

YOUR WALKING COMPANION

In the physical realm, you can't love or receive love from someone you don't know. You can admire, respect, and even follow the teachings of a person, but sincere love isn't achieved without intimate knowledge. It's the same with loving God.

In the early years of my faith walk, I knew the Sunday Jesus, the one others knew and told me about. I believed in a faraway God the Father. I lived my daily life neglecting the companionship of the Holy Spirit. I sought out others to help solve life's most difficult issues because I didn't believe the Triune God would actually answer my questions. I joined women's Bible studies where I filled in every blank and gained useful knowledge, but I still didn't know God on a personal level.

I spent years doing the right things. On the outside I seemed to have my life in order. I stopped doing the things church people frowned upon, began walking and talking like church people, and even tried to dress the part. However, untended-to business was still lurking beneath my surface. All my adult life I had shoved unhealed trauma into the deepest recesses of my soul.

When the typical Christian life of do-ing the dos and don't-ing the don'ts didn't work for me, I bailed. Why wouldn't I? I had spent thirty years getting my needs met by the world. Why not go back to what was comfortable? Like a thorn working its way out of flesh, those things from my past reemerged and nearly destroyed me. I was a found person living lost.

What I discovered during my brief time away from God was that old habits no longer had the power to ease my tangled mind. If anything, my worldly ways left me feeling emptier. I was miserable. Once I realized that being away from Him was even worse than faking my way through church life, I came to my senses. I was exhausted from running and weakened in a way I've rarely been in my life. My spirit was in constant turmoil, so I limped my way back home just like the prodigal son.

During that time, my husband and I were working on an outdoor project that required a large amount of dirt to be brought in to backfill our yard. The dirt was dark and rich and promised to grow healthy grass. I was told it was dirt from a pig farm, well fertilized. We did what we were supposed to do and sowed good seed. We watered, and soon tender grass was shooting up all over. Then they came, weeds like I've never seen before. Overnight, tall, ugly, red-thorned weeds had sprouted up and were looming over the new grass. They were everywhere I looked.

In frustration, I began to snap off the weeds and toss them aside. I heard a voice that day say, "If you snap them off, they will only grow back. You have to dig up the root."

The voice was God. I'm not sure how I knew since there was no reason I would recognize His voice at that stage of my life, but I was certain. I went to get a weeding tool and began to pry up root after root. It wasn't long before I looked out over that field of wicked weeds and said, "But there are so many." The voice came again. "Just pull one at a time."

Consider this aspect of the prodigal son's story: Yes, he came home, but what was his life like after his return? I would suppose he could hardly look his dad in the eye. You know he had a strained relationship with his embittered brother. The prodigal lived with guilt and remorse, and he wore the stench of the world for a season after his return. You can't walk away from your spiritual home and not rack up debt and consequences that must be lived with.

That pig dirt was symbolic of my time in the world and how I brought the stench of it back home with me. I was not only broken, I was damaged in ways that took the Lord Jesus years to mend. Just to mention a few things: I came back to Him in the middle of a full-blown eating disorder, dependent on alcohol, and filled with shame over my lost-like behavior. I had hurt people I loved, and I was hurting myself. I needed restoration. I needed Jesus.

The Gardener and I worked tireless hours in my garden. The physical weeds were tackled easily. My spiritual weeds, however, were dealt with over the course of many years. Just as He had instructed me to do that day when I was snapping off weeds, He began to dig deep down to the root of the weeds in my heart and mind. One by one He pulled them with a gentle hand.

I wish I could say I'm completely well. Are any of us ever complete here in this life? It's been a long process, but I now know sustained joy and peace, and I love Jesus with true abandon. I'm a different woman than that poor girl who came hobbling home to a Father she didn't even know.

No matter your history, there is healing with God the Father and Jesus the Son through the Holy Spirit who indwells you. No matter how far away God seems to you, I give you my word that an intimate and personal Jesus is waiting to reveal Himself to you. God your Father wants to extend His arms to you and share who He is and how infinitely He loves you. You must decide to step in closer so that you can see all He wants to show you.

You may not resemble the prodigal son. You may be the big brother who got it right by staying home in the first place, but if your daily life isn't rocked by the love of a tender Father and the beckoning call of the Son, then you still have work to do. You must lean in and get to know the lover of your soul. The Apostle Paul prayed,

"...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." (Ephesians 1:17)

In hindsight, I've discovered this truth: There are infinite facets of who God is and who He is willing to be to each of us. What do you need? Do you need a Father's touch? Do you need the companionship of a Friend or the guidance of a Counselor? Only you know the answer to that question. What I hope to give you in the section to come is a jumping-off point so that you will run to the God of your need. The way to get to know Him is to expose your weakness and need and then allow Him to invade your situation and be who He already is.

In no way do I want to make this seem as if God is somehow your go-to genie, here to meet your needs and give you a happy life. It's the exact opposite of that. He wants you to see that all your need is wrapped up in Him. He is your life (Colossians 3:3-4). Until you come to the obvious conclusion that Jesus is all and everything you need, you will continue to live your life as if there might be more out there than your life hidden in Christ. Without a hidden walk with Jesus, you are openly exposed to the dangers and influences of the outward world and its ruler.

Along with each attribute of God I've described in the following pages, I've provided Scripture references to substantiate my claim that God is the God of all your needs. Don't blow through these without thoughtful consideration. If something resonates with you, look up the verse and make note of it. Circle it in your Bible. Make an index card with it. Do something to highlight your need and continually bring it before the Lord. There will come a time when you will need something to lean on. What better to hold you up than the mighty Word of God?

FACETS OF WHO GOD IS:

APPROACH GOD AS MY FATHER

(Romans 8:14-16)

- I. Am. Loved. by an infallible Father who has no variation or shifting shadow (James 1:17), a parent always concerned with my well-being. He watches over me while I sleep and while I go about the business of my day. He has compassion on me and remembers my frailty (Psalm 103:13-14).
- He wants to lead me and guide me as any good father would, and says, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21). The unseen Father has made Himself known by sending Jesus the Son (John 1:18).
- When I feel vulnerable and the world seems overwhelming, He is my mighty Dad, a Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5) who can take on any foe. He is my protector.
- When I feel lost and far from home, He reminds me that He is waiting for me with open arms (Luke 15:20).
- His Father's heart is always for me, even when I'm a not-so-well-behaved child. He receives and disciplines me because I am His (Hebrews 12:5-6).
- He is my Dad whom I can ask for anything, one who will only give me what's best (Luke 11:9-13).
- God is a Father who will bring me home to be with Him someday (John 14:2, 17:24).

WALK WITH JESUS, MY BELOVED

(Matthew 12:18-21)

- This Jesus died for my rescue (Galatians 1:4). When I long for romantic love, I know there is no more romantic gesture or happily-ever-after than when the Hero rides in to redeem me, His beloved (Isaiah 43:1-4). He is my ultimate love story.
- When I am lonely, He is the Lover of my soul and calls me beloved (Romans 9:25).
- Neither shame nor condemnation has power over me, the one whom Jesus has made clean (Isaiah 54:4-5, Romans 8:1). No matter my history, he has made me white as snow through His sacrifice (1 John 1:7).
- I am accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6-8). When I feel rejected by this world or by individuals and relationships, Jesus accepts me as I am. He also loves me too much to allow me to stay as I am. He grows and stretches me and removes what is blemished within my human heart. I am a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- He listens when no one else will. I can go boldly before the throne (Hebrews 4:16). He cares for me when no one else does (1 Peter 5:7). He is for me and not against me (Romans 8:31). He loves me when others refuse to and willingly died for me while I was still a sinner (Romans 5:8).
- His embrace is enough, even when the world tells me that what I need is human love (2 Peter 1:2-4). Human love fails. The God who is Love never fails me (1 Corinthians 13:8).

FALL BEFORE JESUS THE KING

(John 12:15)

- At the appointed time, Jesus will rule as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15-16).
- Jesus as the Lamb will overcome those who wage war against Him because He is King of kings. I will be with Him, called chosen and faithful (Revelation 17:14).
- My position is that of a servant (Romans 6:22), a soldier (2 Timothy 2:3-4), and a messenger on His behalf (2 Corinthians 5:20). He has a plan for me and will accomplish great things through me as I'm submitted to His authority (Ephesians 2:10).
- His power goes before me in battle. The battle is His—not mine—to win. I will stand firm on the battleground (2 Chronicles 20:17).

MEET WITH THE WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

(Isaiah 9:6)

- You, the Spirit of Truth, will abide with me forever (John 14:16-17).
- I know You will guide me with Your counsel (Psalm 73:24).
- The Helper, whom the Father has sent, will teach me all things and bring the Word to my remembrance (John 14:26).

PURSUE THE PRINCE OF PEACE

(Isaiah 9:6)

- When the wind threatens, waves roar, and the world clamors, Jesus says, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39).
- He is my hiding place, refuge, and shelter (Psalm 32:7, Psalm 61:3).
- I can cast all my cares upon Jesus because He cares for me (1 Peter 5:7).
- The Lord gives me strength and blesses me with peace (Psalm 29:11).

SEEK THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

(1 Peter 2:24)

- Healing is His nature. No matter my ailment, He is the Cure (Matthew 8:1-17). He created my body and knows its every working part (Psalm 139:13-16).
- Healing may come now. Healing may come tomorrow. Healing may be found only in the eternal. When He doesn't heal here, He heals in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1-2).
- For those who become His, He has already healed the greatest sickness known to man—sin (Isaiah 53:5).

The list above isn't exhaustive by any means, but I hope it will trigger your own thoughts as you answer the questions that follow.

WALKING COMPANION TAKEAWAY

Key Point

You can't love or receive love from someone you don't know.

- 1) Do you feel you know Jesus on an intimate level, or do you feel you only know the Sunday Jesus, the one others tell you about? What do you think an intimate relationship with Jesus should look like?

- 2) Is God as your Father more of a faraway figure or a Dad who resides noticeably in your home and walks with you throughout your days?

- 3) Do you believe God will actually answer life's questions? If so, can you remember a time when you asked God a specific question, and He answered you?

- 4) Write a verse below that reminds you that God wants you to ask Him your questions. If nothing comes to mind, here are a few to consider: Jeremiah 33:3, James 1:5, and Matthew 7:7.

Key Point

The world we run to leaves us empty.

- 5) When we don't walk in an intimate relationship with Jesus, our only hope is to run to the world for answers, fulfillment, validation, relationship, comfort, safety, etc. What have you sought from the world that you now realize only Jesus can give?

- 6) In what ways has turning to the world to meet your needs shaped or misshaped you?

- 7) Have you known the open arms of the Father toward you, the prodigal, in a real and tangible way? If so, recount the story of your return.

Key Point

The Gardener weeds our lives with a gentle hand.

When we try the easy route and snap off an unsightly weed at the surface, the weed will certainly grow back. The only way to fully get rid of it is to dig deep down to the root.

- 8) How do you now view God when you mess up or fail? Do you see Him as a loving Father with a gentle hand who wants to help get you back on track or as a condemning Father with a harsh hand who is disappointed in you? Have you always seen Him as you currently do?

- 9) What are some weeds you have had or currently experience in your life's garden? For example, doubt, anger, anxiety, unforgiveness, pride, greed, gossip, bitterness, substance abuse, co-dependency, selfishness, fear, insecurities, adultery, pornography, etc.

- 10) Were there times when you tried to remove the weeds yourself rather than working with the Gardener? Did you find success in your own efforts?

- 11) Have you known the tenderness of the Gardener as you've worked through issues in your life? What are some examples?

It may take many years to overcome some of the costs and consequences of living a life apart from God. Even if your weeds aren't related to a prodigal season, weeds spring up in every life. The work you do alongside the Gardener will be a lifelong process. Some pulled weeds never return, while others rear their ugly heads again and again. We never have a weed-free garden.

Key Point

God is the God of all your needs.

- 12) From the Facets of God pages, choose one or two and make note of them below, along with why they speak to you.

In the days and weeks ahead, prepare your heart for an invasion by God as you invite Him into your situation. Watch for Him. Expect to get to know Him more. His intention is an intimate relationship with you.