

I visited a Sex Addicts Anonymous open meeting that was open to anyone who identified within this category and lived in the United States. The group name and focus is on “Open Intimacy & Sexual Avoidance”. Their topic of the night was about nurture, specifically nurturing oneself. It was a mixed gender group but the majority of attendees were male. There was only one other female participant in the group.

I think this attendance is not the most accurate representation of how many struggle and what kind of people struggle with these issues. I received a private message on zoom from a female participant saying to me that she was glad she was not the only female in the meeting. This revealed to me that more men have taken ownership in this area of their life. It is women who struggle more to take ownership of this area of their life for various reasons. Perhaps, women are challenged to see their deep desire for intimacy because of how the media portrays sex to be and how romance novels are not considered as porn. In the end, both men and women desire for intimacy and the approach to fulfill this need may be different for each gender.

I observed how well versed people were in their understanding of the correlation between sex and intimacy, and how open they were to discovering their own soul. I firstly recognized that they do not overuse the word “share”. When people talk, they really are sharing for the sake of others and for themselves. In some sense, their cooperation and honesty were what they needed and the group needed as well. They were giving and talking from a place in their personal journey that they are on.

This meeting felt like it was people’s sacred space that I had the honor of entering into. It was welcoming. It was refreshingly honest and vulnerable in an authentic way. It was a glimpse of what intimacy is like on a slightly beyond surface level. As some shared, others would nod in

agreement and you can tell how connected they were to each other because everyone in the group were going through similar experiences. It was interesting to see how it is not simply a space to talk about people's shortcomings but also a space where people genuinely do want to change and have a healthier perspective of what intimacy is, especially deep intimacy.

Those who spoke and shared were able to connect their physical struggle with the issues of their soul by digging into their past. They recognized that there are two extremes that people participated in: binging and depravity. Some would mention how their struggle with intimacy is due to their upbringing. One person talked about how taking many house chores and responsibilities at a very young age led to their struggle to understand what nurturing oneself is like because he was taught growing up, to only care for others and not himself. It is fascinating to see how people were able to make these connections from their upbringing to who they are now.

People recognized that their external behaviors stem from internal conditions. These internal conditions of their perception and perspective of life have been integrated into their narrative due to various past experiences that have defined things for them. This tells me that people are hungry to learn about their soul, which is why a fair number of them seek professional counseling or therapy as part of their journey. Most follow the 12 step process which has worked well for them in their journey towards sobriety.

One key thing in life change is not just about one taking action but also about inviting people to be part of the journey with you. For life change to occur and to experience deeper intimacy, the participants in SAA have expressed how they have spent more time with their partner. Those who are married, talk about how they have been making efforts to show their wife how much they love them and appreciate them for who they are. One participant expressed how telling people and having friends help in the process have brought change in their perspective of

intimacy. They recognized that redefining what intimacy is, required small steps beginning with relearning how to be friends with someone. Even this step in itself was a change and something out of the usual norm that challenges people who struggle with intimacy, to learn to face and embrace for the sake of experiencing something deeper in the future.

From this SAA meeting, I believe the church can learn how to address and define what intimacy is. The topic of sex and sexuality has become a political matter rather than a matter of the heart and of our being as God's creation. It is not something to be shy about nor shame others about. The SAA meeting is consistent and repetitive in how it defines intimacy. The church needs to be more comfortable with talking about this topic or even mentioning it, even in brief sentences on the pulpit, of how we are created with a desire for deep intimacy.

For churches to be open to hosting or opening up their building for 12 step meetings to occur would allow the world to see that Christians are not here to condemn nor shame people. It also challenges church members to embrace people from different walks of life. Churches can learn to be better listeners. People can be quick to judge, but Christians are especially portrayed in this way and the world is not completely wrong in this. By being better listeners, we get to see people not for their shortcomings or sin, but rather as broken people who are deeply loved by God. This would challenge the church to put people before theology or self righteousness.

There are people in this world who are hungry and desiring for life change. The church needs to catch up and update their approaches to this and that begins with being a good listener and being people who are approachable for deep conversations. Life change ultimately is not done by man but by God's power, healing and Spirit. We are to be an extension and representation of who God is to those who are seeking, by extending the invitation.