



Relationship with God: The Four Levels

The Lord gave me understanding of four levels of relationship with Him, through our dear friends, Jimmy and Carol Owens - gifted musicians and song writers who provide counsel as 'parents' to many Christian music artistes. I've walked through each of these four levels.

The four levels of relationships with God are:

1. Academic
2. Casual / Lukewarm
3. Growing
4. Intimate

1. Academic - Knowing a lot about God but not really knowing Him (1 Cor 1:18-31)

*I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that.
I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.
I promised you to one husband, to Christ,
so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him.
But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning,
your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Cor 11:1-3*

For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 1Cor 4:20

Over the centuries, the study of doctrine and knowledge about God has gradually replaced an intimate walk with Him. I was taught the Word of God from the time I was very little. I memorized the Word and knew where the books of the Bible were found. I have met Bible teachers who knew Greek and Hebrew, but do not know how to listen to God. They only knew about Him. Intellect gives *information* but the Spirit gives *revelation*.

Many pastors or ministry leaders have degrees, but do not have a relationship with God, nor with those under their leadership. How much of what we're doing in the church organization is from man, and not led or initiated by the Holy Spirit? Some would say much of what we do is driven by the 'religious spirit'.

2. Casual / Lukewarm

From the time I was nine, I attended summer camps, and got 'saved' every year just to make sure I was. But Jesus was not my Lord. I would sit in church and think of many things other than the Word and Jesus. I cared more about pleasing people than seeking God.

I'm blessed to speak in many Discipleship Training Schools (DTS). On the second day of teaching on Lordship at a young people's DTS, an 18-year-old teenager came to me and said, "I like drinking alcohol. I like going out with girls. I like fast cars, etc."

And I said to him, "Did your mother make you come to this DTS?" And he responded, "Yes!" And I said, "Did you realize this is a Discipleship Training School?" And he said, "Yes!"

And I asked, "Do you know what Jesus would like to say to you? He would like to spit you out of His mouth! Either be hot or cold. But don't be lukewarm. It's your choice. I can't make this decision for you. You have to wrestle with God. But don't stay in the DTS if you're not willing to be a disciple."

Three days later, he burned all his pornography, his drugs, his cigarettes, etc. And he said, "I'm going to follow Jesus!"

Jesus said, "*So because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of My mouth.*" Rev 3:15-22

A large percentage of 'the church' are casual, but God is calling a people who are hungry for Him, pure and holy, and hearts undivided to follow Him.

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them . . . Ezekiel 11:19

I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. 1 Cor 7:35

God is raising up an army to see His Kingdom come, and His Will be done.

A few years ago, I was teaching on listening to God, and I'd be away from home for 5 – 7 weeks. It was unusual for me to leave my husband for that length of time. It wasn't easy for me to be obedient, but out of love for Jesus, I wanted to be.

I was crying in the shower, saying, "Lord, why do You want me to be away from my family for so long?" He responded with such love, "Donna, this is wartime. People need to learn how to listen to Me, the King of kings, and their Commanding Officer!"

Many soldiers in Canada go to war, leaving their families, material goods, not knowing if they will return. I'm just asking you to go for 7 weeks, knowing you will return."

I responded, "Yes, Lord! Please forgive me for my self-pity. I will do whatever You ask. And speak whatever You ask me to speak."

When you are a soldier in combat, even though there are guns going off, you listen for your commander's voice; and you hear it.

If you love me, keep my commands. John 14:15

3. Growing - Hungry for More - Thirsty

In my 20's and early 30's, I was very involved in doing things in the church. E.g. leading Ladies Groups, teaching in Sunday School, being a counsellor at Christian camps, etc. I did all the right things; going to church, sometimes two times, or three times on Sunday. In my early 30's, we met Youth with a Mission (YWAM) leaders who had moved to Montreal to get prepared for the Olympic Games. They asked Peter if he would be on the Board, and if we could meet with them for prayer times.

Their prayer times weren't just talking to God; they listened to Him, and asked questions. I was amazed, as I'd never experienced or recognized God's voice like this before and had never been taught that we could ask God questions. God gave these leaders very detailed instructions. This made me hungry for Him, and thirsty for His presence. Being with others who were listening to God made me hungry for that relationship also. Does your life make people hungry for God?

A short time later, I was at a barbecue with my friends. I was a proud woman, living in a beautiful home, noticed what kind of cars people drove, and what kinds of clothes they wore. That afternoon, a man walked in. He was in an older car, longish hair, eyes crossed, and his tie (which he shouldn't have been wearing to a barbecue), did not match his socks. Those were the first things that I saw with my physical eyes.

When the man opened his mouth to speak, he said that God sent him, from 350 miles away, to come to this home, and that he would find 5 or 6 people hungry for God. I knew I was one of them. He said, "If you remain after the barbecue, I will pray for you."

I stayed after the barbecue. And in his gentle, quiet way he said, "If we are hungry and thirsty for God, we need to make Jesus the Lord of our lives."

That night, I knelt down around a coffee table with my few friends and made Jesus my Lord - not just my Savior - but my Lord. This commitment meant that I would do whatever He asked me to do before He said it. From that time on, my heart was changed. I really wanted to follow Him wholeheartedly - no matter what the cost.

*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9*

My spiritual eyes and ears started to be opened. I was hungry for His presence like never before. I wanted to listen to worship music and be with people who really loved Jesus; who were not 'playing church' but being the church. The Bible was becoming real to me. The Logos, which was the written Word, was becoming *rhema*, which was life to my spirit.

We lived in a beautiful big home; four bedrooms, three bathrooms, recreation room, living room, dining room, and family room. It would take me all day to clean this house. One day I was complaining to my husband and asked if he would please hire a housekeeper to clean the house so I could have more time with Jesus.

He responded, in a loving and firm way, "You are home all day long, taking care of the four children, you can easily clean the house by yourself."

All I know is that my heart was changed when Jesus became my Lord, and I was hungry and thirsty for His presence and His Word.

. . . He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. Psalm 107:9

Come, all you who are thirsty . . . Isaiah 55:1-3

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. John 6:32-35*

*. . . Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said,
rivers of living water will flow from within them. John 7:37-38*

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!"
Let the one who is thirsty come;
and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. Rev 22:17*

4. Intimate

Nothing else matters but to be with God and to please Him, love Him and walk in obedience to Him. Intimacy with God is not out of duty. I am married to a wonderful man, and as a wife, it is my 'duty' to spend time with him, to talk with him and meet his needs. It is so much more wonderful when I desire to meet with him because he understands me and wants to listen to me. He really does love me and wants the highest good for me. But imagine if he were all loving, all powerful, all knowing and wanted to spend time with me. That is our God.

I love my husband a lot. Imagine me saying to him, "I'll spend 30 minutes with you every morning." I'd go into his office first thing in the morning and say, "This is your 30 minutes - Talk." I sit there for 30 minutes, and yawn, and yawn. And I say, "If you're not going to talk, I'll read your old love letters."

This is what many Christians do and they call it "doing quiet time". They read one chapter of the Old Testament, and one chapter of the New Testament. This is not wrong, but there is no relationship with God.

Imagine instead, I went into my husband's office and say, "I love you and there are things I need to ask you and get wisdom from you." He would love to talk. He would respond, "I love you too, what's on your heart?"

This is the same with God. He loves us to share our love with Him. He shares His love back and asks us what's on our heart. He speaks to us through the Bible by the Holy Spirit, or possibly with visions. His heart is to communicate back and forth with us.

It is a love relationship which transcends the rational mind. Your heart responds to the Spirit of God. The mind plays a role - it gathers knowledge from the Word of God which becomes food for the spirit. Revelation comes to those who hunger and thirst for the Lord, and to those who walk in humility. Jesus is the Bread of Life. (See Deut 8:2-5; John 6:31-35 and verses 48-50)

Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus. Rev 19:10

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Matt 4:4

Intimacy is defined as a close, familiar and affectionate personal relationship. It's out of our intimacy with God that comes our ministry. Many do ministry to please Him, but what pleases God most is spending time with Him; listening to Him and being led by His Spirit in ministry.

Peter didn't marry me to do his wash and cooking. He married me for intimacy, and out of that love, I do cooking and washing, etc. to please him.

God asks us to abide in His love. God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). His love can be like as a blazing fire (Song of Songs 8:6-7). It is the strongest force in the universe, and it breaks down barriers. God wants us to be clothed in His love (Luke 24:49; Rom 13:14). God loves us as much as He loves His own Son. All God is asking us to do is to love Him, and love others. Love is really wanting the highest good for the other person.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. John 15:9

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . 1 John 3:1

I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them. John 17:23, 26

People who love Jesus more than you do are sometimes called fanatics or mystics. But mystics go right back to the time of Jesus' early disciples. What unified them all was their experience of supernatural encounters with the presence of God. Early Christianity was inherently mystical because it expected individuals and local bodies to experience and respond to the immediate presence of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. They beheld the Lord. People were encouraged to abandon themselves and open their hearts to receive the love of God - an intimate, abiding, spiritual communion with Jesus Christ.

For me, this journey towards intimacy could be described this way:

I knew a lot about God through the Word and the voice of others. However, when I learned that I could commune with Him and He could become my best friend, I opened up my heart and completely gave everything over to Him. Now I am getting prepared to be his bride. His love becomes like a blazing fire that is burning up the roots of sin and purifying me of self-seeking motives, so I can love Him, and live for eternity alone. I only want to look to Him; to do and say what He wants. I live to please Him. It is a daily abandoning and dying to self so that He may live in me. My heart's desire is to reflect Jesus and become more like Him.

The highest calling is to know God intimately, and then to make Him known.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death . . . Phil 3:8-10

You must want intimacy! Out of intimacy we will reflect the fruit of the Spirit which is *love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* (Gal 5:22-23).

Intimacy requires purity and trust (2 Cor 7:1; 2 Peter 3:13-14; 1 John 3:1-3). So, we need to purify ourselves, and trust God.

The enemy has tried to take Peter's life three times. And one significant time was in Hong Kong when he was knocked off a stage. He was close to death, but miraculously has no broken bones. He was kept in the hospital overnight. That night, in my hotel room, I could sense Jesus sitting by my bedside, and I said to Him, "Why did this happen to us?" And He responded with such love, "Because I can trust you."

The Lord is asking, Can He trust us? It's a two-way relationship; we trust Him, and He trusts us.

Every single form of spiritual warfare and conflict you deal with is to stop you from having intimacy with God. Christianity is all about that intimate relationship with Him.

God is calling us back to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve had an intimate relationship with Him. There they were evidently accustomed to walking and talking with Him in the cool of the day (Gen 3:8a). It is like the old hymn we sing:

*I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses;
And He walks with me and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.* (C. Austin Miles)

God is preparing a bride for his Son, Jesus. And He is asking us to get prepared.

Reflect on these Scriptures, and apply them in your life:

See Rev 19:7-9; Rev 21:2 and read the Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matt 25:1-13.

Peter and I had an off-and-on relationship for six years. We finally made a commitment to each other for life and prepared for our wedding so that all of our friends could witness that pledge we had made to each other.

Jesus asks us to speak out our commitment to Him; that He is our Lord and King, and that we will get prepared to be His bride. With that preparation comes baptism, which is an outward confession to our friends that we die so that He may live. One day, when I was baptizing some youths, I asked Jesus why He had to be baptized. He replied, "It was My commitment to the Father that I would go through the death and resurrection."

When we get married, we are both making a commitment that both of us will die so that with the Holy Spirit, the three of us could become one.

. . . A cord of three strands is not quickly broken . . . Eccl 4:9-12

Picture what would have happened on my wedding day. The wedding guests, all dressed in their best, are seated expectantly. Peter and his groomsmen are in place. The beautiful bridal party has just 'marched' down the aisle and are also in place. The first strains of the wedding march sound forth and everyone turns to look for me, the bride, to make my entrance. And in I meander, dressed in a pair of jeans, a plaid shirt and dirty old sneakers. I wander slowly down the aisle, checking all around to see if there is maybe some other guy that I had missed.

How would Peter feel and what would the guests think? "She's not prepared at all!"

Sometimes 'the church' is like that. Even though we, the church, are on our way to the great wedding day – our marriage to the Lamb – some of us are looking around to see if there's something better. Instead of keeping our eyes on the Groom, getting an education, a job, a house, financial security and other 'things' become the priorities. None of these 'things' are wrong in themselves, but where is our commitment? Where is our attention or focus? How much are we including God in our decisions?

When speaking at a DTS, I challenged the students on what kind of bride they want to be. Would they be the foolish bride who is looking to see if there was somebody else? Or would they be the bride who comes adorned in her beautiful white dress, focused on her groom standing at the front of the church.

A year or so later, one of the students had a garden wedding. She was dressed in a beautiful white dress, carrying her beautiful bouquet. When the music started for the bride to enter, she handed her bouquet to her father, kicked off her shoes, and ran down the aisle into the arms of her husband-to-be who just twirled her around. The groom did not expect this entry. It brought joy to everyone.

That's what I'm believing for – that when I enter into the Kingdom of heaven, I will run into Jesus' arms.

Often, the bride will go through testing times just before her wedding day. Doubts, anxieties and fear may come in. The bride of Christ is going through a testing time. Will our love for the Bridegroom come through the fire of testing? Our trust in Him will be refined through fires, floods and afflictions. Will we keep our eyes on Him & the wedding day, and not on the circumstances that test us?

Jesus, the Bridegroom, will empower, sustain, shield, and protect the 'bride' during these difficult days ahead.

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"
And let the one who hears say, "Come!"
Let the one who is thirsty come;
and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. Rev 22:17*

APPLICATION

At which level of relationship are you with God?

Write down and tell Him your heart's desires.