual fruit begins and ends with the love of God because the 8 fruits following love come forth from God’s love, which is listed first. When received, God’s love produces fruit. Christian character grows from a Christian branch that is abiding in Jesus the Vine. Here is a complete quotation of what Jesus said: “Abide in Me and I in you. As the

branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the Vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me and I am him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing” (Jn 15:4-5). Then in the next verse, He said, “If a man abideth not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered and burned. It is very plain; if we are to be real in the Christian life, we must abide in Jesus. Think what it would be like to appear before our Lord withered and burned—having ended this life with little or no Christian character (spiritual fruit). For the committed Christian, abiding in Jesus is a must.

Well, what is abiding in Jesus and how can it happen? First, we must get a hold of the fact that Jesus is “very God,” the Creator that came in human flesh, the King of kings and Lord of lords—the Almighty God that rose from the dead and loves us with eternal love that is beyond our understanding. Christians believe that intellectually but we must also believe it in our hearts. Add to that the fact that He not only died for the sin of the world but, out of His great love, He

invites us to unite with Him by abiding in Him—abiding in His love. There is the key—He made us with the capacity to love and be loved—the King of kings and Lord of lords wants us to receive His love and love Him in return—to have a loving relationship with Him that is so abiding that it bonds us to Him like branches are bonded to vines.

Just think, for a minute, what this abiding of a branch in the vine really is. It is union of the inferior with a greater or greatest and then abiding as one. It is complete dependence of the inferior on the greater. The only way a branch can produce fruit is to receive nutrients from the vine - without this dependence, a branch “can do nothing” - it cannot produce fruit. The nutrient for a Christian branch comes from abiding in the Vine and that nutrient is God’s powerful love. We must depend on our Lord because abiding is the product of dependence and abiding is the key to everything that is great and good in the Christian life.

The question then arises: How can I put down this evil pride called “the flesh” and depend on my Lord? I know by experience

that I cannot “clench my fist” and “grit my teeth” and expect to obey Him much less depend on Him. But the reality is that God’s love has the power to hold us as we receive His love. There is something supernatural about receiving God’s love - it puts down the pride of the flesh and leads us into fellowship with Him - the very reason He created us. Then through fellowship, we get to know Him personally. By knowing Him personally, we trust and depend on Him more and more. In the process, we want to be like Him as friends become like each other. Good friends are willing to “take on” qualities revealed in a friend they trust.

Later in this chapter of John, Jesus said in speaking to His disciples that He considered them friends because He had revealed what He knew - everything that the Father revealed to Him. The relationship of the Father and Son was complete and they had perfect communication. We need this friendly communication with our Lord—He wants us to be His friend—but it is up to us to complete this friendship by returning His love. In an exchange of love, we begin to depend on Him as we abide in His love.

And when we abide in His love, we have the communication necessary to receive the revelation from our Lord that we need. His revelation of Himself to us is a supernatural thing, causing us to truly want to be like Him. In this, we can clearly understand why Jesus said that we must abide in Him if we are ever going to be what our Lord wants us to be -- and what He wants us to be is spiritual, fruit-bearing Christians.

Fellowship with our Lord will depend on how much spiritual fruit is present in our lives. Now is the time to enter into an exchange of love with our loving Lord—to depend on Him, to abide in Him, to produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Now is the time to be and become all He wants us to be in this life and the life to come as He brings us into union with Himself and with our heavenly Father (Jn 17). And now is the time to begin to live with our heavenly Father, confident of His love, knowing that He will love, protect, and prepare us, for eternity. This physical life is the time we have to allow our loving heavenly Father to work His marvelous grace into our spiritual lives that we will experience through all eternity.

WHY THIS EMPHASIS NOW?

OUR NATION AND OUR WORLD NEED REVIVAL!

This little book is meant to help form an alliance of born-again Christians who see the need of revival in ourselves and in our land. Genuine revival will surely come as we encourage each other to receive God's love and love Him in return. We can help each other as we seek God for the life changing and world changing effects of revival. It is becoming very clear that revival in the Church has already begun because more and more believers recognize their need to be closer to God.

We hope that you will want to help us promote the emphasis of the way to revival, which is achieving a personal, loving relationship with our heavenly Father through Jesus our Lord.

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