

INTO HIS PRESENCE

A THEOLOGY
OF INTIMACY
WITH GOD

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Tim L. Anderson

 Kregel
Academic

Into His Presence: A Theology of Intimacy with God

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To My Wife Barbara

God's gracious provision
of the best partner in this life
I could ever have.

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INTRODUCTION

AS WE BEGIN . . .

When I was a freshman in college, I made the decision to follow the Lord wholeheartedly. One of my initial desires was (and still is) to relate to God as He has proscribed in the Bible. One Sunday I was listening to my pastor preach, and I was struck to my spiritual core by a thought that had never even remotely occurred to me in all my years of growing up in the church: “Who do I pray to?” This was not a venture into other religions; rather, I was simply asking, “Do I pray to the Father only? To the Son, Jesus Christ? To the Holy Spirit? Am I slighting or disrespecting any one of Them when I am praying to one of the Others? Is it possible to pray to only one of Them?” In my growing faith, I simply had a desire to pray right. This was accompanied by the realization that what I believed about intimacy with God had profound implications.

That same year, a friend gave me his own personal copy of A. W. Tozer’s *The Pursuit of God*. Tozer began to open my world to the understanding that the rightness of my relationship with God is to be combined with my closeness to Him. Specifically, Tozer makes this astounding assertion: “God wills that we should push on into His Presence and live our whole lives there.”¹ Like entering into the biblical temple’s Holy of Holies, rightness is combined with closeness. Maybe you can relate to that in your spiritual journey as well. There are times when I still feel like a freshman in my understanding and close-

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1948), 36–37, italics his.

ness to God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity. Furthermore, when discussing intimacy with God with my students, in small groups at church, at retreats and conferences, and during counseling sessions, I have heard a variety of perspectives—some cogent and some very peculiar, some derived from bits and pieces of Scripture understood in isolation, some derived from sitcoms and Disney films. A study on what the Bible says about intimacy with God, to me, seems to be crucial for our day.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS *NOT* ABOUT

So as we begin, it would be helpful to make clear what this book is *not* about. This book will not be a narrative of someone’s personal experience with God, on his or her own journey from distance or loneliness to a feeling of closeness with Him, though I would validate many such narratives. Indeed, it would be tragic if, after reading this book, readers were not moved toward God one iota. As Ron Brackin pointedly advises, “We can read a good spiritual book in search of information or in search of God. We will find only what we’re looking for.”² Reading this book does not have to be one or the other, either. In fact, I hope it is both.

This book will also not be a “how-to” devotional guide, providing ten steps to a better intimacy with God, or some such formulation. At the same time, we are certainly examining the Bible’s theology on intimacy with God, and so we should expect transparent principles to rise to the surface and function as assessment points for us to tell, for example, if we truly are any closer to God today than yesterday or last year. Additionally, this book cannot hope to address all of your favorite passages, or pursue every corollary theme related to intimacy with God in the Bible. I apologize straight away, but the basic topic at hand is more than enough to keep me busy throughout. Keep in mind, too, that what may seem to be a direct correlation or implication may not be addressed because I simply have not noticed it, or perhaps I chose other themes to develop that were, in my mind, more germane. In other words, there are undoubtedly missed opportunities in my pursuit of the topic, but I hope that my fundamental aim has been achieved: to explain intimacy with God in a way that answers fundamental questions about who God is and how we are to relate to Him.

Let me add at this point that this is not a book that claims to be written by someone who has all the answers, nor does the book want to sound preten-

2. Ron Brackin, “Reading Skills Quotes,” Goodreads, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/reading-skills>.

tious, and so if you take it that way, I am sorry—please allow me the chance to explain, and then you can make a judgment.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

So what *is* this book about? In short, this study will develop what the Bible says about intimacy with God. However, before we get into specific definitions and concepts, let me start by addressing its purposes. First, it is an *affirmation*. When Christians study the Scriptures, there will be a shared agreement over basic and most important truths because of the promised Holy Spirit's work (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 2:26–27). Believers have always sought to draw near to their God. While sin separates, trust in the salvation God provides by faith has been a rallying point throughout the ages. It is a glorious reality that Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, the disciples, Paul, John, Peter, Antony, Augustine, Aquinas, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Edwards, Wesley, Parham, Nee, Tozer, Lewis, Merton, Nouwen, etc. have all drawn near to the God of their salvation. They all have something to teach us as well. The significance of recent classics should never be minimized. They are profoundly enriching works, yet they are a product of their time, culture, worldview, philosophy, theology, and human limitations. Their theological method is often less precise and more devotional in thrust. For example, Tozer's *The Pursuit of God* is a classic text on intimacy with God; and as I have already shared, I am indebted to him on a profound level. However, as important as this work is, it is broader than what I am attempting. Also, a more thorough biblical theology needs to be done to provide a more substantive grounding in scriptural data and specific biblical themes. J. Oswald Sanders's *Enjoying Intimacy with God* is another classic book on this topic.³ It includes concepts that I will also develop, and yet it includes broader Christian life issues; again, the key difference is that his is more of a devotional, practical, how-to book, not a robust systematic/biblical theology.

The other purpose of this book is to attempt an *intervention* of sorts. By its very nature, an intervention into someone's life, ideas, and experience is emotional and challenging, and yet necessary and affirming. This book's intercession will seek to address head-on the foundational assumptions and imprecise theologies of intimacy with God that appear to be addictive. These assumptions are quite evident in the sheer amount of books that have been written with "intimacy with God" in the title in the last two decades. There are

3. J. Oswald Sanders, *Enjoying Intimacy with God* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2000).

three categories of the types of works and issues: Catholic Mystical, Pentecostal Experiential, and Evangelical Devotional.

Catholic Mystical

Contemporary Catholic mystical writers like Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating are part of a tradition that dates back to the early monastic movements. Their passion to mortify the sins of the flesh is commendable. Their spiritual self-discipline is in itself exemplary. Their desire to connect with God as a two-way experience is a crucial corrective to a one-way—we talk and He listens—approach. So I haltingly bring anything negative against these deeply sincere spiritual giants. However, one challenge for them is that they tend to follow aspects of a tradition born out of a Neoplatonic view of reality and humanity from Augustine and St. John of the Cross.⁴ This simply means that the body and flesh are less valuable than the spiritual and rational. One problem with this is that they can also drift toward an Eastern mysticism that tries to free the self from fleshly hindrances. While this may be commendable, such attitudes can focus less on immersion in truth of what God has revealed in the Scriptures, and more on escaping the confines of our earthly existence and emptying ourselves of our rational humanity. Their goal is the achieving a union with God that has us being absorbed into Him⁵—that is, His spirit, will, and essence—rather than having a relational unity that preserves our personal human identity.⁶

4. Pearcey rightly notes, “Partly because Augustine was such a towering figure in church history, a kind of Christianized Platonism remained the *lingua franca* among theologians all the way through the Middle Ages.” Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, Study Guide Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), Loc. 1740; José C. Nieto, *Mystic, Rebel, Saint: A Study of St. John of the Cross* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1979), 126.

5. One type of example of this union can be found in Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, introduction by Sue Monk Kidd, Kindle ed. (New York: New Directions, 1961, 2007), loc. 257.

Contemplation is also the response to a call: a call from Him Who has no voice, and yet Who speaks in everything that is, and Who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of His. But we are words that are meant to respond to Him, to answer Him, to echo Him, to echo Him, and even in some way contain Him and signify Him. Contemplation is this echo. It is a deep resonance in the inmost center of our spirit in which our very life loses its separate voice and re-sounds with the majesty and the mercy of the Hidden and Living One. He answers Himself in us and this answer is divine life, divine creativity, making all things new. We ourselves become His echo and His answer. It is as if in creating us God asked a question, and in awakening us to contemplation He answered the question, so that the contemplative is at the same time, question and the answer.

6. See Thomas Keating’s book, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), for a modern mystical Catholic perspective. Alex Aronis’s *Developing Intimacy with God: An Eight-Week Prayer Guide Based on Ignatius’ “Spiritual*

Pentecostal Experiential

The Pentecostal experience writers find their roots in the Methodist Holiness movements of the late nineteenth-century America. Their practical and transformative Christianity has rightly found fertile ground around the world. The resurgence of experiencing the Holy Spirit's ministry has been a necessary intervention into the church. The expectation of experiencing the true and living God is important for any age of the church. However, this experiential emphasis, coupled with an unassailable American individualism and existentialism, has resulted in some having the mindset that everything intimate and miraculous with God that believers experience in the Bible can and should be the norm for all Christians today.⁷ Thus experiential claims, no matter how bizarre, cannot be challenged. Claims of intimacy with God through visions and experiences of Jesus are becoming more common. David Taylor, in his *Face-to-face Appearances from Jesus: The Ultimate Intimacy*, assumes that since Jesus has supposedly appeared to him on more than one occasion, seeing Him "face-to-face" is normative for believers today. In addition, these visions bring intimacy, prosperity, and a clear destiny for one's life.⁸

Evangelical Devotional

The evangelical devotional writers often find their foundations in the Puritans, the Great Awakening, the fundamentalist/modernist controversies, and the broadening of the evangelical movement. Like most evangelicals, the personal conversion experience is necessary, but must be followed with a discipleship based upon studying the Bible's teachings on the broader issues

Exercises" (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2003) is an interesting Catholic approach based upon an early church father, though this is not rooted in a biblical theology but in elements of a Neoplatonic philosophy.

7. Phillip H. Wiebe, "The Pentecostal Initial Evidence Doctrine," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24, no. 7 (1984): 465–72; Beni Johnson, Sue Ahn, Ann Stock, DeAnne Clark, Heidi Baker, Sheri Hess, Winnie Banov, and Nina Myers, *Beautiful One: A Walk in Deeper Intimacy with the One Who Created Us*, ed. Shae Cooke (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2010).
8. David Taylor, *Face-to-face Appearances from Jesus: The Ultimate Intimacy* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009). We will later examine the claims of Matthew Robert Payne, in his *Finding Intimacy with Jesus Made Simple* (Litchfield, IL: Revival Waves of Glory Books & Publishing, 2016). In *Experience the Power of God's Presence: A Call to Intimacy with God, Volume 1* (Royal Center, IN: Exson Publishing, 2012), Harry Muyenza focuses on defining worship and experiencing Pentecostal phenomena for intimacy with God. Joyce Meyer, in her *Knowing God Intimately: Being as Close to Him as You Want to Be* (New York: FaithWords, 2008), uses "Scripture and powerful real life examples" in her Pentecostal approach, focusing mainly on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and gifts.

of the Christian life. Thus intimacy with God is a topic associated with learning to practice the Christian life. The clearest evidence of this is by doing one's devotions. Their literature tends to focus on an American pragmatism of how to achieve intimacy with God.⁹ Others incorporate psychology into their approach to a close relationship with God. This can be very useful, and yet they do not provide substantial theological grounding for its elements.¹⁰

Planning for Precision

So what's my plan? One cannot pursue an affirmation and an intervention without a plan. As a minimum, we need to work toward a precise definition of intimacy with God. This is especially important when it appears that our culture faces the temptation to reduce intimacy with God to an experiential narrative and to spiritual how-to lists. Thus, precise definitions seem to be an afterthought at best. J. Gresham Machen in *What Is Faith?* pointed out liberalism's aversion to precision. He noted:

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9. Steve Korch, *My Soul Thirsts: An Invitation to Intimacy with God* (King of Prussia, PA: Judson, 2000), has good elements in its approach to intimacy with God, but is more of a how-to book for a more popular audience. It is also more conceptual at points than biblical (for example, see sections on joy [for the "humor-impaired"], prayer/spiritual power ["overcoming life's obstacles"], knowing the Bible ["hearing God's voice with your whole being"], and authentic passion for God ["dancing in the Arms of God"]), and much broader in scope than the present volume. Malcolm Macdonald, *Set Me on Fire: Being Filled with the Presence of God* (Venice, CA: Monarch, 2015), is classified under Christian Living on Amazon, and under Christian Life and Devotionals on Kregel (<http://www.kregel.com/christian-living-and-devotionals/set-me-on-fire>). Randy Madison's *Pursuing Intimacy with God: Life's #1 Priority* (Las Vegas: Next Century Publishing, 2010) is a book based in his sermon series on this topic. It is therefore limited in scope to certain passages and themes, and lacks theological depth, clarity, and precision. Christian Paul Osburn's *The Key That Unlocks the Door to Intimacy with God* (Kindle ed., Amazon Digital Services, 2014) is a "how-to" that is more of a basic theology booklet about being able to be right with God/justification. Dr. Benjamin Sawatsky's *Intimacy with God: Drawing Ever Closer to the Almighty* (Colorado Springs: Book Villages, 2011) develops theological themes in practical ways (i.e., "Intimacy with God and the Holy Spirit"), yet it is broader than intimacy with God as it ventures into other areas of God's role in the Christian life (e.g., "The Holy Spirit as My Resident Rabbi"). Eddie Snipes's *Simple Faith: How Every Person Can Experience Intimacy with God* (Carrollton, GA: GES Book Publishing, 2011) is a basic introduction to Christian faith that appears to be intended for newer believers and lacks theological development.
10. Dr. Anthony J. Fischetto, *Transformed: Intimacy with God* (Reading, PA: Alpha Omega Counseling Center, 2000). This book, written by a psychologist, centers on avoiding the stress of life through Christian meditation and psychobiology. Dr. Norm Wakefield's *Living in God's Presence: Pursuing Intimacy with Our Heavenly Father* (Loveland, CO: Walking Carnival, 2013) is not theological but psychological and devotional.

This temper of mind is hostile to precise definitions. Indeed nothing makes a man more unpopular in the controversies of the present day than an insistence upon definition of terms. . . . Men discourse very eloquently today upon such subjects as God, religion, Christianity, atonement, redemption, faith; but are greatly incensed when they are asked to tell in simple language what they mean by these terms.¹¹

First, I would add that for many in our era it isn't simply an aversion to precise definitions, but an inability to see the need for them on a substantive level. If intimacy with God is personal, then it is subjective and relative. To claim a precise definition could alienate people, invalidate their experiences, and thus come across as imperialistic and hostile. Second, men and women are speaking very eloquently on the subject of intimacy with God but we find that there is a hesitancy to claim some definitions and approaches as being out of bounds. This reluctance is motivated in part by viewing intimacy with God as a means to spiritual and emotional health. And there are many paths and practical ways to that end for the individual. Yet, this kind of posture is precisely why we need to have a robust and clear theological development of the concept of intimacy with God from the source of truth God has revealed, in the Scriptures to His creations.

We also face the temptation to absolutize intimacy with God. The Achilles heel of any worldview or theological position is when it either makes too much of its theological importance or reduces its complexities to something too simple.¹² For example, I have had students absolutize God's sovereignty even in His gift of free will, to the point that they claim that God is the ultimate author of evil. In the past some hyper-Calvinists have absolutized God's sovereign choice in election to the point that they have denied the need for evangelism. Similarly, some Baptists have absolutized religious liberty to the point that they have allowed in their churches and seminaries the denial of certain fundamentals of historic orthodox Christianity. Some of my students, because of cultural and theological forces, have absolutized God's love to the extent that when I ask them what the Bible is all about, they say almost without thinking, "It's God's love letter to mankind." All I have to do is ask them how they would fit the Bible's kingdom theme and the judgments of Revelation into that and their foreheads begin to wrinkle. Intimacy with God is not

11. J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 13–14.

12. Steve Wilkins and Mark Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Stories That Shape Our Lives* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009).

the theme of the Bible. However, it is a significant theme and, as we will see, it does overlap with other important scriptural themes and foundations.

Some define intimacy with God by absolutizing one Bible verse. For example, Fischetto bases his approach to intimacy with God around Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.” To him, this passage teaches us “how to be still and know God personally, passionately, and powerfully.” Thus spiritual and physical meditation is absolutized as the key to intimacy with God.¹³ I am not dismissing the fact that there are key passages that function as parts of the foundation to key biblical concepts (Eph. 2:11–22; Heb. 4:16; 10:19–22; James 4:8; etc.). Absolutizing, however, funnels all other experiences and biblical data through one main and defining passage. It is as if the gospel itself can be fully explained by writing John 3:5 on a sign at an NFL football game for all to see. The gospel is more than the phrase “being born again.” Intimacy with God is more than “Be still and know that I am God.”

AGAIN . . . WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

I have developed this book as a biblical and theological affirmation of the profound teaching on intimacy with God in the Scriptures. These sacred Writings not only describe coming into authentic and safe contact with the high and holy Creator and Redeemer of the human race, but they invite us to be a part of a relationship that is nothing short of epic. Think of it! The movement of God toward the beings He has made in His image is an epic drama that is as real as any national or personal history. In order to capture as much of the teachings of Scripture as possible, I have framed this book primarily around how biblical and systematic theology work. In other words, a theology of intimacy with God should address many of the structural issues important to theology, its categories and terms, as such a theology should go where the biblical data leads. Moreover, it must address some current issues and trends. Thus I hope that this theology will serve as an example and model for doing theology on other relevant topics.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of intimacy with God. Much like the beginning of a college course, this is where the instructor provides focus to the students as to what they will be studying all semester long. What is geology, educational philosophy, Christology, etc.? Here I provide a definition of intimacy with God as *the movement of God and Christians toward a place of true knowledge and close contact*. Imbedded in this definition are

13. Fischetto, *Transformed: Intimacy with God*.

the four key scriptural elements of intimacy with God, which are the yarn that knits the whole intimate sweater together. The sweater metaphor, incidentally, is optional.

Chapter 2 focuses on what theologians call “theological prolegomena,” that is, the preface to doing theology. When Tolkien wrote the preface to the *Lord of the Rings*, he simply stated that it is “largely concerned with hobbits.”¹⁴ J. I. Packer positions his classic work *Knowing God* on His attributes as a book for travelers on a journey, rather than simply for those who watch the journey and ask questions and make observations from a balcony above.¹⁵ With the same intent, I will try to show where intimacy with God fits into the broader concepts of philosophy and theology in order to show where it is, where we are, and where we should go. Therefore, at the outset, we must recognize God as the source of our very existence, consciousness and delights, the indispensable human elements for an intimate relationship with Him. Our very personal expressible and inexpressible knowledge of Him is also a gracious divine gift and responsibility for us. This focuses our study and pursuit upon God’s self-revelation in the Bible, and thus we form our theology primarily from it. That theology reveals our God as the immanent and yet transcendent One who is omnipresent, omniscient, *and* condescending. His nature and attributes will help us assess other examples of approaches to intimacy with God such as those situated within the three camps listed above. We will examine how their presuppositions undergird and thus shape and limit them.

Chapter 3 provides an understanding of the fall of humanity and its effects on intimacy with God. The Bible claims that the human condition is one of brokenness. We are beings fully culpable for cultivating estrangement from God. Without reckoning with the radical effects of the fall of humanity, we may cultivate illegitimate expectations for intimacy with God. We may expect it to be easy, long-lasting, and unassailable, or feel that our movement away from Him is not really our responsibility. Therefore, this chapter develops the backstory of how it was supposed to be and what went wrong. It describes the continuing barriers to intimacy with God in wickedness, spiritual adultery, Satanic opposition, arrogant self-sufficiency, distraction, hiding, and fear.

Chapter 4 seeks to interpret the biblical symbols for God’s communication of intimacy. We will delve into the beautiful arena of the figures of speech, or anthropomorphisms, used by the writers of Scripture to express intimacy

14. J. R. R. Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Random House, 1965), 19.

15. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 11–12.

with God. We will examine the profoundly rich symbols of God's face, ears, hands, voice/mouth, bosom, and how we are to interpret them.

Chapter 5 will interpret the biblical image of God our Father. Too often the church gives congregants a simplistic view of God, which paints Him only as an angry or disappointed judge, and so circumvents a lasting relational intimacy with Him.¹⁶ For those who struggle to approach God because of the shame they suffer from past sins and current temptations, the Bible's teaching on God as a good and intimate Father coupled with recent psychological research provides tremendous insights. In this chapter I demonstrate that those who agonize over feelings of shame need new "cultural scripts" and "life scripts" by which to flourish—new narratives wherein a healthier view of God, self, and community might emerge. The starting point is a proper biblical script of God as our Father, a vision of Him that resists one-dimensional notions of divine anger and disappointment. A more robust and grace-filled concept of God the intimate Father, in other words, provides relief to the sufferers of unhealthy shame.

Chapter 6 interprets Christ and the marriage images. This is one of the most profound images of intimacy with God in the Bible with Christ and His people as husband and wife and bride and bridegroom. However, the church has struggled interpreting these metaphors and how these marital images apply to us today. Do they correspond to contemporary Western ones? Are we to seek some sort of divine romance with Christ? This chapter answers these questions, so that the Christian's conception of and quest for an intimate relationship with God will not only be freed from the burden of misconceptions and perhaps idolatrous errors, but wonderfully enriched.

In Chapter 7 we examine the Holy Spirit's intimate provisions for believers. We see that as the *parakletos* He provides intimate disclosure of the truth of Christ's sustaining presence and indwelling leadership over sin and his life-giving influence. He intimately intercedes for us in our prayers amidst our deep suffering and gives us hope that He will clearly communicate the depth of our longings to the God who holds our destinies.

Chapter 8 is perhaps the most relationally intense one. It grapples with the seemingly uncaring hiddenness of God that appears to be glued to many instances of suffering. This is why we will seek to understand the sufferer's feelings and perspectives toward God in the scriptural data. We will then

16. This has been going on for a while. See David Van Biema, "Behind America's Different Perceptions of God," <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1549413,00.html> (accessed April 25, 2019).

examine how God not only has intimate knowledge of our trying circumstances, but how He provides in Himself the necessary intimate place of security and safety amidst suffering.

The last chapter will put into practice the biblical and theological themes of the book in assessing our songs of intimacy with God. The church has a long history of expressing the theme of intimacy with God with music. First, I will provide a brief survey of some of these songs, while focusing on contemporary Christian songs that communicate the intimate nature of God's movement, presence or place, His knowledge, and His contact or touch. Then I will assess some for biblical and theological accuracy, precision, and clarity. I hope to do this while avoiding being judgmental of the songwriter's motives and emotions.

At this point, I must admit that crafting a theology of intimacy with God is a risky endeavor. I must return to the wise counsel of one of our mentors. Tozer was surely correct in his recognition of the risk of rightness without closeness.

Sound Bible exposition is an imperative *must* in the Church of the Living God. Without it no church can be a New Testament church in any strict meaning of that term. But exposition may be carried on in such a way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience they are not the better for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.¹⁷

Our approach must not merely be a sound exposition of the biblical theme of intimacy with God. Our knowledge must be intimate and move us toward Him to an intimate place of close contact with Him.

So how should we come to this? Another one of our mentors, Jonathan Edwards, calls us to the way of affections.

I am bold to assert that no change of religious nature will ever take place unless the affections are moved. Without this, no natural man will earnestly seek for his salvation. Without this, there is no wrestling with God in prayer for mercy. No one is humbled and brought to the feet of God unless he has

17. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 9–10.

seen for himself his own unworthiness. No one will ever be induced to fly in refuge to Christ as long as his heart remains unaffected. Likewise, no saint has been weaned out of the cold and lifeless state of mind, or recovered from backsliding, without having his heart affected. In summary, nothing significant ever changed the life of anyone when the heart was not deeply affected.¹⁸

Notice his call not only for feelings from the heart, but also an intimate knowledge and internal desire that move us to God. The unconverted must move by seeking salvation and mercy. Everyone must move to a place before God in humility, must come to a deep knowledge of their own unworthiness, and move as a bird flies from danger, to seek Christ, their place of refuge. We Christians must cease sliding back away from God by redirecting our hearts by the gradual replacement of a “cold and lifeless state of mind.” May this book be a map and guide for this movement of our hearts and minds ever closer to the true and living God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT INTIMACY WITH GOD?

Initial Personal Reflections

1. What do you want out of this study on intimacy with God?
2. What do you think you should want out of it?
3. What does God have to say about what you want?
4. Do you believe He will provide that for you? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What is your responsibility in it?
6. What resources do you need for it?

18. Jonathan Edwards, *Faith beyond Feelings: Discerning the Heart of True Spirituality*, ed. James M. Houston (Colorado Springs: Victor/Cook Communications, 2005), 46.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINING INTIMACY WITH GOD

The old Chinese proverb, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step,” invites us to ask some questions: Why is this person taking this journey in the first place? Who will they meet? Whom or what do they seek? Where they are going? When we as Christians reflect on intimacy with God, we may not know where to step, at least not always, and should admit it is a journey to “God knows where and why.” And yet we should admit we nonetheless have an intuitive desire to move closer to God even if we catch a glimpse of God’s glory far off on the horizon. C. S. Lewis surely knew of this when in *The Horse and His Boy* he described the boy Shasta’s sense that there is something more out there. Reflect on how Lewis recounts how even the established practical authority in Shasta’s life could not explain away his thirst to know and experience a distant voice that called to him:

Shasta was very interested in everything that lay to the north because no one ever went that way and he was never allowed to go there himself. When he was sitting out of doors mending the nets, and all alone, he would often look eagerly to the north. One could see nothing but a grassy slope running up to a level ridge and beyond that the sky with perhaps a few birds in it.

Sometimes if Arsheesh was there Shasta would say, “O my Father, what is there beyond that hill?” And then if the fisherman was in a bad temper he would box Shasta’s ears and tell him to attend to his work. Or if he was in a peaceable

mood he would say, “O my son, do not allow your mind to be distracted by idle questions. For one of the poets has said, ‘Application to business is the root of prosperity, but those who ask questions that do not concern them are steering the ship of folly towards the rock of indigence.’”

Shasta thought that beyond the hill there must be some delightful secret which his father wished to hide from him. In reality, however, the fisherman talked like this because he didn’t know what lay to the north. Neither did he care. He had a very practical mind.¹

Little did Shasta know that his journey would not just lead him to a place, but to a Person . . . “the Voice,” “the Lion.”²

In this chapter we will study a definition of what our compass (i.e., the Bible) reveals of this “delightful secret”—intimacy with God. A crucial first step in our quest for understanding and developing intimacy with God is to establish a definition. In other words, what do we mean by intimacy? What are its synonyms and its opposites? With what is it associated? What tools, besides *Roget’s Thesaurus*,³ can we use to clarify some corollary concepts: close-

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 2–3.

2. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 157–60.

3. “Intimacy,” *Roget’s Thesaurus*, <http://www.roget.org/scripts/qq.php> (accessed July 6, 2017).
 #163 Reproduction: Nn. copulation, copula, coupling, mating, coition, coitus, venery, intercourse, commerce, congress, sexual intercourse, sexual commerce, sexual congress, sexual union, sexual relations, relations, intimacy, connection, carnal knowledge, aphrodisia.
 #533 Secret: Nn. intimacy.
 #888 Friendship: Nn. nearness, thickness, familiarity, intimacy, closeness.
 #892 Sociality: Nn. intimacy, familiarity.
 “Intimate,” <http://www.roget.org/scripts/qq.php> (accessed July 6, 2017).
 #43 Junction: Adj. hand-in-hand, hand-in-glove, intimate.
 #79 Speciality: Adj. personal, private, intimate, esoteric.
 #189 Abode: Adj. comfortable, friendly, cheerful, peaceful, cozy, snug, intimate.
 #197 Nearness: Adj. near, nigh, close, intimate.
 #199 Contiguity: Adj. near, nigh, close, intimate.
 #221 Interiority: Adj. innermost, inmost, intimate.
 #225 Clothing: Nn. shirt, shirtwaist, intimate, sark, shift, waist.
 #526 Latency, Implication: Vb. hint, intimate.
 #527 Information: Vb. hint, intimate, suggest, insinuate, imply, indicate, signify.
 #531 Publication: Vb. notify, intimate, give notice.
 #533 Secret: Adj. intimate, inmost, innermost, inner, interior, inward.
 #888 Friendship: Adj. on familiar terms, on intimate terms, familiar, intimate, close, near.
 #890 Friend: Nn. intimate, familiar, close friend, intimate friend, familiar friend.
 #892 Sociality: Adj. intimate, familiar, cozy, cosy, chatty.

ness, nearness, familiarity, connection, etc.? How does the Bible frame what we should be examining as we formulate a biblical and systematic theology of it?

At the outset, we might observe the obvious: intimacy is a relational concept. Relationships in general have certain elements or characteristics. Intimacy stresses a certain quality of relationships themselves. Therefore, one careful step we will be taking is to investigate how psychology and relational science provide clarification as to what intimacy is and is not. This will help us to identify its synonyms and antonyms. Otherwise, if we simply look in a concordance (and doing theology is definitely more than this, but not less) to find the term “intimacy” related to God in the Bible, we would have little if any data with which to work.⁴ Once we have a basic idea of concepts associated with intimacy, however, we can examine, compare, and contrast them with the biblical data. To put it another way, the term “intimacy” does not occur in most translations of the Bible. That does not mean we should proclaim intimacy with God a nonstarter, an illegitimate concept foisted upon Him and the Bible. If that were the case, then we would have no justification for studying biblical concepts like the Trinity or inerrancy, clearly terms chosen to summarize a large amount of scriptural data in a coherent manner. So let me announce up front that the biblical patterns associated with intimacy with God form the following working biblical definition: *the movement of God and Christians toward a good place of true knowledge and close contact*. This will be the hub from which the spokes of the rest of our study will emerge.

WANTING INTIMACY

If this definition is to be valid and helpful, we must grapple with what people want out of intimacy. Dr. Phil, on his television show, will often listen to two sides of an argument and then ask one of the family members involved, “What do you want?” He tries to get them to state the heart of the matter from their perspective. We should be asking what God wants out of our relational intimacy, and only then can we understand what we should want. As with our definition above, we should be saying something like the following: “I

4. In the New American Standard translation, “intimate” with reference to God is used in the entire Bible twice (Ps. 139:3; Prov. 3:32), only once in the New International Version (Job 29:4), and not at all in the King James Version, New King James, the English Standard Version, and the Christian Standard Bible. It is interesting to note these translations only use “intimate” for sexual relations (except for the KJV, which doesn’t use it at all; and the ESV, which uses it twice and only for close friends).

want God to move toward me and I want to move toward Him, so that in full disclosure we can meet in a good place of close contact.”

However, what do we actually mean by intimacy? We often rely on what we know and experience, and so we connect intimacy to our family relationships. Often it is minimized to or substituted entirely with romance and sexual intimacy (we will address this more in Chapter 6). Yet it is broader than the category to which we assign it today. That is why the Bible uses a significant range of images and metaphors for intimacy with God. However, the common denominator concerning intimacy is that it is a relational concept of a certain quality.

Psychological and sociological studies of relationships describe intimacy as a close bond or attachment.⁵ This actually seems to have become intimacy’s common cultural designation, including even bonding with our animals.⁶ Parsing this a bit, notice the overlap with and yet differences from our working definition. For example, closeness logically speaks of a place or location of intimacy and is tied to being near. Thus we can say, “We experience closeness,” and “They are near and dear to my heart.”⁷ Closeness is also a movement within the relationship.⁸ Since closeness is a directional goal, it requires

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5. Debra J. Mashek and Arthur Aron, eds., *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004); Harry T. Reis and Caryl E. Rusbult, eds., *Close Relationships: Key Readings in Social Psychology* (New York: Psychology Press, 2004); Stanley O. Gaines, Jr., *Personality and Close Relationship Processes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jeffrey A. Simpson and Lorne Campbell, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Close Relationships*, Oxford Library of Psychology, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
 6. Penelope Smith, *When Animals Speak: Techniques for Bonding with Animal Companions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009); Victoria Schade, *Bonding with Your Dog: A Trainer’s Secrets for Building a Better Relationship* (Hoboken, NJ: Howell/Wiley, 2009); Bonnie Ebsen Jackson, *From Herdmates to Heartmates: The Art of Bonding with a New Horse* (Bradenton, FL: Booklocker.com, 2015); etc.
 7. An intimate location in American culture is associated with a wedding venue, a place just the right size to accomplish the union of two people in holy matrimony. An NFL stadium does not have an intimate feel for most, because the intimate connection between the two would be lost in the magnitude of the location. Intimate concerts allow the audience actually to be or at least feel like they are participants, that they have some connection with the artist. Intimate restaurants capture the need for quiet privacy to allow for personal communication in the dining experience.
 8. Henri Nouwen argues for closeness as movement from his spiritual-psychological perspective: “This ‘first and final’ movement is so central to our spiritual life that it is very hard to come in touch with it, to get a grasp on it, to get hold of it, or even—to put a finger on it. Not because this movement is vague or unreal, but because it is so close that it hardly allows the distance needed for articulation and understanding. Maybe this is the reason why the most profound realities of life are the easiest victims of trivialization.” Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Image/Doubleday, 1986), 114.

our movement, prompted by vulnerability and trust, to achieve it.⁹ It is not static, but grows and deepens. So we say, “We are growing closer . . . more intimate.” The opposite of this movement toward closeness is a sense of abandonment and aloneness.¹⁰ Therefore, intimacy or closeness is a movie depicting a long-term relationship, as well as momentary selfie with both people in it. Research attempts to help us assess how far we are in our “relational intimacy satisfaction.” This is the difference between our idealized intimacy (how I wish things could be) and our realized intimacy (how things are now).¹¹ This cultural description does tell us that it is important to assess the level of closeness we have with God, and this satisfaction survey approach can help us ask important questions and see patterns in our thoughts and feelings. However, as we will see in a theology of intimacy with God, this approach fails to have an ultimate or objective standard for true intimacy. God must be the One we turn to for the essential elements of closeness with Him and with others.

Furthermore, bonding, like closeness, is also a journey and a destination.¹² Yet studies show it is more than simply a close connection with someone, but an attachment.¹³ A popular perspective is that bonding is mainly emotional. While the affective bond between people is very strong, bonding includes the mental, intellectual, and spiritual. So we can say, “Our hearts are bound together,” “We are kindred spirits,” “We are so close, we think alike,” and “We finish each other’s sentences.” This means that intimate knowledge as a result of observation and self-disclosure is essential for this bonding, and communicating personal feelings and information is the best way to achieve this knowledge.¹⁴ Thus we can

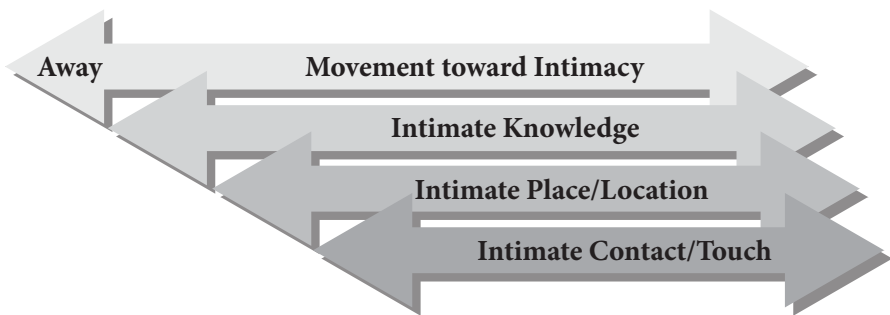
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9. Jonathan S. Gore, Susan E. Cross, and Michael L. Morris, “Let’s Be Friends: Relational Self-construal and the Development of Intimacy,” *Personal Relationships* 13 (2006): 83–102.
 10. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.
 11. Lauren M. Walker, Amy Hampton, and John W. Robinson, “Assessment of Relational Intimacy: Factor Analysis of the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships Questionnaire,” *Psycho-Oncology* 23, no. 3 (2014): 346–49 (348). For them, the two main features of intimacy are: engagement—the degree to which one feels connected to another, and communication—the degree to which one experiences understanding from one’s partner and the ability to freely express one’s emotions and beliefs to another through an open and fluent exchange of ideas.
 12. Cindy Hazan and Mary I. Campa, eds., *Human Bonding: The Science of Affectional Ties*, 1st ed. (New York: Guilford, 2013).
 13. For a helpful overview of attachment theory, see David Wilkins, David Shemmings, and Yvonne Shemmings, *A-Z of Attachment*, Professional Keywords Series (New York/London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
 14. H. T. Reis and P. Shaver, “Intimacy as an Interpersonal Process,” in *Handbook of Personal Relationships*, ed. S. W. Duck (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1988), 367–89; H. T. Reis and B. C. Patrick, “Attachment and Intimacy: Component Processes,” in *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*, eds. E. T. Higgins and A. W. Kruglanski (New York: Guilford, 1996), 523–63.

say, “They truly know me,” “They know me best,” or “I know them intimately” and “Our interaction is on an intimate level” or “We share intimate things.” As a result, a bond or identity is formed and thus we can say, “We possess an intimate relationship,” “I am their intimate . . .,” or “We have an inseparable bond.” Therefore, in some psychological sense, intimacy with God is the believer’s bonding with or attachment to the Triune God through growing close interaction.

The important part about intimacy with God is that its essence is intricately tied to what we want: results. In other words, how can we say we have intimacy with God without enjoying its benefits? If the essence of intimacy is relational bonding or attachment, then it makes sense that the research on attachment has recognized that the primary concerns in bonding relationships between children and adults are care and protection.¹⁵ Thus, intimacy provides what we all really desire: security, safety, acceptance, belonging, identity, loyalty, love, and support.

FOUR BIBLICAL ELEMENTS OF INTIMACY WITH GOD

So let’s return to our working biblical definition of intimacy with God as *the movement of God and Christians toward a good place of true knowledge and close contact*. This is basically the result of asking how, where, and what. The Bible answers how we may obtain intimacy or closeness with God by showing the need for movement to a location or place where this intimacy occurs. The most common elements associated with this intimacy are intimate knowledge or understanding and contact or touch. It is best now to take a tour of the orchard of the Bible and point out some of the dense, rich, ripe clusters of these fruitful themes.



15. Wilkins, Shemmings, and Shemmings, *A-Z of Attachment*, viii.

Movement toward Intimacy

The Bible describes the basic element of intimacy with God as a movement of God and the believer towards one another. As we will see, movement within this relational dynamic is in the advancement or the changing of location of God and/or a human's consciousness or attitude. In other words, it is an attempt to encounter—or avoid—an exchange between these two parties. Both sides move, but not necessarily at the same time, at the same rate, and even in the same direction. In the Bible we observe this movement in God's initiation of it and also through a variety of human activities. Let's examine a couple of substantial scriptural themes as examples, to give some substance to this first element.

One common movement to or away from divine intimacy is *seeking*. Most of the data on this concerns the human seeking after God. Nevertheless, God initiates moving toward the lost by seeking them out. In restoring Israel, the Lord promises to “search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day” (Ezek. 34:11–12). He then declares, “I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick” (Ezek. 34:16). Jesus Christ fulfilled this because His very mission on earth has been to “seek and to save that which was lost” (*zēteō*, Luke 19:10). Furthermore, the Father rejoices over the lost being found (Luke 15:1–32; cf. Matt. 18:12).

We also witness this seeking movement in a variety of human activities. It is searching God out or striving after Him in trust and worship (*baqash* and *darash*). It is seeking an audience with God in order to place our innermost feelings and needs before Him. Eliphaz claims, “But as for me, I would seek God, and I would place my cause before God” (Job 5:8; cf. 8:5; Pss. 9:10; 10:4; 34:4; 69:32–33; 105:4; Dan. 9:3, 4). When David brought the ark to Jerusalem, he called the people to “let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually” (1 Chron. 16:10–11). Even though seeking other gods would cause Israel to be banished (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 4:25–28), God promises, “But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul” (Deut. 4:29; cf. Isa. 55:6; 65:1, 10; Hos. 3:5; 5:15). This seeking heart is the gold standard for the kings of Israel's history (1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 12:14; 15:2; 19:3; 20:3; 26:5; 34:3) and the prerequisite in order for God's people to be forgiven and their land healed (2 Chron. 7:14; 20:4; 30:19; Ezra 4:2; 6:21; 8:21–22; Hos. 5:14; Zeph. 2:3; Mal. 3:2). The seeker does not escape the notice of God. David claims, “The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the

sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God” (Ps. 14:2). Tragically, the fool does not have the trait of being this kind of seeker (Ps. 14:1–3; Rom. 3:11). Many seek with wrong motives in order merely to have their physical needs met or their curiosity satisfied (*zēteō*, John 6:26; 7:35; 8:21). However, Christ’s disciples followed Him because of who He is (John 1:38). James witnessed the seeking and turning of Gentiles toward God (Acts 15:17 of Amos 9:12). Paul appealed to the general revelation in creation that causes Gentiles to seek God, even to “grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). This search is the manifestation of the faith of those who come to God believing “that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Another common movement to or away from intimacy with God is that of *turning*. God also initiates movement toward His people by turning to us. In the midst of trial the believing heart’s great desire is that God would turn to face us with His presence and blessing. David implores the Lord in Psalm 25:16 to “turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.” Notice for him what the movement of God is associated with when He turns to us in Psalm 69:16–18:

Answer me, O LORD, for Your lovingkindness is good; according to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me, and do not hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in distress; answer me quickly. Oh draw near to my soul and redeem it; ransom me because of my enemies! (cf. also 86:16; 119:132)

The Lord blesses the obedience of His people in His turning toward them (Lev. 26:9). He has even made an everlasting covenant with them to “not turn away from them, to do them good” (Jer. 32:40; cf. Ezek. 36:9).

Our movement toward nearness to God also requires our turning to Him. It is not only a conscious choice to position ourselves in His direction, but also to follow Him. This is not just turning to follow His rules, but follow closely where He personally leads us. We are to trust His desires for our lives. In Israel’s history, the Lord made this clear. Their hearts turned aside (*pana*) from the Lord (Deut. 29:18; 30:10; cf. Jer. 17:5; Ezek. 6:9), and because this vacuum would be filled, He had to warn them against turning aside to idols, mediums or spiritists (Lev. 19:4, 31). If they did, He would set His face against them (Lev. 20:6; Deut. 7:4; 11:16, 28; 23:14; Ezek. 7:22). It makes sense that He viewed this as spurning Him (Deut. 31:20) and hostility toward Him (Lev. 26:23), which would cause Him to abandon them in the wilderness (Num. 32:15) and hide His face from

them (Deut. 31:18). It is sad that they would do this so “quickly” after His saving them (Deut. 9:12, 16; cf. Acts 7:41–42), which would be the theme of the period of the Judges (Josh. 24:20; Judg. 2:17). At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon prayed that when Israel sinned she would turn to the Lord for forgiveness and restoration (1 Kings 8:33, 35). Again, it is a tragedy that Solomon’s many wives turned his heart toward other gods so that was no longer wholly devoted to the Lord (1 Kings 11:2–4, 9). This pattern continued with all the people of Israel (2 Chron. 29:6; Isa. 9:13; Jer. 2:27; 50:6; Hos. 3:1; 7:14; 11:7; Zeph. 1:6) unless the Lord turned their hearts back to Him (1 Kings 18:37–39; 2 Chron. 15:4; Jer. 31:19; 32:40) or certain kings like Josiah remained faithful and encouraged faithfulness (2 Kings 22:2; 23:25; 2 Chron. 30:9; Isa. 45:22).

Nevertheless, the power of the Holy Spirit through the gospel causes people to turn to God from sin (*epistrephō*). Luke recounts this at various points in the book of Acts when those in Lydda and Sharon (9:35) and Antioch (11:21), as well as the Gentiles of Paul’s ministry (15:19), turned to the Lord. This also occurred in Corinth (2 Cor. 3:16), Galatia (Gal. 4:9), and Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:9). The early missionaries summoned everyone to turn away from sin and idolatry and toward God (Acts 14:15; 26:20) according to the Lord Jesus’s instructions (Acts 26:18).

A final example of a common movement to or away from intimacy with God is that of *coming*. We can celebrate that our God is one who comes to His people and wants us to come to Him. The foundational instance of “coming” in the Old Testament is when the Lord came down near to Moses in a thick cloud (*bo’ yarad*, Exod. 19:9, 11) and allowed him to come up Mount Sinai (*alah*, Exod. 24:12; 34:2). The Lord only usually allowed people to come to the foot of Mount Sinai (*nagash*, 19:13, 22, 23; *alah*, 24:1–2; 34:3) to meet Him (19:17), to test their fear of Him (Exod. 20:20), and to bless them (Exod. 20:24).

God’s people are to come near to Him in sacred ways. He established the holy pattern for this in the tabernacle and temple (*qarab*, Lev. 10:3). People presented certain cleansing offerings when they came “before the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting” (*bo’ paniym*, Lev. 15:14; cf. also 21:21, 23). The Lord even met certain people there (Num. 12:4–5).¹⁶ David connects coming before the Lord with bringing Him an offering, glorifying His name and worshiping Him (1 Chron. 16:29; cf. also Pss. 66:13; 96:8). The psalmist calls all of God’s people to “come before His presence with thanksgiving” and

16. Balaam expected the Lord to come and meet him when he presented his burnt offerings (Num. 23:1–4).

“Come . . . worship and bow down . . . kneel before the LORD our maker” (Ps. 95:2, 6). This would be true of those coming to the baby Jesus Christ (Matt. 2:2). It is tragic that His people would come to Him with impure motives and deeds (Jer. 7:10; 26:1–6; Ezek. 20:3; 44:13; Mic. 6:6–8; Matt. 2:8). However, David assumes that one day all nations will “come and worship” before Him (Ps. 86:9; cf. Isa. 2:3–6; 66:18; Jer. 16:19; Mic. 4:1–2; Zech. 8:22). The Lord calls upon those who trust him to come and follow him (Matt. 19:21; Mark 10:21; John 1:39, 46) to the point of taking up their own cross (Matt. 16:24). He even called Peter to come to Him in trust by walking on water (Matt. 14:28) and the Samaritan woman to come with her “husband” (John 4:16).

Often God’s people come close to Him because of their needs. David puts this principle simply: “O You who hear prayer, to You all men (*basar* or flesh) come” (Ps. 65:2). The Lord came down (*yarad*) to deliver His people from the Egyptians because their cry came to Him (*bo’*, Exod. 3:8–9). Boaz blessed Ruth by saying, “May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge” (*bo’*, Ruth 2:12). It was self-evident to Job that the suffering could argue their case before God, but that “a godless man may not come before His presence” (Job 13:16). Amidst his groaning, he exclaimed, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat!” (Job 23:3). The psalmist insatiably longs for God and His deliverance: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:2). Asaph asks the Lord to “let the groaning of the prisoner come before You” (Ps. 79:11). Therefore, the psalmist pleads with the Lord, “Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry!” (Ps. 88:2; cf. 102:1; 119:169, 170; 144:5; Jer. 36:7). David boldly asks the Lord, “When will You come to me?” (Ps. 101:2). Later, the Lord assured those far off in exile about His plans: “Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you” (Jer. 29:12; cf. 50:5; Hos. 3:5). Similarly, some came to Jesus and implored Him to come to meet the need of another person close to them: Jairus for his daughter (Mark 5:22–23) and the nobleman for his son (John 4:46–49). The centurion came to Jesus for his paralyzed servant, though he knew Jesus didn’t need to come but could simply heal him from a distance (Matt. 8:5–9; Luke 7:1–10). Jesus’s expressed desire has been for people to come to Him to have their needs met by letting children come close to Him (Mark 10:14), and by coming to drink of the Spirit (John 7:37–39), to have life (John 5:40; 11:47), and to find rest for their souls (Matt. 11:28–29).

The coming of God is a grand expectation among the people of the Bible. Asaph implores God to “come and save us!” (Ps. 80:2). Therefore, David called

for Zion to be ready to receive the King of glory when He comes in triumph into the holy city (Ps. 24:7; cf. Isa. 59:19–20; Zech. 14:4–5). Like many who expected His powerful delivering presence, Asaph exclaims, “May our God come and not keep silence; fire devours before Him, and it is very tempestuous around Him” (Ps. 50:3; Isa. 66:15; Mic. 1:3–4; Mal. 3:1–3). When the Lord does come, His compassion (Pss. 79:8; 119:77) and lovingkindness (Ps. 119:41) are assumed to be present as well. In Psalm 121:1–2, a psalm of ascent sung while heading up the paths toward Jerusalem, the psalmist asks, “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come?” The expectation of the Lord’s coming deliverance is apparent in the next line: “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Jesus Christ is the glorious fulfillment of this grand expectation. He came out of Bethlehem to be “a Ruler Who will shepherd” God’s people (*exerchomai*, Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:6). Furthermore, He has promised not to leave His followers as orphans (John 14:18) and has sent the Holy Spirit to call upon His followers to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). He also stands and knocks at the door of self-sufficient lukewarm churches, and out of love promises to the repentant to “come in to him and dine with him and He with Me” (Rev. 3:20). However, at the event of His return to earth, everyone will see His “coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (*erchomai*, Matt. 24:30). He will come again to gather His followers to Himself and to the place He has prepared for them to take up residence with Him (John 14:3, 23). And so we who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ’s promise that He will come quickly, echo the words of the Apostle John, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20; cf. 1 Cor. 16:22).

Intimate Knowledge

A second biblical element of intimacy with God is intimate knowledge. God does not merely know information, but has understanding, awareness, and familiarity with us. He has deeply personal knowledge of us that we can keep secret or private from everyone else but Him. Thus He has a thorough and detailed knowledge of our lives, that is, our experiences, conduct, and behavior, as well as our inner workings, thoughts, ambitions, motivations, desires, etc.¹⁷ At the same time, we can have an element of intimate knowledge

17. God’s movement and His intimate knowledge are connected. One example is in the use of term *paqad*. It is variously translated as when He visits, numbers, cares for, has concern for, takes note of, etc. We can see the common idea of God being on the move, visiting His people to take careful note of their situation and concerns. In Genesis 21:1, the Lord “took note of Sarah,” and in Exodus 4:31 was “concerned about the sons of Israel.” Job expressed his impression of God’s constant visitation and careful notation questioning Him in Job 7:18–19: “You *examine* him every morning and try him every moment? Will you never

of God. We will discuss in more detail the important issue of our epistemology of intimacy with God as well as how it fits theologically in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, let me give some biblical examples of intimate knowledge.

We should join the people of the Bible in being convinced that God knows our intimate and personal thoughts and motives. He clearly knows every human heart. When dedicating the temple, Solomon implored the Lord to “forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men” (*yadah*, 1 Kings 8:39; 2 Chron. 6:30).¹⁸ When choosing the disciple to replace Judas, the apostles prayed, “You, Lord, who know the hearts (*kardiognostēs*) of all men, show which of these two You have chosen” (Acts 1:24).¹⁹ Nathaniel was shocked at Jesus’s knowledge of his sarcastic reaction to the news about Him being the Messiah before they even met (John 1:48).²⁰ Christ personally addresses each letter to the Seven Churches with “I know . . . (your deeds . . . your tribulation . . . where you dwell . . . etc.)” (Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15) and then gives them specific instructions like “do not fear” (2:10), “repent” (2:16), “hold fast (to what you have)” (2:25), etc. He can do this simply because He discerns the thoughts and motives of the churches and responds to each accordingly. Therefore, He admonishes Thyatira, the fourth and center of the list of churches, with the words, “And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds” (Rev. 2:23).

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- turn your gave away from me, nor let me alone until I swallow my spittle?” Jeremiah could trust the Lord’s careful investigation of his trial when He said, “You know, O LORD, Remember me, *take notice of me*, and take vengeance for me” (Jer. 15:15, emphasis added).
18. It is foolish to refuse to acknowledge and trust in God’s intimate knowledge of everyone. Psalm 73:11 recounts the arrogantly wicked as saying, “They say, ‘How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?’” Proverbs 24:12 reminds the fool that “If you say, ‘See, we did not know this; Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul?’” Furthermore, God’s intimate knowledge of everyone includes the seemingly untouchable, the foreign king. In Genesis 20:6, God said to Abimelech in a dream, “Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this.” In Exodus 3:19 the Lord told Moses, “But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion (*yad*, hand).” In 2 Kings 19:27, the Lord told Sennacherib, “But I know your sitting down, and your going out and your coming in, and your raging against Me” (cf. Isa. 37:28).
 19. The apparent conviction behind their prayer is reminiscent of the reciprocal intimate knowledge they have with Jesus Christ, when He said, “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me” (John 10:14) and “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).
 20. “Nathaniel said to Him, ‘How do You know (*ginōskō*) me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under a fig tree, I saw you’” (John 1:48).

We should also recognize that God's intimate knowledge is capsulized when men pleaded with God concerning their integrity. Jeremiah simply claimed, "But You know (*yadah*) me, O LORD; You see me; And You examine my heart's attitude toward You" (Jer. 12:3; cf. 17:16).²¹ David also said, "O LORD, You know," referring to the integrity his heart (Ps. 40:9–10; cf. 2 Sam. 7:20). He could say this because he knew the Lord desired "truth in the innermost being (*tuchah*, or kidneys), and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom" (Ps. 51:6). He trusted that God knew his troubled feelings when he said, "You know my reproach and my shame and my dishonor; All my adversaries are before You" (Ps. 69:19). When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times, he responded, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love you" (John 21:15, 16) and finally, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17).

In Psalm 139:1–4, David provides us with a comprehensive view of God's intimate knowledge. White is probably correct when he says, "This psalm represents the peak of the Psalter, the maturest individual faith in the Old Testament, and the clearest anticipation of the New."²² Immediately note how David uses a series of synonyms to describe the fullness of God's intimate knowledge:

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up.
 You understand my thought from afar.
³You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
 And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
 Even before there is a word on my tongue,
 Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

He acknowledges that the Lord "searches" us (from *chaqar* used for what spies do), in that He penetrates into and explores essential secrets of our hearts (Pss. 44:21; 139:23). His knowledge of us is comprehensive and includes our daily activities ("sit down," "rise up"). He perceives and considers (*bin*) our inner thoughts, purposes, and intentions. He does this "from afar," from the transcendent perspective of His dwelling place (139:2b; cf. Ps. 138:6), "contradicting the delusion (Job 22:12–14) that God's dwelling in heaven prevents

21. Job's frustration was in God's clear knowledge of His integrity, but "According to Your knowledge I am indeed not guilty, yet there is no deliverance" (Job 10:7).

22. R. E. O. White, "Psalms," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 3396.

Him from observing mundane things.”²³ He “scrutinizes” (*zarah*, that is, winnows or sifts like grain) our life’s journey and days’ endings. Furthermore, like a nurse He is “intimately acquainted” (*sakan*) with all our ways and whole lifestyle.²⁴ David wraps up this section with the fact that the Lord even knows our thoughts before we verbalize them. How he closes the psalm should not surprise us:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
 Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
 And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
 And lead me in the everlasting way. (vv. 23–24)

Thus, as a tremendous example for future generations, David opens himself up completely for the Lord to transform and redeem his innermost self (cf. Ps. 26:2).

May we have a thirst for intimate knowledge of God. May we have Moses’s desire for knowledge when he prayed, “Now, therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight” (Exod. 33:13). May we have David’s desire: “Make me know Your ways, O LORD, teach me Your paths” (Ps. 25:4). We can seek this because God’s knowledge of Himself is a gift. He invites worshipful believers into His secret counsel and knowledge of Him (Ps. 25:14; Prov. 3:32; John 7:17; 17:25–26). He has promised through the new covenant, “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart” (Jer. 24:7 cf. also Isa. 52:6). And again, “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3). Thus we should heed Hosea’s call to Israel, “So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going forth is . . . certain. . . . And He will come to us like the rain” (Hos. 6:3). As Christ’s sheep we are given the ability to know His voice (John 10:4; cf. Acts 22:14). Our pursuit will not be in vain, because knowing the Son of God means eternal life (John 17:3). It is not in vain because the Holy Spirit powerfully mediates this deep personal knowledge when we pray (Rom. 8:26–27). And Daniel claimed that if we know our God, then we “will display strength and take action” (Dan. 11:32).

23. John Peter Lange, et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Psalms* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 647.

24. J. A. Motyer, “The Psalms,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, eds. D. A. Carson, et al., 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 578.

Thus from what we have seen so far, J. I. Packer is right that knowing God is a matter of personal dealing and involvement, not just of theology and facts. He states:

Knowing God . . . is a matter of dealing with Him as He opens up to you, and being dealt with by Him as He takes knowledge of you. Knowing about Him is a necessary precondition of trusting Him . . . but the width of our knowledge about Him is no gauge of our knowledge of Him.²⁵

He adds an important note, stressing that we must do this with our whole being: “We must not lose sight of the fact that knowing God is an emotional relationship as well as an intellectual and volitional one, and could not indeed be a deep relation between persons were it not so.”²⁶ Again, we must know enough about God to trust Him, and know Him deeply enough to hold nothing back from Him and for Him.

Intimate Place/Location

A third vital image of intimacy with God is the place or location where God meets with or connects with His people. There is truth in the old adage “Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” but it is also true that “Absence makes the heart go yonder.” Intimacy with God cannot survive and grow without a sense of God’s actual presence with His people in the here and now. Location of this intimacy is associated with His nearness in a relational and spatial sense. It also overlaps with His movement toward us in relationship to time or how quick He is to respond to our cries for help. Moses proclaimed, “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him?” (Deut. 4:7; cf. Ps. 148:14). Thus His intimate nearness is a tremendous source of hope and comfort, as Psalm 34:18 clearly demonstrates: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” This source is likened to a place of refuge and salvation, and so the psalmist Asaph declares, “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works” (73:28; cf. Ps. 85:9). Therefore, as His people we are enjoined to move toward God’s intimately safe place because He is never far off.²⁷ Listen to Isaiah’s words: “Seek

25. Packer, *Knowing God*, 39.

26. *Ibid.*, 40.

27. Because God’s location is always intimately near, the opposite that He is never far way is also true. The Lord Himself sums this up in Jeremiah 23:23: “Am I a God who is near,” declares the

the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6). May the place where God is near be our constant delight as in Isaiah 58:2: “Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God.”

Tozer grapples with this concept and is right not to limit God to one place:

Our pursuit of God is successful just because He is forever seeking to manifest Himself to us. The revelation of God to any man is not God coming from a distance upon a time to pay a brief and momentous visit to the man’s soul. Thus to think of it is to misunderstand it all. The approach of God to the soul or of the soul to God is not to be thought of in spatial terms at all. There is no idea of physical distance involved in the concept. It is not a matter of miles but of experience.

To speak of being near to or far from God is to use language in a sense always understood when applied to our ordinary human relationships. A man may say, “I feel that my son is coming nearer to me as he gets older,” and yet that son has lived by his father’s side since he was born and he has never been away from home more than a day or so in his entire life. What then can the father mean? Obviously he is speaking of experience. He means that the boy is coming to know him more intimately and with deeper understanding, that the barriers of thought and feeling between the two are disappearing, that the father and son are becoming more closely united in mind and heart.²⁸

He overstates his point by limiting God’s nearness only to an experience of relational distance without accenting how He seems to “move” the “location” of His presence. Even if the biblical writers were only speaking metaphorically about God being near, they still experienced relational distance during their trials and/or their sinful rebellion. They longed for God to be “spatially” close to them right where they were. Thus Tozer is correct when he claims, “We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts.”²⁹

Lord, ‘And not a God far off?’” God’s distance from the biblical writers was in space and time. David beseeches the Lord in Psalm 22:11, “Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help” and again in 22:19, “But You, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance” (cf. Pss. 35:22; 38:21; 71:12; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 46:13). Thus, to lack intimacy with God is have a heart that is far from Him (Matt. 15:8; Mark 7:6; Luke 16:23; Acts 17:27; Eph. 2:13, 17).

28. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 65–66.

29. *Ibid.*, 66.

The Bible is clear that God's location is "with" us. When God is "with" someone, His powerful gracious presence is with them in order to watch over them and bless them. God was with "the son of Hagar" (Gen. 21:20), Abraham (Gen. 21:22), Isaac (Gen. 26:24), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Joseph (Gen. 39:2, 21), Moses (Exod. 3:12), etc. However, "with" is also used when God is with certain people in an intimate way. On Mount Sinai, the Lord descended in a cloud and met with Moses, "and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD" (Exod. 34:5). David claims that he will not fear death and evil "for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4). Psalm 46 connects God being with His people to His being a stronghold and place of refuge. It underscores this as it repeats, "The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold" (Ps. 46:7, 11). God rewards the one who loves Him and knows His name with the promise of His presence: "He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him" (Ps. 91:15). David recognized God's continual thoughtful presence when he said, "When I awake, I am still with You" (Ps. 139:18). When God's people struggled with trusting in kings and political alliances to deliver them, He promised, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10; cf. 42:3, 5).

God's presence with His people isn't only stationary, however. The Bible profoundly describes walking with God, a theme emphasizing the closeness of God's location as we move with Him through this life. It is striking that Adam and Eve customarily walked with their Creator in the garden in the cool wind of the day (Gen. 3:8). Amidst the depressing repetition of "and So-and-so became the father of So-and-so . . . and he died" in the genealogy of Genesis 5, we find the interruption of "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:22, 24). Then after the description of the Lord's grief over the legacy of human rebellion, Moses inserts the first *toledot* of Genesis, "These are the records of the generations of Noah," and describes Noah as one who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). Thus the standard of true biblical religion is "to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8), and heaven will consist of "walking with" the Lord Jesus "in white" (Rev. 3:4). Thus, God's people are not only to walk in God's "ways" or "laws" (Deut. 5:33; 10:12; Josh. 22:5; Neh. 10:29; Jer. 7:23; Luke 1:6; 1 Cor. 7:17; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 John 1:6), but to walk "before" or in light of the place of His presence (1 Kings 8:23, 25; 2 Kings 10:31; 2 Chron. 6:14, 16; see also 2 Cor. 6:16).

A final example of themes of divine location or place is God's dwelling among His people.³⁰ Initially, the holy of holies containing the ark of the covenant was the place where God would meet with the high priest (Exod. 25:22) and meet with His people at the tabernacle (Exod. 29:43). The people were to view the ensuing temple as His lovely dwelling place and long to be within its courts (Ps. 84:1). This was because it was the location on earth where God graciously came close to His people. Psalm 65:4 declares, "How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple." However, Jesus Christ is Immanuel or "God with us" (Matt. 1:23; see Isa. 9:6), who "dwelt among us" or "tabernacled among us" (*skēnoō*, John 1:14). As the great high priest of His people, Christ has intimate knowledge of His churches as He walks through them as lampstands (Rev. 1:13). Furthermore, we as the church individually and corporately are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). And yet, there will be an ultimate intimate safe place where there will no longer be a need for a temple structure because all of God's people will dwell with Him in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2–3).

God's intimacy with us is not limited to our quiet times or brief periods of concentration in prayer. John White calls us to remember, "you do not leave God when you go from the quiet place any more than He leaves you. . . . You may leave the room where you pray, but you do not leave the inner sanctuary deep inside your being."³¹ Like Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*,³² God calls us to make our knowledge of His intimate location with and in us a continuous integral part of our lives.

Intimate Contact/Touch

The fourth basic element of intimacy with God is contact or touch, as the Bible suggests. I look forward to exploring this aspect more carefully in chapter 4, which examines the metaphors used to describe God's body parts and how He touches us in some sense. Nevertheless, we see, for example, that God upholds or lifts up His people when they are weak (Ps. 145:14). We see His intimate touch and location when He promises, "Nevertheless I am continu-

30. For a helpful broader and more Reformed study on the biblical theme of God's dwelling, see Greg K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014).

31. John White, *The Fight* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1976), 35.

32. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God the Best Rule of a Holy Life*, Kindle ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.).

ally with You; You have taken hold of my right hand” (Ps. 73:23). Similarly, God makes intimate contact with His people as their shepherd when He carries them in His arms close to His heart (Isa. 40:10–11). Thus we are deeply moved when Jesus describes the Father’s returning with His lost sheep on His shoulders (Luke 15:5) and His embracing and kissing his prodigal son upon his return (Luke 15:20). Christ’s intimate touch was often a means of healing people when He knew their fear and need for compassion (Matt. 8:3, 15; 9:25, 29; 20:24; Mark 1:31; 7:33; Luke 7:14; 22:51).³³ With this in mind, we look forward to when God will, with an intimate touch, wipe away the tears of mourning and pain from the faces of His oppressed but faithful people at the beginning of the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:4).

At this point my hope is for us to revel in the richness of intimacy with God as it is revealed in these four biblical elements. We can now go on to explore them further as they relate to God as our Father, Christ as the Bridegroom, the Holy Spirit, etc. Hopefully, it has become clear as a result of this journey that the elements of intimacy are not isolated from each other but work in concert together. They may not all four be found in the same context, but often two or more are. Movement toward intimacy is often coupled with intimate knowledge of another. Movement can be to an intimate location. These may culminate in intimate contact.

To be fair to the biblical record, we must also be ready to address the opposites of intimacy with God. Avoidance and abandonment, for example, provide a couple of necessary contrasts to the closeness and security of the scriptural reality of intimacy with God. Much of this will be developed in succeeding chapters. Nouwen, like all of us, knows that our existence in this world is often not a connected one:

We probably have wondered in our many lonesome moments if there is one corner in this competitive, demanding world where it is safe to be relaxed, to expose ourselves to someone else, and to give unconditionally. It might be very small and hidden. But if this corner exists, it calls for a search through the complexities of our human relationships in order to find it.³⁴

33. By contrast, this is one reason why the false kiss of intimacy Judas showed Him as he betrayed Him is such a contrast to Jesus’s touch (Luke 22:47–48).

34. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Intimacy: Essays in Pastoral Psychology* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1969), 23.

How much more do we need a place with God like this and how much more effort should we expend to navigate the complexities of our minds, hearts, experiences, and cultures to find it with Him?

Nevertheless, intimacy by nature has elements that are intuitive to us. Gina Cloud, a radio talk-show host, author, and self-help guru, makes this claim:

Real Intimacy isn't the nakedness of the body, but the vulnerability of the heart. This is why we run towards it and also run away from it. Intimacy requires vulnerability and surrender. It demands that we reveal ourselves to each other, naked, exposed, raw, real, honest. It requires that we be willing TO BE SEEN—FULLY.³⁵

She understands the movement to and away from intimacy to a place of intimate knowledge and contact. These intuitive elements are very similar to our intimacy with God and why pursuing intimacy with Him is not optional. Brother Lawrence called it “our profession” and “if we do not know it, we must learn it.”³⁶ But we must know what it truly is and how to find it. Our next chapter will try to lead us further down that path.

NOW WHAT?

1. What do you want concerning intimacy with God?
2. What biblical passages or images would you add as examples of the biblical elements of intimacy with God?
3. How do you think the four biblical elements will help you pursue intimacy with God?
4. Ask God to weave these images into your mind and heart to bring you closer to Him.

35. Gina Cloud, “Are You Longing for and Afraid of Intimacy?,” *GinaCology*, <http://www.ginacology.com/are-you-longing-for-and-afraid-of-intimacy>. Emphasis in original.

36. Brother Lawrence, *Practice of the Presence of God*.