

INTERSECTIONS

WHERE HEAVEN MEETS EARTH



LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE GOD AT THE INTERSECTIONS

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Heaven Invading Human Space

...our familiar atmosphere is a "heaven" in which God dwells and from which he deals with us ...instead of heaven and God also being always present with us, as Jesus shows them to be, we invariably take them to be located far away and, most likely, at a much later time — not here and not now. And we should then be surprised to feel ourselves alone?

Dallas Willard,
The Divine Conspiracy

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My Story

God uses various spiritual mentors in our lives, to help us to work on our relationships with Him. Although I am mentored through my close personal relationships, it has been the work of scripture, prayer and the thoughts of three spiritual writers that have shaped the story I would like to share. These mentors are Oswald Chambers, through *My Utmost For His Highest*; N.T. Wright, through *Simply Christian*; and Henri Nouwen, through *The Only Necessary Thing*, *Living a Prayerful Life*.

N.T. Wright's description of the intersection between heaven and earth is what enables me to put a framework around the events God has placed in my life and the deeper relationship that has developed between God and me. Thanks to Wright and other mentors, I have learned to listen to God and have learned how to see Him at work.

Here is Wright's description. Please use it as your framework for following my story.

Simply Christian, pgs. 136, 161

"God offers us, through the Spirit, the gift of being at last what we know in our bones we were meant to be: creatures that live in both dimensions of his created order. The quest for spirituality now appears as a search for that coming together of heaven and earth which, deeply challenging though of course it is, is genuinely an offer to those who believe.

"We are called to live at the overlap both of heaven and earth - the earth that has yet to be fully redeemed as one day it will be - and of God's future and this world's present.

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We are caught on a small island near the point where these tectonic plates - heaven and earth, future and present - are scrunching themselves together. Be ready for earthquakes!"

My story also begins with a scripture that has always caught my attention. It is Paul's way of describing our relationship with God in Ephesians 3.

Ephesians 3: 14-19

"When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

I've held this scripture close to my heart - wondering if my relationship with God was all it could be. Knowing in my soul that God was calling with His small voice: "I have more to offer, come closer."

The love Paul describes has dimension so wide, high and deep that we will never fully understand it. But his prayer

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better understanding and more complete experience of God's love. That gives me hope.

Discovering the intersection between Heaven and Earth

My journey closer began almost 15 years ago, in our home at the bedside of my father. He is in the final days of his earthly life. Although he rarely is conscious for very long, I feel God calling me with His small voice, moving me to share with Dad.

The Only Necessary Thing, pg. 172

"The movement of God's Spirit is very gentle, very soft and hidden. It does not seek attention. But that movement is also very persistent, strong and deep. It changes our hearts radically."

What you should know about my Dad is that his relationship with God was not something he would discuss. Mom was the visible Christian parent, connecting church and family. I am being drawn by the Spirit to share things with Dad. What the small voice within me reveals is how much Dad has taught me about the depth of God's unconditional love.

I learned how to love God because my Dad taught me the way. Unconditional love is a powerful gift - Dad gave it freely. I am able now to tell him how much I know that God loves him and then I release him to Jesus. At that point, a great peace comes to my spirit about Dad and his relationship with God.

Jessi's Vision

After Dad's death we decided as a family to celebrate his life with a picnic at a park. We arrange a time of sharing with family and friends. As everyone is arriving at the park, Jessi, my

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10-year-old niece, is doing somersaults on the grass. In the distance, but close enough to recognize him, she sees her grandfather, my Dad. He is dressed in a white shirt and pants, with one additional item, a bright orange cap, the type hunters wear to be seen in the forest. He has a golf club in his hands. She does three somersaults and each time she stops to look toward him, he waves to her. After the third time he is gone.

It took a while for Jessi to share what she saw - it's not something our family had ever experienced before and she was unsure how it would be viewed; how she would be viewed. But when I heard, my attention turned to God. What did he want us to see?

Simply Christian, pg. 221

"God and the world are different from one another, but not far apart. There were and are ways in which, moments at which and events through which, heaven and earth overlap and interlock."

Learning to Listen at "The Church of the Front Porch"

As I mentioned earlier, Dad and I were very close. It was not surprising, then, that the grief process could take a while. But five years? Really now. What I didn't expect was the overwhelming sense of warm love and care from my Heavenly Father. This developed as I spent time at the "Church of the Front Porch."

The Only Necessary Thing, pg. 84

"Why is it so difficult to be still and quiet and let God speak to me about the meaning of my life? Is it because I don't trust God? Is it because I don't know God? Is it because I wonder if God really is there for me? Is it because I am afraid of God?"

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"Is it because I wonder if God really is there for me? Is it because I am afraid of God? Is it because everything else is more real for me than God? Is it because, deep down, I do not believe that God cares what happens at the corner on my street? Still there is a voice - right there in my neighborhood. 'Come to me, you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'"

At the time, we lived in a vintage Craftsman house that had a huge porch facing the street. I assembled a set of comfortable chairs at one end of the porch and spent many hours just sitting and listening. I was still working a 60-hour week but God was always beckoning me to His place of worship. Scripture was painful and meaningless to read. Church services always brought tears and I was tired of the crying.

On the porch, I was undisturbed, with nothing to do but be in God's presence. I was learning to listen. As I listened, I found that God didn't really want anything from me except to be loved by Him. That was good, because I didn't have much to give to the relationship except my presence.

Another Intersection

It's five years since Dad died and my Mom is in the hospital. We are there with her, sharing her final earthly days. Mom is unconscious and has been for several days. The doctor says her brain can no longer function due to a massive stroke. He tells us only her body is still clinging to life. The end of her time with us is near. My sister and I and our husbands take turns beside her bed day and night.

My husband, Gary, and I are on the night shift. I'm asleep in a chair and Mom is across the room from us. Gary comes to my side

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and wakes me with: "Your Mom is calling you." I think, how could this be possible? I move over to her bedside and hold her hand for a few moments as she passes through the intersection of heaven and earth. I am filled with a warm peace as I experience God's presence in the transition.

Oswald Chambers calls experiences like these "Sacred Circumstances."

My Utmost For His Highest, Nov. 7

"The circumstances of a saint's life are ordained of God. In the life of a saint there is no such thing as chance. God by His providence brings you into circumstances that you cannot understand at all, but the Spirit of God understands. God is bringing you into places and among people and into conditions in order that the intercession of the Spirit in you may take a particular line. Never put your hand in front of the circumstances and say - I am going to be my own providence here, I must watch this, and guard that. All your circumstances are in the hand of God, therefore never think it strange concerning the circumstances you are in."

A Season of Obedience ... Becoming "All Ear" for God

As a life-long Christ follower, I have made many attempts at setting aside a special time with God but until I personally experienced the depths of His care, I often found my times sporadic and challenging. Life always seemed to get in the way. It was after Mom's death that I discovered the writing of Oswald Chambers. His insights into the heart of what God brings to our relationship and what he is urging me to contribute have kept me

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coming back to spend time with God to hear what His small, quiet voice has to say.

The Only Necessary Thing, pg. 82

"It is clear that we are usually surrounded by so much inner and outer noise that it is hard to truly hear our God when God is speaking to us. We have often become deaf, unable to know when God calls us and unable to understand in which direction God calls us. Thus our lives have become absurd. In the word "absurd" we find the Latin word 'surdus,' which means 'deaf.' A spiritual life requires discipline because we need to learn to listen to God, who constantly speaks but whom we seldom hear. When, however, we learn to listen, our lives become obedient lives.

"The word 'obedient' comes from the Latin word audire, which means 'listening.' A spiritual discipline is necessary in order to move slowly to an obedient life, from a life filled with noisy worries to a life in which there is some free inner space where we can listen to our God and follow God's guidance. Jesus' life was a life of obedience. He was always listening to the Father, always attentive to his voice, always alert for his directions. Jesus was 'all ear.' That is true prayer: being all ear for God. The core of all prayer is indeed listening, obediently standing in the presence of God."

Five Years Later

My story picks up another five years later. We left family and friends in California, selling the business we owned for more than 25 years and our much loved old house, and moved to Washington State. I asked God to give me a gift. I wanted a yearning for the deeper relationship that had been developing between us. I was beginning to enjoy my time alone with Him. I wanted to need it. I didn't want anything to draw me away from my time with God.

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Gary and I planned to take a year off of working to travel. In that time we hoped to discover what new work situations God would provide. Through a set of God-arranged circumstances our year off from work grew to five years and during this time I received the gift I requested. The gift came in the form of obedience. Gradually my time alone with God grew from 10 minutes to 15 and then to 30. Often I never knew how long. I was now totally engaged and yearning for my time with him, but this was not precisely the gift God wanted me to accept. He had something bigger in mind.

His bigger gift started again as a whisper during our time of talking and listening. He wanted me to do something - visit Ethelyn, a older neighbor, who I had never met. She was living with her family and not expected to live many more months. God was pushing me out of my comfortable life no a few, into the intersection. Would I be obedient? I said no within but I am so thankful that I finally obeyed.

Ethelyn and I developed a brief friendship before her death and through my obedience God was able to give her a gift. She was part of a church Bible study and had been praying about a way to thank all the women of her group for the care they had been giving her. God sent me to ask the question: "Is there any way I can help you?"

The desire of her heart was to host a thank you tea for her friends. With delight we worked together to plan the event, and another neighbor and I hosted it, along with Ethelyn's daughter. My obedience enabled me to see, yet again, the intersection between heaven and earth, as this event turned into a wonderful day for all of us who took part.

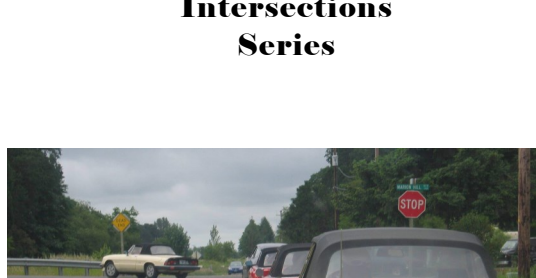
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Remaining in the Intersection

As our relationship grows, God continues to give me more experiences that allow me to view this special place where heaven and earth come together. The intersection can be a thought or a situation He has arranged. I delay, He whispers. If I cooperate, I experience the intersection and learn more about obedience in the process.

Sometimes God surprises me with a new and unexpected view of the intersection. Something that delights my soul. Something so God filled that I can only say: "I just witnessed, A God Thing."

Intersections Series



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