

Chapter 5.

INTIMACY: GOD'S DESIRE FOR ME

*Thirsty hearts are those whose longings have been awakened
by the touch of God within them.¹*

—A. W. TOZER

How is your journey so far? I am so proud of you for making it this far with me. It's time for you to see how God desires to have intimacy with you through prayer and the reading of His Word. John 10:27 states, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me," indicating that you will recognize Him from all other voices.

The story is told of a man from America who went to visit his relatives in the Middle East. As shepherds, they gathered at a common well for their sheep to drink. The cousin was alarmed that the sheep would be mixed up because there was no branding on the sheep. The shepherd chuckled and told him not to worry, because they had a way to gather their sheep. After quite some time, the shepherds got up, said their goodbyes, and walked away in different directions, each singing their favorite song. Upon hearing their shepherd, the sheep stopped eating, raised their heads, and began walking in that direction. Each sheep knew the voice of its master.

In the same way that we share secrets with our friends, God wants to share the secrets of his heart with us. He knows our secrets and our desires, and yet He wants us to share them with Him anyway. Our desire for intimacy is one of the indications that we have been made in God's image. Matthew 5:6 reminds us that "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled." Wesley Duetzel described this desire when he wrote,

Desire is another word for hunger. Unless there is sighing, longing, hungering and thirsting, and

perhaps even tears of desire, you have probably not yet reached prevailing prayer. Unless your heart cries out from its hidden depths, Satan's roadblocks seem at times unmoved, and Satan's captives remain bound.²

Mirror Moment

Meditate on Psalm 63:1: "You, God are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you." When you are ready, pray the following prayer: "God, will you increase my hunger for you?"

INTENTIONALITY IS THE KEY

Intimacy does not occur haphazardly. Isaiah 50:4–5 reads,

The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to

listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away.

It is interesting that the writer made sure to say that he had not been rebellious or turned away after God opened His ears. Perhaps that is our first inclination when we hear so clearly what God is saying. Are we embarrassed by what is asked? Do we feel put on the spot that as the One who heard the message, we are therefore responsible to have to say it or do it? Do we have a whining attitude of why me? I don't want to do it! It's hard. What will people think? Will anybody listen to me?

According to this passage, God is waking us morning by morning to listen like one being instructed; therefore, He has specific information He wants us to receive. He is looking for men and women who will take seriously His words to them. Second Chronicles 16:9 reads, "The eyes of the Lord range to and fro throughout the Earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him." The psalmist wrote, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:11). Hiding God's word in our hearts keeps us tender toward

Him and empowers us to know the word that sustains the weary.

EMBRACE AMBIGUITY

Are you demanding too much of yourself? Oftentimes in our relationship with God, we put demands on ourselves that are not from God. We feel we need to come into His presence to get something to give away to others, rather than just enjoy Him, worship Him, and be close to Him. Making time for God just to be in His presence is a sign of a secure relationship. In every relationship, there is the enjoyment of being together. There is usually conversation, but when it is quiet, the moment is simply enjoyed together. In those moments with God, we change our breathing to relaxation, focusing on His beauty and majesty, rather than on the next assignment. Simply being still before Him to know He is God is part of it. This is the place of peace. This is the place of breakthrough. This is the place of vision. There is no rush in this place, and not everything received here is meant to be shared with anyone else. It is your private place that

no one else gets to enter. Much like the master bedroom for a married couple.

My husband and I have very busy ministry schedules. We often open our home and enjoy hanging out, eating food, and having a good time with our friends. People are free to move about the house and sit where they are comfortable, but there is one room off limits to guests—the master bedroom. That is the one place that is set apart for us alone. It is safe. It is restful. It is a place where love is expressed and received and meant for no one else.

Every encounter in the presence of the Lord will not be a fireworks explosion. Some of the most powerful encounters are quiet with tangible waves of peace or love. Other times have no feeling or expression that the person encounters, but a deep knowing that the word of God is true. It is during the times of quiet that negative thoughts are stirred up within us. Thoughts such as, “God doesn’t care about me. This works for everyone else, but me. What is wrong with me? This is dumb. This is a waste of time.” These are lies that must be unveiled and addressed. Such knowledge of these lies is a gift from

God to help remove these obstacles and become more intimate with Him.

We are not aware that these lies exist, because they do not surface until God doesn't come to us in the way we think He should come. It is deep vulnerability to come to someone in love, only to have them jilt you. Rejection triggers abandonment issues and true feelings that are hidden below the surface that have no other way to be revealed than through silence and waiting. Fear is what causes people to avoid silence in the first place.

Waiting is not something we do well. We live in an instant society where whatever we want is at our fingertips. If we want information, we google it. If we are hungry, we use a microwave. If we want relationship, we text someone. Talking to someone face-to-face is less popular than even a few years ago, because of the time it takes to arrange a meeting. Why bother with that when I can stay in my pajamas on the couch and communicate on my phone? We have lost an integral part of intimacy that anticipates the face-to-face meeting. Imagine having a relationship with someone you never see, but only read their words to you. We were made for face-

to-face encounters to enjoy one another's presence. God is speaking all the time, but some people have not yet recognized what He sounds like.

OBEDY RIGHT AWAY

Years ago, I had a neighbor who never came on our side of the street. We waved to each other from the driveway or sidewalk, but she always stayed in her yard. Surprisingly, one Saturday while all four of my children were taking a nap, there was a knock on the door. When I opened it, Laura was standing there. I invited her in, made coffee, and we sat at the kitchen table to talk. As soon as I sat down, I "heard" a whisper tell me to share the gospel. I quickly pushed it aside and continued the conversation. After a few minutes passed, I heard it again. In my head, I talked back to the voice and said it was too soon to jump into such a dialogue with Laura, because I didn't want to scare her away.

I heard the statement even louder to share the gospel. In my head, I argued that such boldness didn't align with friendship evangelism principles that required a natural

relationship before plunging into a gospel presentation. The voice didn't go away. It only increased in volume. After an hour passed, Laura got up and said she needed to get back home. I told her how much I enjoyed our time together and hoped she would come again soon. I walked her to the door, hearing the statement one last time, "Share the gospel."

As soon as the door closed, I felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit and realized I had passed up a great opportunity. I repented to the Lord and told Him I would make it right. I walked across the street, and as I got closer to the house, noticed why she had come over. The TV was loudly broadcasting a football game, and many men were cheering in the living room. They were so loud they couldn't even hear my knock, so I had to keep ringing the doorbell.

When Laura's boyfriend came to the door, he muted the TV and all eyes turned toward me. I apologized for interrupting the game and made my way across the room to sit beside Laura as all the men watched me. As I sat down, I timidly stammered that I wanted Laura to know how much God loved her. Once the word *God*

was mentioned, the men sighed and turned back to the game. Laura leaned closer to me, got big tears in her eyes, and told me that she had once known the Lord, but had turned away from Him. She went on to say that someday she would probably return to Him.

Her boyfriend noticed her emotion and yelled to her to get the men some food, because she had already been gone for over an hour. I quickly got up and said I had to leave in case one of the kids woke up from their nap. I practically ran out of her house.

As I crossed the street, the magnitude of the encounter hit me hard. God had set me up. He had brought Laura to my distraction-free home to share the gospel with her. I didn't listen to the voice, because I didn't want to be embarrassed, since it was her first time in my home. I cared more about my awkwardness than about her and what God was asking me to do.

By this time, I was crying really hard and told the Lord from that day forward, I would do whatever He wanted, whenever He wanted, and I wouldn't wait or talk myself out of it. Deep down, I knew I had heard the voice of the Lord and I blatantly ignored it. I still get emotional

when I share that story, because I wonder what would have happened if I had shared the gospel. Would Laura have come back to the Lord? My disobedience burned something in my heart that day regarding the voice of God. He does speak and I must listen right away, whether I look foolish or not. He chose me to talk to Laura, and I blatantly ignored his request.

I know it was God's voice I heard that day, because I was too chicken to share the gospel myself and Satan wouldn't have wanted me to do that. It is not always clear it is His voice, but it is necessary to measure what we hear with the written word of God, because God's spoken word will never violate the written Word. It takes practice to act on what we hear to clarify if it is God, our own desire, or the voice of the enemy.

God's spoken word will never
violate the written word.

When it is God, there is usually an obvious outcome or result that we could not make happen, such as emotion,

agreement, or willingness to act or stop acting a certain way. If it is our own desire, nothing really comes of it and we come to the realization we were just pushing our own agenda. If it is Satan's voice, it is usually accompanied by feelings of condemnation, guilt, fear, accusation, shame, blame, torment, and harassment.

As straightforward as the message was, I still refused to listen. It takes time, practice, and trust to decipher the voice of God, but we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. If we demand certainty before acting, that is sight, not faith. Romans 10:17 reads that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

In the Greek, the word here is *rhema*, which means "that which is or has been uttered by the living voice." Hearing comes by the "living voice" of God. Isaiah 55:11 reads, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." We can trust the *rhema* of God. He wants us to know what He sounds like to deepen our relationship with Him.

CASE STUDY FROM THE LIFE OF DAVID

A beautiful picture of intimacy with God is displayed through the life of David. I Samuel 16 tells the story of how David became king. Samuel was told by God to stop mourning Saul and go to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons. When Samuel arrived and saw the oldest son, Eliab, he thought he must be the one. God warned Samuel not to look at height or outward appearance because the Lord looks at the heart. Five more men came into the room, but none of them were the one God had chosen. Samuel asked Jesse if he had any more sons, and he said there was one more in the pasture tending the sheep. Samuel told him to go get the boy.

When David arrived, he was probably out of breath from running. He was told to stand in front of Samuel, oil was poured on his head, and Samuel pronounced him as the next king of Israel. As soon as Samuel was done, David was sent back to the pasture to resume his duties as shepherd. Jesse had not even thought enough of David

to bring him before Samuel that day, yet he was God's choice for king.

It would be another fifteen years before David took the throne in Israel, but day in and day out, he faithfully cared for the flock right in front of him. There were many skills that David developed as he wrote songs and practiced his slingshot in the wilderness. During this time alone, David drew near to God and became familiar with His voice.

God has many things to teach us alone. It can be painful and lonely, but it is necessary for growth. For some reason, we don't learn it any other way. For all of us, there is a time when God takes us to a place of obscurity to show us that He is enough for us.

OBSTACLE: LIES

What lies have you told and what lies are you believing? One of the biggest obstacles to intimacy is lies. Lies are nasty little creatures that suck the life out of a person. They latch on to pain and create an unhealthy stronghold. When a person gets hurt, the lie is right there

to snatch up the opportunity. Thoughts like, “I am alone. No one cares about me. I must do it myself” come rushing in and begin their torment. Such lies create a foundation on which we form our belief system.

We live by what we believe, so whatever the lie is, we are set up for unhealthiness. If we believe we must do everything ourselves, because we are alone and no one cares for us, we will not ask for help. If we believe we are worthless, we will not take the necessary risks to advance in our job, because we don’t believe it will do any good. If we believe that this is as good as it gets, we won’t dream for the future because there is no point. In these ways, lies not only prevent us from moving forward, but they replace truth. Truth is the key component to being set free.

When we believe the truth that God is with us, we seek the help we need, expecting to find it. When we believe we have worth, we take risks and don’t worry about failure, because our identity is not wrapped up in our performance. We are still loved and that cannot be taken away.

If we have hope, we allow ourselves to dream of what could be. Such possibility thinking opens the avenue for creativity to flourish. Shame often attaches to the lie and leaves us feeling exposed and humiliated. Shame is not of God and nothing that makes us feel shameful or unworthy is ever from God. To really understand this, we have to understand better God’s reality.

APPEARANCE VS. REALITY

David Benner, a Christian psychologist, wrote, “Focusing on God while failing to know ourselves deeply may produce an external form of piety, but it will always leave a gap between appearance and reality.”³ Perfectionism is a relentless taskmaster who demands more and more and more from us, but is never satisfied. It creates a huge gap between appearance and reality.

It will take years to peel back all the layers and identify our lies. There are still times when we feel worthless or useless and it touches a sore spot in our soul that wants to prove something. We want to prove that we are significant. We want to prove that we can outwork

anyone. We want to prove that we are worth someone's time and attention. Freedom comes as we learn that our worth is not based on what we do; rather, our worth is based on what Jesus has done for us in bearing all our sin and shame on the cross. This grace is applied through faith in the One who bore our shame.

When we don't spend time with the Lord hearing the truth that He loves us as we are, we are easily offended and our need to prove ourselves returns. Our offenses revolve around feeling insignificant, unappreciated, unnoticed, and unaffirmed. The lies try to return and seem true because of experience and feelings. It is during such times that the Holy Spirit whispers that we are not alone because He is with us. He reminds us of what Jesus has done for us.

It is indeed a battle that is not against flesh and blood. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that our battle and struggle are waged against the rulers of the darkness of this world. It starts in our mind and it starts with a lie. When we agree with the lie, we give it power in our lives.

We must be keenly aware of the truth so the lies are blatantly obvious and we immediately reject them when

they come. It takes practice. There is a part of us that may want to wallow in self-pity, but it truly leads nowhere. Perspective is important and a slight adjustment from lies to truth changes everything.

It takes discipline to keep our thoughts on truth. Paul exhorts us to "be transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2). The Greek word for transformed is *metamorphao*, meaning "from the inside out." The lie comes into our mind, but the transformation also occurs in our mind as we choose truth over lies.

Mirror Moment

Take a moment and think about the lies you believe. Make a list of them on the left side of the page. Don't feel badly if there is a long list. When you are ready, make a new column on the right side of the page and write a truth statement to replace each lie. Search for Bible verses that support your truth statements and write them beside the truth statements. This may take time. These truths need to become the new tape that plays in your mind when you believe the lies. Acknowledge each lie and its

accompanying feeling, but replace it with the truth statement and Bible verse(s).

FALSE SELF

The false self is the person we create to cover up our feelings of worthlessness, shame, and inadequacy. Rather than being broken and admitting we need a savior and a healer, we pretend that we are fine as we are and don't need anyone or anything. Perhaps even worse is to pretend we do need others, but never really allow them to speak into our life. We attend events and are present physically, but emotionally we shut down and spiritually we only have the appearance of engagement. We walk in hurting and we walk out hurting because no one really knows what is going on.

Our mask is securely in place and we know the right phrases and clichés to say to back people off. “God is good,” “I am blessed,” and “I have so much to be thankful for” are statements that roll off our tongues, while our hearts are aching for true fellowship. Image is all-

important; therefore, we cannot ruin that by showing others who we really are.

Success, people-pleasing, power, money, and even ministry can be used to cover up the false self. Benner wrote, “While other people’s excessive attachments and personal falsity often seem glaringly apparent, it is never easy to know the lies of our own life.”⁴

THE WAY THROUGH: DISCIPLINE OF HONESTY

As previously mentioned in chapter three, the church is called to be the community of truth who lives transparently. Silence causes inward destruction, but confession and forgiveness bring healing and freedom. Silence gives the sin nowhere to go, so it grows in our minds as we replay it again and again. Fueled by silence, negativity warrants a situation worse than it really is. The wildfire increases and sends us into a downward spiral of hopelessness and despair.

Telling the truth allows us to
grow up and mature.

Once we speak what is bothering us—confess our sin—and bring it into the light, the reality of the situation returns to its normal size, lies are exposed, and truth enters. The situation may still be dire, but truth accesses light and our ability to handle what is there. God is given access by our confession. Speaking the truth to God allows Him to come in and grant us forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9).

Telling the truth allows us to grow up and mature. “Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become... mature” (Eph. 4:15). It is a choice. “Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (Eph. 4:25). The church needs to be the place in our culture where truth is spoken. “Therefore confess your sins to

each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). Truth-telling requires discipline because it does not come naturally to us.

FREEDOM REQUIRES TRUTH

Everyone is broken and flawed. If we want to truly love others, we must present our real selves, just as we are—full of faults and flaws. Not only does this need to occur in order to receive the love we desperately crave, but it gives permission to others to do the same. Fear of rejection is so strong that many of us would rather go without love than expose our lies.

Only by walking in the light do we
have fellowship with others.

The mask has been on for so long, we don't remember what we really look like and the thin line between the

lies we have believed and the truth of who we are has become too blurry. Only by walking in the light do we have fellowship with others (1 Jn. 1:6–7). It doesn't mean perfection; rather, it means that truth is necessary if we are to experience love and forgiveness.

When we live in honesty, we choose for others to see our warts and all. It is vulnerable, but real. Many Christians walk around feeling lonely and depressed, because they are not presenting their true selves. They have picked up clues that being real is not acceptable, so they smile and swallow their pain.

AUTHENTIC CHURCH?

Some churches choose image over honesty. The way things appear are more important than the way things are. Outwardly everyone looks great and praises God, claiming everything we need God will do for us, but pretention is thick in the air, indicating authenticity isn't welcome. If we do share an emotional story of pain, others silently stare at us until we apologize for crying. Their silence speaks loud and clear that superficiality is

the standard. Sometimes we do have momentary lapses of truth and our real self emerges, but a quick mask adjustment sends us back into hiding.

The church is challenged by authenticity, because once someone honestly and vulnerably shares their story, there is an expectation for the next person to tell their story and on and on. Honesty is feared, because it blows up the image of everything being okay. Honesty makes room for the raw mess, while image forces the mess to stay at the door. Image-conscious relationships remain shallow and church becomes an event to attend, rather than a place for broken people to come for healing.

HONESTY IN PRAYER

One of the best places for honesty is in prayer. It is the starting place to admit to God and ourselves our need for Him. Real praying can be a gut-wrenching process whereby the deep longings of our heart are admitted. Oftentimes it looks like a whine session of complaints, but we are being real about what is going on inside. This type of praying is exactly how David prayed in

the Psalms, Jeremiah prayed in Lamentations, and Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Please, Father, is there any other way for us to do this?”

In Matthew 26:36–46, Jesus asked, “Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” Jesus knew in His heart there was no other way, because He and the Father and the Holy Spirit had talked about it before Jesus came to earth, but Jesus asked anyway because He was revealing the fear, insecurity, and apprehension that accompanies every human being who is faced with something they know they must do, but dread it. This is honest praying.

Jesus said to his three best friends in verse 38: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” He told them how deeply He was hurting and invited them to join Him, but they didn’t understand.

No matter how much He wanted someone with Him in this situation, He knew he must face it alone, but He still asked. He kept checking on the disciples to see if they were in it with him, but He found them sleeping. Three times He went away and prayed the same thing. The

same thing. Why would He pray the same thing when He knew the answer?

Why do we pray the same thing when we know the answer? Because there is relationship in our asking. There is an intimacy we experience with God in the asking that allows us to ask even when we already know the answer. That is honesty. God is not upset that we keep asking the same thing over and over, because He knows we are processing our emotions as we wrestle with it and He gives us the freedom to come to our conclusion of either doing our own thing or saying, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

God is secure in our relationship to allow us to be honest and make our own choice. Jesus knew His sole purpose for coming to earth was to do the will of the Father, but He had to be honest with how He truly felt as He faced death. Jesus’ conclusion was submission to the Father, because He knew how much the Father loved Him. He wanted to please the Father because of the depth of their relationship.

Jesus was scared and knew He would be alone. He knew what his mission was, but He was still afraid. His

example of gut-level, honest praying shows us that it is okay for us to pray like this too. Not everyone will decide to please the Father, but He gives everyone the freedom to honestly work it through and make their choice. Jesus understands what it is to wrestle in prayer. Wrestling in prayer is necessary, so when surrender is chosen, it is authentic.

PRACTICE: MEDITATION

Take a moment and read these verses from Psalms 32 and 62 several times.

When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD."
And you forgave
the guilt of my sin.

(32:3–5)

Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge. (62:8)

Are there things in your life that need to be spoken because your silence is slowly killing you inside? Take time and pour out your heart to Him.

Who else needs to be told so you will have the needed support to live in the light?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *On a scale of one to ten, one being low and ten being high, how thirsty are you for more of God? Explain.*

2. *How do you “listen like one being instructed” as mentioned in Isaiah 50:4–5?*
3. *Where is a safe place for you to be honest about what’s really going on in your life?*
4. *What lies prevent you from drawing closer to God? Share the biggest lie you believe from the list you created in the Mirror Moment in this chapter.*
5. *In what way(s) have you ever heard God speak to you outside of the Bible (pictures, words, songs, nature, etc.)? Tell us your story.*
6. *Have you ever had a similar incident as Wanda had with Laura? Tell us your story.*

¹ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Aneko Press, Updated Edition, 2015), 17.

² Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer: Experiencing the Power of Answered Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 71.

³ David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 20–21.

⁴ Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 83