

## INTIMATE LIVING (Sermon #1)

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES:

One of God's greatest gifts remains boxed and bowed. It's not hidden—like a lost Christmas gift, wedged underneath the needle dropping tree, piles of uninhabited boxes, or crumpled and torn wrapping paper. We're fully aware the gift awaits our efforts because our name has been personally inscribed on the tag's "To" section. Having some familiarity with His image, we recognize this gift has not come from a random secret Santa, but from the ultimate Gift Giver, the Savior of the world. The gift is actually a pathway to a relationship of intimacy and oneness with God (and others).

Intimacy. Now there's a word conjuring up all kinds of emotions and attitudes having caused many men and women to physically cry and emotionally die. It's haunted, alluded, and driven some individuals to multiple breaking points. It's been run from, ignored, and outright rejected by countless human beings. On this side of Heaven, it seems few individuals ever experience true intimacy and oneness with Jesus (or with others). Even though we've been created with the God-given potential to take this astounding journey, most of us accept, and try to convince ourselves, we're satisfied with far less.

Whether it was becoming a Christian at the age of nine, my personality type, the time and culture in which I was raised, four years spent in Bible college, lack of discipline, busyness, or one of the other hundred-plus excuses I could conveniently offer for my dissatisfaction, my relationship with Jesus wasn't as intimate as I *knew* it should be or *wanted* it to be.

Maybe you can identify, understand, and sense that kind of awareness, longing, and frustration. You'd think, as Jesus followers, we'd open the gift and achieve true intimacy with God (and others). Most of us (from the pews to the pulpits—if those still exist anymore) remain content to just look at the unopened gift, displaying a surface-type, basic survival-style relationship with our Creator. Most of us have never maximized the rewards or depth of true intimate living. The emptiness we sense in our spirit is one of the pleading voices: "Open and accept the gift!"

This sermon series brings together practical, biblically based skills, strategies, and stories that will not only help open the gift but also seize the opportunities to embrace the contents. We will share simple, practical applications for building intimacy with Jesus Christ, God's Son. Once your spirit comes alive on the pathway of intimacy with God, you'll be set free to develop your own specific connections. In addition, these same principles can be applied to other life relationships—our spouse, children, parents, co-workers, friends, and even community contacts—ushering in a truer intimacy with them, also.

It's not wishful thinking that God wants an intimate relationship with us. He does! After all, He put on flesh and sent His One and Only Son to insure it could happen. However, there's a problem and it's a big one. There are many roadblocks that must be overcome to experience intimacy with God (and others). Some of these roadblocks have been self-inflicted and self-assembled, while others are by-products of wounds we've received along life's other pathways from people or circumstances not necessarily of our choosing. No matter how these roadblocks have come about, their presence is undeniable. However, there's great news. For every roadblock, there's a replacement—a building block. By implementing the building blocks, we can achieve a truly intimate relationship of great personal depth with God (and others).

It's my hope and prayer that we will not only find the intimacy we're looking for (and so desperately need) with Jesus, but we will allow this intimacy to improve all our relationships. Doing so will bring us, among other blessings, tremendous joy, love, and peace.

In many respects, the world operates clueless as to its desperate need for a richer, fuller,

and more comprehensive understanding of intimacy. Mention the word “intimacy” and most individuals are drawn or dragged to the topic of “sexuality.” Exposing the fracture from the Fall, few intellectually proceed beyond this—and that’s unfortunate. While sexuality is a part of true intimacy, it’s only a microcosm.

God offers a magnificent and more competent view of intimacy. The brokenness around us (and maybe in us) is proof of the great need for a more eternal perspective. When God put on flesh and Jesus entered our world, the Gift was proof that brokenness could be reconditioned into healing. Help arrived in the form of a baby. That baby grew into the perfect God-man and He demonstrated true intimacy—the relationship He and His Father have shared for all eternity.

The worldview on intimacy can change. It will require Christ-followers who are actually displaying the full array of what He provides. The world around us is hurting and hungry for a more complete and thorough conception of true intimacy. Jesus manifested it to us so we might demonstrate it to the world. True intimacy involves mind, body, heart, soul, and spirit—every aspect of our humanness.

So let’s get this journey started!

### **DEFINING INTIMACY:**

While attending elementary school, recess and lunch were my favorite two “subjects.” I noticed when I progressed to middle school, recess lingered behind. Thankfully, lunch followed me to the sixth grade. Math, not English, took the newly vacated spot, albeit a distant second.

I made it through my formal education years, including graduation from Bible college, never acquiring a deep appreciation for English grammar. Term papers were the worst. I could never understand all that pomp and circumstance over sentence structure and style. “How is this ever going to help me in the real world?” One such college document was returned to me with a giant “C” on the front page. Accompanying this letter were the words: “This is more like a sermon than a term paper.” I shrugged, took the grade with gladness, and figured the correction was actually a compliment—I never intended to be a professor of English but a preacher of the Word.

As it turned out, my Grandmother La Prell was an English major. This was a real blessing in the early 1990’s when I asked her to edit my first book. I couldn’t believe all that “red ink” on the manuscript. (I should’ve paid more attention in English class!) She must’ve trekked to the store multiple times to renew her supplies of red pens draining down and drying up correcting my many mistakes. I appreciated her lengthy explanations to the amended pages and the fact she never once complained throughout the month’s long editing process. I was determined, however, to improve my skills, if not just to make it easier on her. As a result, I learned more from her than most my English teachers because, now, I was actually paying attention. All this being true about my English prowess, it wasn’t a surprise when I struggled with the assignment necessary for this first chapter—creating a personal definition for the word “intimacy.”

Have you ever made an attempt to come up with your own definition for a familiar word? It seems simple enough, right? What could be so challenging? Take the word “intimacy” for example. We know what it means, don’t we? We’ve used it in a sentence or two with our spouse, a friend, or maybe with a counselor. We’ve heard it used various places: at church—from the pulpit or the pastor’s office; in a restaurant—from the strangers two booths over; in the car—from the radio; or at home—from the television.

To define the word “intimacy,” I didn’t start with Webster’s Dictionary or any other source—online or otherwise. I sat on the swing outside, wrote the word on paper and started to write a complete definition. The concept morphed for days. I kept getting lost in a sea of new ideas and preconceived, old suppositions. When I thought serious progress had been made, I received yet

another notion that revealed—I really wasn’t any closer to concluding the process. Four weeks later, after daily meditating on the word, I began drawing a far superior conclusion as to what truly incapsulates this mysterious word.

There’s a problem with a word like “intimacy.” The world, with its cultures and societies, has marginalized the word. “Intimacy” has been basically neutered into something less than it actually is. In this sermon series, we’ll use my personal definition for the word, not some pansy, watered-down, or snow-flake narrative. Here it is:

**INTIMACY:** [ in-tuh-muh-see ]

The harmonization of attitudes and actions  
resulting from mutual effort to see and be seen,  
know and be known, and connect  
at significant personal depth;  
a unifying of separate individuals in oneness.

This was a three month-long struggle (with continual tweaking thereafter). This definition reflects a higher view of intimacy than the world’s standard, and reveals a biblical viewpoint of true intimacy, illuminating what God intends for us to share with Him (and with others). As experience teaches us—with wiser thought comes wiser living.

*Through the lens of this definition, let’s explore the intimacy the Father and Son share.*

*1. The Father and Son have harmonized attitudes and actions.*

Although functioning in distinctive roles (Persons, if you will), the Father and Son are together and unified in thought, motive, purpose, and deed. God—the Father, and Jesus—the Son, have identical attitudes and actions because They have come together through the Son yielding to the Father’s will.

John 6:38:

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

John 14:31a:

“...but I do as the Father has commanded me,  
so that the world may know that I love the Father...”

It’s through Jesus we see God presenting submission in its purist possible form. The Father and Son demonstrate for us the intimacy that comes from the harmonization of will, word, and work.

*2. The Father and Son demonstrate a seeing, knowing, and connecting relationship.*

In a very real sense, seeing reveals will, knowing reveals personhood, and connecting reveals the relational bond between individuals. This is expressed in Scripture.

John 5:19-20:

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.”

John 10:14-15:

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I

know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

John 15:10:

‘If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.”

Jesus doesn't describe His Father as a passive participant in Their relationship. Jesus views the Father as actively involved in the revelation and disclosure of His desires. Even while on earth, Jesus was completely aware of what the Father was doing and the assignments He was being asked to achieve. What Jesus would accomplish in attitude and action came directly from seeing, knowing, and connecting with His Father.

There's an eternal harmony between the Father and Son that will not be broken or suffer separation. This helps explain Jesus' unwavering commitment to the Father amidst the various difficult and challenging temptations He endured. Satan designed these to destroy and dismantle the seeing, knowing, and connecting intimacy the Father and Son enjoy.

*3. Although distinguishably different, the Father and Son demonstrate unity and oneness by being distinctively the same.*

For all who have a beginning (including me), this will remain a mystery. The finite will never completely grasp the infinite—so, a measure of faith is required. All earthly attempts to understand this perfect union of Persons between the Father and Son (and don't forget the Holy Spirit) will fall short. Nevertheless, no matter how incomplete our understanding, it doesn't change the fact that Jesus (and Scripture) presents the Father and Son as two distinctive Persons, yet sharing oneness. Jesus said,

John 10:30...

“I and the Father are one.”

Jesus' statement to first-century Jews (and to us) was crystal clear. Jesus unquestionably claimed oneness—EQUALITY—with the Father. The shock wave can still be seen on the seismometer cascading through that crowd! Jesus' claim acknowledged the distinguishable difference in Persons, but also avowed distinctive similarity and union. It was so coherent and unmistakable, many, right then and there, picked up rocks to stone Him for blasphemy.

Months after Jesus proclaimed that powerful truth, He prayed a prayer that holds many intimacy nuggets.

John 17:18-23:

“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. <sup>20</sup> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

Here are four of those intimacy nuggets. First, the Father and Son are “in” each other. Despite being distinguishably different, the Father and Son are uniquely “blended” together. They share the same power and eternal existence. They share through collaboration, cooperation, and cohabitation.

Second, an unparalleled mixture and aspect of the Father and Son's intimacy can be shared with His children. The Father's children should have Jesus in them as the Father is in Jesus. We

should be in Them and They should be in us. THAT IS INTIMATE! To participate in this “Father, Son, Child” intimacy necessitates continual action. It's not a one time event, but an ongoing testimony of obedience and trust as demonstrated through daily life and sacrifice.

Third, the fellowship of true believers can experience this oneness of the Father and Son. Our purposes, motives, attitudes, and actions, all can (and should) be aligned with our Savior and Lord. His mission becomes ours—to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) for which Jesus commissioned us to go into all the world (Matthew 28:19-20). Likewise, His reconciliation story becomes ours—we share in the ministry of reconciling others to God, through Jesus' sacrifice, allowing us also to be reconciled with each other (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Fourth, the pursuit of oneness with the Father and Son is not just a hope for intimacy but it's a hope for salvation.

You might be wondering, “How do I get started?” At the Cove, we're all about helping you take your next step of faith. So, each message in this series contains a specific faith step along this intimacy journey. Today's faith step is a simple one...and simple is good.

What I want to encourage you to do is to make a decision. Make the conscientious commitment to develop a more intimate relationship with God. The “how” will unfold in this series, but it starts with a choice that needs to be made today.

Today's faith step is an acknowledgment that there's more seeing, knowing, and connecting to be done. It's a commitment to harmonize your attitudes and actions rather than accepting the status quo. This is everyone's first step. It's a realization that we aren't where we want to be, need to be, or should be. It's a step of humility when we recognize we haven't arrived. In fact, we may conclude, we aren't as far along in our faith journey as we thought we'd be—let alone how far everyone else thinks we are. We actually may be closer to the beginning of that journey after all these years of following Jesus than towards the end.

It can begin today. Make the choice to commit yourself to this journey. Make a clear, discernible commitment towards intimacy with God.

What you'll find along this journey is that these faith steps will not only empower you to develop your relationship with God, but also your relationships with others. In making the commitment today to become more intimate with Jesus, we're also making the commitment to develop more intimate relationship with others (our spouse, parents, children, and friends). It all starts with one discernible decision of will.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, on this day, January 9th, 2022, make the commitment to discover what it means to have intimacy with God (and others) and I'm willing to become more intimate with God (and others).

What would happen if we all made this genuine commitment—if we all marked our calendars with “Today is the day!” Today is the day I willingly decide to align my attitudes and actions with God. Today is the day I will begin to see and be seen, to know and be known, and connect more deeply with Jesus (and others). If we take this journey, we will have what we've always wanted—a strong, vibrant, living, intimate relationship with the Savior of the world (and with others).

Today is the day to start your journey.