

I'D LIKE YOU  
MORE  
IF YOU WERE  
MORE LIKE ME

GETTING REAL ABOUT GETTING CLOSE



JOHN ORTBERG  
*Bestselling Author*

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JOHN ORTBERG



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*I'd Like You More If You Were More Like Me: Getting Real about Getting Close*

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## Introduction: Table for One?

WHEN I THINK ABOUT LOVE, I think about a table.

I grew up in a Swedish family in Rockford, Illinois, surrounded by other Swedes. We're not the most expressive, demonstrative, or verbal people. Sometimes when I come home at night and my wife, Nancy, asks me, "How was your day?" I tell her, "Sorry, I've used up all my words. I don't have any words left." Nancy cannot understand that because she *never* uses up her words. She is an inexhaustible source of words. She's like the Niagara Falls of words.

One thing Swedes always have, however, is a table. For the people I grew up with, gathering around a table was the primary love language. If someone got hurt, got sick, got married, bought a car, bought a house, had a crisis, had a baby, or died, that's what we'd do. There would always be the rich smell of coffee in the house (not Orange Mocha Frappuccino—just coffee), and we'd gather around the table to talk, laugh, and cry—*together*.

If you think about it, many of the moments that shape our lives are spent around a table. In fact, some of my most vivid childhood memories took place around a glass-topped



rectangular table in a small dining room at 227 Brendenwood Terrace in Rockford, Illinois.

If I close my eyes, I can still see it. That's my dad sitting way down at the end. To his right is my little brother, Barton. I'm the guy in the glasses and braces, and my mom is sitting kitty-corner from me on my right.

I remember one time when we were eating breakfast and my mom was holding a piece of peanut butter toast. It was that critical peanut buttering time when the toast is still warm enough to melt the peanut butter a little, and just as Mom was lifting the toast to her mouth, I reached over and smashed it right in her face. Before you knew it, we were all creaming each other in the face with peanut butter and laughing until we cried.

Good times.

And sometimes not so good times.

A couple of years ago, a friend of mine (who also happens to be Swedish) lost his mom. As soon as I heard—just a few hours after his mom had died—I called him on his cell phone. Turned out his whole family was at a local pancake house sitting around a table drinking coffee. I immediately felt a resonance in my spirit.

*I know that family.*

Throughout the years, there have been other tables, as well.

I remember the first time I sat around a table with Nancy's family. She happened to mention that she had bought a tire from a car dealer, and immediately someone at the table responded, "I would *never* buy tires from a dealership. They charge an arm and a leg. I get 'em at Shell."

"Shell?" someone else said. "You would get a tire at a Shell station? I would never do that. They have terrible tires. You couldn't *give* me one of their tires. I get mine at Goodyear."

"Goodyear?" a third family member chimed in. "Their

service stinks! If you get tires at Discount Tire, you get a free rotation every six thousand miles. Just saying.”

And it went on like that.

Later, I said to Nancy, “What was up with that fight?”

“What fight?”

“That tire fight at the table.”

“That wasn’t a fight,” she said. “That was us helping each other.”

*Really?* At *my* family’s table, in the unlikely event that I ever bought a tire, my mom would say something like, “Oh, Son, you bought a tire. We’re so proud. You know, you raise kids; you try to teach them right from wrong. You never know how things will turn out. And now a moment like this makes it all worthwhile. Let’s take a selfie.”

Different tables have different styles, different rules. For Nancy, “table talk” involves a gritty commitment to reality—being deeply honest about the difficulties of life. No pedestals, no idealizing. Flowery language sets her on edge.

Once we were in a restaurant in Menlo Park, where we live. As we were laughing about something, a woman came up to our table and said, “I go to your church, and it’s so great to see you two enjoying each other. I’ve been watching the way you interact—the way you look at each other when you talk. You must have a wonderful marriage.”

“Sometimes,” Nancy immediately shot back. She wants truth to have a place at the table. And I’ve come to enjoy that. For the most part.

When we were dating, we used to have Sunday dinner at the home of Nancy’s grandmother, Gladys. The whole family would sit around an old mahogany table they had brought out to California from Texas. Sitting around that table made me feel like I was part of the family. Nancy loved that table.

When Nancy and I got engaged, I gave Gladys a dollar so we could get the mahogany table after she died. I even wrote a little deed, claiming the table, and taped it on the underside, so Nancy's greedy cousin wouldn't get it after Gladys was gone. When Gladys died, her table found a new home in our dining room.

When it's only two adults at the table, everything may look quite elegant and stylish; but when you have a baby, the table is a mess. Of course, the easiest way to keep your table tidy is not to let anyone sit there. But sometimes a messy table creates a memory that a tidy table never could. Once, when one of our kids had spilled one too many times and punishment was about to ensue, this particular child pulled out a dollar, set it on the table, and said, "Maybe Mr. Washington can change your mind." Turns out he could.

We had all three of our children in pretty short succession, and I remember what a triumph it was when we had our first meal together where nobody spilled, nobody cried, and nobody spit up. Our youngest was twenty-one by then, but that was still a great day in our family.

One thing about tables, at least in my family, is that we always sit in the same places. My spot is across from Nancy and kitty-corner from our daughter Laura. Even after the kids moved out, whenever they came home they reclaimed their old chairs: Laura on one side, Johnny and Mallory on the other; and now Laura's husband, Zack, next to her. We never voted on this. There's no seating chart. Nobody made assignments. There's just something deep in the human soul that says, "I need to have my place at the table." I know it's true for me: I want to have my chair, and I want everybody in my family to have their chairs. And I kind of like it when their chairs are filled.

To have our own place at the table means we belong. We have an identity. We're somebody's sibling, somebody's parent, somebody's spouse. We're *in*.

For me, a table is a reminder that what *really* matters in life is relationships. We are hardwired for emotional connection to other people. We want to be known. We crave being loved. We want to be accepted by someone who is completely aware of our gifts *and* our flaws and yet wants to be with us anyway. In short, we crave intimacy.

On a little study table in my office, there's a card with a quote from Victor Hugo's epic novel *Les Misérables*:

My coat and I live comfortably together. It has assumed all my wrinkles, does not hurt me anywhere, has molded itself on my deformities, and is complacent to all my movements, and I only feel its presence because it keeps me warm. Old coats are old friends.<sup>1</sup>

On the back of the card, written in pen, are four words: *You are my coat*. It is signed by my wife. That's intimacy.

You may be thinking, *Nancy must be a wonderful person to be married to*.

She is.

Sometimes.

## OUR FEAR OF INTIMACY

Although we crave it, intimacy is a scary concept for a lot of people. When I mentioned I was writing a book about intimacy, some people visibly tensed up. Others blushed. Nancy laughed.

I sometimes wonder why people have such strong reactions. Why do we fear intimacy so much?

For one thing, I think we're afraid of being hurt. Intimacy means being *known* by someone—like Nancy knows *me*, for example. She knows my strengths and weaknesses, my hopes and fears. She can use that knowledge to bond with me and grow closer to me, or she can use it to shame, wound, or betray me.

We also fear intimacy because it can set us up for disappointment. If you and I are not particularly close, I won't be crushed if you let me down because odds are, I didn't expect much from you to begin with. But if I desire closeness with you, if I come to depend on your friendship or need your love, it would wound me to the core to be rejected or abandoned by you. I would feel like a fool for trusting you—like Charlie Brown lying flat on his back after believing, yet again, that Lucy really *will* hold the football this time.

Intimacy can also make us feel needy. Or worse, it can *reveal* our neediness. Generally speaking, we don't like to feel needy. We like to think of ourselves as strong. (Ironically, the choice to pursue intimacy—to reveal our weakness and neediness—actually requires great strength.)

Many of us fear intimacy because deep down, we think we don't deserve it. We're afraid that our deficits and flaws are bound to emerge, and it will hurt even more to *lose* intimacy than never to have had it at all. Anytime we let someone in, we run the risk of being hurt or rejected. So we tend to avoid it.

The irony, of course, is that we deeply desire intimacy. We want to be loved, to be liked, to be celebrated, to have someone who accepts us no matter what. We want to have great friendships. We want to have people to turn to when a crisis hits. We want to have someone trustworthy in whom we can

safely confide our secrets. We not only *want* intimacy, we were made for it.

Whether you are a man or a woman; whether you're the life of the party or a wallflower; whether you're a thinker or a feeler or a category not yet known to social science, you were made for connection. You were made for relationships. You were made for intimacy.

We see it whenever a freshly minted baby enters the world, looks into its mother's eyes, and—by some miracle—latches on to its mother's breast and begins to feed. My wife had never been a “baby person,” but when she held our firstborn, she said with an awestruck voice, “I'd kill for this baby.”

“Don't you mean you'd die for her?” I asked, concerned about her maternal instinct.

“No—that'd be stupid,” she said. “Then I'd be dead and someone else would get her. I'd *kill* for her.”

Intimacy has a fierceness that distance will never know. Inside every one of us is a hunger to be accepted, and it goes deeper than any other hunger.

We see it when two young lovers cannot stop gazing into each other's eyes. We see it when a couple bent with age won't go anywhere without holding each other's arms. We see it when a child comes to us beaming with the knowledge of a secret and wants to whisper it to us. We see it in the Bible when God looks at Adam and declares, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” and proceeds to create a partner who is “just right” for him.<sup>2</sup>

When we experience intimacy, we can take on whatever else life throws at us. Without it, even our greatest accomplishments ring hollow. After all, where's the joy in success if we don't have someone we love with whom to share it? That's why I believe the pursuit of intimacy is the greatest, most worthwhile pursuit there is.

Granted, for most of us, pursuing intimacy is not as simple as adding more fiber to our diets. It's not something we can do without thinking about it. We have to work at it. But it's worth it because deep down, we know that being close to another human being matters like nothing else in the world. And being close to God? That takes things to a whole new level.

But maybe when you think about having an "intimate relationship with God," it feels like one more obligation in an already overwhelmed life. After all, intimacy is tricky enough to pull off with a real, live, flesh-and-blood person. How can we hope to have an intimate relationship with someone we can't even see? A spiritual being, no less.

Well, what if I were to tell you that not only did God create you for intimacy, but he also has been pursuing an intimate relationship with you from the very beginning?

Not long after God decided it was "not good for the man to be alone," we find him walking in the Garden *searching* for Adam and Eve. They were his creation; he enjoyed their company, and he wanted to spend time with them. But they were hiding. Finally, he calls out, "Where are you?"<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, the serpent had convinced Eve to eat from the tree of life, and she had cut Adam in on some of the fruit. Now their relationship with God had changed—the bonds of intimacy were broken. For the first time, they realized they were naked, and they were embarrassed and ashamed. For the first time, they feared being *seen* and *known* by God. So they hid.

Now, here's the interesting part: God *allows* them to hide—because intimacy can't be coerced. God doesn't want compliance; he wants connection. Intimacy respects distance but isn't content with it. Like God in the Garden, intimacy calls out,

“Where are you?” And God, in his desire for intimacy with us, has been asking that same question ever since.

God wants you and me at his table. Jesus says, “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”<sup>4</sup>

John, the dear friend of Jesus, was an old, old man when he recorded those words. He must have remembered a thousand meals he had shared with Jesus. And he used this image of sitting at the table with Jesus to describe an experience that is possible for you and me. When I think of love, when I think of intimacy, I think of a table—just like Jesus did.

It’s a mystery, no question about it, that we’re invited into an intimate relationship with God. But how does that happen? Is it possible that God has been speaking to us all along, and we’ve been hearing without realizing that the whisper comes from him? Is it possible for us to draw closer to God without realizing that it’s happening? I think it is. In fact, I believe God uses our relationships with other people to teach us how to love *him*. The more we pursue intimacy in our other relationships, the more we see and understand God’s incredible, audacious love for us.

But that’s getting ahead of things a little. For now, let’s talk about what I learned about intimacy on my honeymoon.





CHAPTER 1

# ARE YOU WITH ME?

## WHAT INTIMACY IS

*To know and engage with someone intimately is always a crossing of a border, always fraught, even if you've been married fifty years.*

AMY BLOOM

ONCE UPON A TIME, in a suburb far, far away, I thought I was going to be the greatest husband anyone had ever seen.

And then I got married.

Back then, I thought I knew everything there was to know about intimacy, but I had no idea how emotionally immature I was. I believed that intimacy was a feeling of closeness into which I would effortlessly fall as soon as the pastor said, "You may now kiss the bride," and that everything would then be a fantastic, blissful Hollywood musical. The idea that intimacy was something I would actually have to *work at* never occurred to me. As you might expect, that led to a few problems.

When Nancy and I were first dating, she would occasionally say or do something I didn't like. Maybe she would disagree with me too vehemently in front of other people or

say something that struck me as bossy or too opinionated. Ironically, part of what attracted me to her in the first place was the fact that she was a person who loved to talk and had strong opinions. And she's always been that way. At her very first evaluation in kindergarten, her teacher said, "Nancy is adjusting well, but she does have a tendency to chat during nap time." So even though I was drawn to her outgoing and expressive personality, for some reason it also bothered me.

And I didn't handle it very well.

Whenever we had a disagreement, instead of being able to talk to Nancy about it, something inside me froze up, and I pouted. A lot. It was my spiritual gift. In fact, if I were a superhero, pouting would be my superpower. I would just pout the bad guys into a deep sense of guilt and remorse that would make them want to turn themselves in.

Pouting may be a great (though admittedly unconventional) superpower, but it's also an intimacy killer.

On the night of our rehearsal dinner, I was upset with Nancy about something—I don't remember what. But instead of telling her what was bothering me so we could work through it (you know, like two adults), I became politely withdrawn and distant. Of course she noticed, and as a result, what should have been a time of great joy was actually quite painful.

The next day, without ever resolving our differences from the night before, we arrived at the church, got married, and left for our honeymoon.

You always hear about how your honeymoon is going to be perfect, and I—being the perfect husband—had the perfect plan. Nancy was a California girl born and bred. She has always loved the ocean and the warm coastal climate. So naturally, for our honeymoon, I took her to . . . wait for it . . . Wisconsin.

I thought, *This is going to thrill her!*

Yeah. Not so much. Go figure.

Not surprisingly, our honeymoon was an emotional roller coaster. If Nancy said or did something I didn't approve of, instead of talking about it, I brooded and withdrew. One afternoon we were sitting by the pool (it was a beautiful day for pouting), and I was reading a book as a way of distancing myself from my bride. (That's right, I not only brought a book on my honeymoon, but I was reading it out by the pool.) I had waited my entire life for a honeymoon. Ever since puberty, I had *lived* for my honeymoon. And now here I was, at a beautiful Wisconsin resort, and instead of building intimacy with my wife, I was reading a book. And not just any book, but a biography of Sigmund Freud. (No, I'm not making this up.) As you may know, Freud mostly wrote about sex. So I could have been *having* sex, but instead I was reading about it.

What would Freud have said?

What would Jesus have said?

Here's what Nancy said: "Put down that book!"

Actually, that's the sanitized version. In reality, she used an adjective to describe the book that was the kind of word you would use if you hit your finger with a hammer. It was a very non-Baptist word.

*Oh, man*, I thought. *We're still on our honeymoon and she's already using bad words.*

See what I did there? Instead of *engaging* with Nancy's frustration, I simply criticized her means of expression. In other words, I totally missed the point.

By telling me to put down my book and pay attention to her, Nancy was *inviting* me to intimacy (in her own non-Baptist way). And I was missing it. I thought of myself as someone who—by virtue of my background and training in

clinical psychology and ministry—was an expert in intimacy. But I was, in fact, severely intimacy-challenged.

### UNDERSTANDING INTIMACY

Somewhere along the way, in the minds of a lot of people in our culture, the word *intimacy* got all tangled up with sex. But even though there *is* a connection between the two words, they are not interchangeable, and one is not necessarily dependent on the other. We don't need to have sex to be intimate with someone. And we don't need to be intimate with someone in order to have sex. In fact, the vast majority of our intimate relationships have absolutely nothing to do with sex. Intimacy also applies to our relationships with our kids, our parents, our friends, our coworkers—and even with God.

Intimacy is not simply a feeling. It's not a mysterious experience that some people are born for and others are condemned to miss out on. It's not restricted to certain temperaments, or to married couples, or to “feelers” on the Myers-Briggs continuum. And it's not something that mystically occurs the moment we say, “I do.”

The best definition of intimacy I know of—and the core of our journey together in this book—comes from my friend Dallas Willard.

Dallas was the head of the philosophy department at the University of Southern California. There's an old saying that if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room. Dallas was always in the wrong room. He also knew the Bible better than anyone I'd ever met. People wanted to be around him because he constantly said unforgettable things that could not have come out of any other mouth. Things like these:

- The Kingdom of God is never in trouble. Neither are the people in it.
- Reality is what you bump into when you're wrong.
- Christians are people who are better off dead.

But even greater than his capacity for wisdom was his capacity to experience life as an unhurried gift—and to share this experience with others.

One time, a friend of mine was serving as a teaching assistant for Dallas during a two-week intensive class for ministers. They stayed together in the same home, and in the evening Dallas would change from his more formal teaching clothes into Bermuda shorts and a white T-shirt, but he would leave on his brown wing-tip shoes and brown socks.

One night, they were channel surfing and they landed on a Spanish-language program where people were doing a salsa dance, and Dallas said, “That looks like fun. I should try those moves.”

The thought of Dallas Willard—a middle-aged, rural-Missouri-born, Fundamentalist-Baptist-raised expert on Husserlian phenomenology—doing salsa moves wearing Bermuda shorts and brown wing-tips is just priceless, and almost as unforgettable as his teachings.

Anyway, he once told me, “You are an unceasing flow of experiences. To be alive is to have the capacity to experience reality.”

This sounds deceptively simple, but it helped me give a name to the craving of my soul. I love to have life-enhancing experiences—the first cry of my newborn child; riding a wave at Cowell’s Beach; the beauty of Jean Valjean singing “Bring Him Home”; talking deep into the night in front of a crackling fire with someone I love; watching the Pleiades in sleeping

bags on the deck with my children while Don McLean sings, “Starry, starry night . . .”

“Intimacy,” Dallas explained, “is shared experience.”

Think about it. If our lives consist of our experiences, then to some degree the quality of our lives reflects the quality of our experiences. Our experiences shape our perspectives on life and help to inform our understanding of the world. If you stop to consider how you became the person you are today, it's easy to see the role of your experiences in determining who you are.

Sometimes, we use our cell phones to take pictures of ourselves enjoying these experiences because we want to capture and preserve the good times. Of course, we don't take selfies of moments we want to forget. Nobody captures the moment they flunked a test, got dumped, got fired, or belched on a first date. We take selfies at a ball game, on a hike, at a concert, or even while driving. (Now there's a frightening thought!)

Here's a fun fact I dug up along the way: In 2015, more people died taking selfies than from shark attacks.<sup>1</sup> It's a little surprising that no one takes a selfie during a shark attack.

Not only do we revel in our experiences, but we also have a deep need to *share* them. When we share experiences with other people—the good times, the bad times, and all the mundane in-between times—we're sharing our *lives* with them. And that builds *connection*, which is another essential component of intimacy.

On our honeymoon, Nancy wanted to *connect* with me. She was angry because I wasn't focusing on her. She was angry because I wasn't making myself emotionally available to her. She was angry because I had dragged her to Wisconsin for our honeymoon. But mostly, she was angry because I was not *sharing the experience* of our honeymoon with her. What I had

failed to realize—at that critical juncture of our relationship—is that *shared experience* is what intimacy is all about.

Every time we connect with someone in a shared experience, we have the potential to build intimacy. If you're not a planner or overly sentimental, you may think you're doomed to miss out on intimacy. But you're not. Intimacy isn't built on grand, elaborate gestures. It doesn't have to be something deep or dramatic—an elaborate, romantic getaway, a dramatic self-disclosure, or sentimental words. Rather, it's made up of a thousand tiny, everyday moments of *interaction*.

It's asking your kids how their day went when they get home. It's asking—and caring about—what your spouse wore to an event. It's listening to a joke. It's remembering someone's favorite wine, book, or television show. It's a head butt on a football field. It's noticing a downcast face and offering a word of encouragement. It's a private wink to a stressed-out colleague in a fractious meeting that says, "We've got this." It's putting down a Freud book to listen to a disappointed spouse on a Wisconsin honeymoon.

A single note of music is an insignificant thing. But if you put enough of them together in the right way, you get Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Likewise with sharing our experiences. A single encounter may not amount to much, but if we share enough experiences with someone . . . that's how we build intimacy.

#### INTIMACY REQUIRES PRESENCE AND TIME

If my honeymoon is proof of anything (aside from the fact that Freud rarely "heightens the mood"), it's that intimacy does not automatically result from being in the same place



at the same time with someone. We can share physical space without actually sharing the experience.

There's no such thing as one-way, self-generated intimacy. By its very nature, intimacy must be *mutual*. Consequently, the basic building blocks of intimacy—whether with God or with other people—are shared experiences that build meaningful connections. For the most part, intimacy grows when one person invites another to share the many ordinary—and sometimes extraordinary—moments of everyday life and the invitation is not only accepted but reciprocated.

In order to share an experience, we must be fully present—we must engage with the other person. We have to talk about what we're thinking, feeling, and experiencing, and we must actively listen when the other person does the same. Otherwise, we're just two people who happen to be in the same place at the same time. If my body is here but my mind is distracted—if my thoughts keep drifting back to the stock market or work problems while you're talking about your day—we're not actually sharing the experience.

Two people might sit together at a meal, see a movie, go for a ride to the store, or even face a tragedy such as losing a child, and yet instead of growing more intimate as a result, they may actually lose intimacy.

Not long ago at dinner, my body was at the same table with Nancy, but my attention was on the screen of my cell phone. A few minutes into the meal, I got a text—from Nancy—that read: "I'm sitting right here." Screens are useful, but we can forget their place. Screens are made for man; man is not made for screens.

Is texting together quality time? No. Is checking e-mails together? No. Is watching television together? Well, it depends on what's on. The real-life drama of an NFL play-off game

where you're experiencing the ups and downs together—yes, of course it is. If it's *The Bachelor*, that's unbiblical, so use discernment and common sense.

A striking dimension of Jesus' capacity to love was his ability to be totally present with people. In all the Bible, Jesus never says to anyone, "Huh? What did you say? I wasn't paying attention. I was distracted with all my Messiah work." Jesus was constantly aware of how his friends were doing.

Of course, being fully present requires a commitment of time.

Time is precious to us because it is such a limited commodity. We can make more money, but we can't make more time. That's why giving someone the gift of our time is such an intimate act. It's something we can never get back.

Pursuing intimacy means making our top relationships the top priority of our time.

I once had a conversation with Nancy about our relationship and how I was spending my time. I asked her, "Am I working too much?"

Her immediate response was, "It's not terrible."

Granted, that's better than "terrible," but it's kind of a low bar. Jesus didn't say, "By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if your relationships are *not terrible*."

Here is the key challenge with time: There's always something else you could be doing. There are always more e-mails to be answered, more stuff to be done, more projects to be finished. But rarely do your kids say, "Hey, Mom. Hey, Dad. Why don't you go and work on your presentation for the office for the rest of the evening."

When it comes to time, you're bound to disappoint someone eventually. Don't let it be the people you love the most.

Because at the end of the day, our relationships—our shared experiences—are what really matter.

I have yet to hear anybody say on his deathbed, “Bring out my résumé so I can read it one last time. Let me review my financial portfolio. Let me tick off that list of impressive achievements I’ve accomplished.”

Time and presence. They are the stuff of shared experience. We can’t experience true intimacy without them. And there is no greater gift that we can give to those we love.

Speaking of gifts . . . years ago, my wife and I took our preschool-age children to have a family picture taken at one of those shopping mall photo places. I wanted a happy portrait to send out at Christmastime, so everyone could see what an intimate family looks like.

I don’t know who managed this photo shop, but whoever it was should be locked up for a long time, because it was an ugly experience. Basically, a stranger behind a large camera held up a series of odd-looking shapes that frightened the kids until they cried.

Now, I’m no expert, but I’m fairly certain that if you send people a Christmas card featuring three small children crying their eyes out, it’s not a good thing. Especially if you’re a pastor. So we went through a series of phases as we tried to get the kids to smile for their pictures.

The first was the “happy phase,” in which I cheerfully said, “Hey, kids, this is going to be fun! You’re going to enjoy this.”

That didn’t last long before we moved to phase two—the bribery phase.

“Kids, there’s a Mrs. Fields just a couple of doors down. If we get a good picture here, with lots of smiling faces, you can go to Mrs. Fields and get a double fudge brownie chocolate chip cookie—if you just smile.”

Didn't work.

So we moved into phase three, which is basically a series of threats.

"I told you to smile! You want to cry instead? All right, I'll give you something to cry about."

In case you're wondering, that's a proven and effective way to get small children to smile. I had to go to graduate school for a lot of years to learn that particular technique. And yet—surprisingly—it didn't work. Things just went from bad to worse.

By now, the entire place had filled up with other parents who had brought their kids to have their pictures taken—and all those kids had started crying just watching what was going on with my family.

So I got desperate. I pulled out our middle child—three-year-old Mallory—who was crying the hardest, her little body wracked with sobs, and I said, "Mallory, you're not happy, are you?" (That's called empathy—more help from my grad school years.) "I bet I know what you want right now . . ."

Mallory had always loved little dolls, stuffed animals, and other playthings, and her very favorite at the time was a little doll she called Baby Tweezers. It was the first doll she had ever named, and we don't know why she chose the name she did. Mallory was not a forceps-delivery child, but Baby Tweezers was what she decided to name her doll.

At that moment, I knew that if anything could bring comfort to my daughter, it would be the thought of that little doll she loved so much. So I said, "Mal, I bet if you could have anything in the world right now, you would want to have Baby Tweezers here with you, wouldn't you?"

Fresh tears formed in her eyes, and her bottom lip stuck

out so far that a bird could have perched on it. She didn't even trust herself to speak. She just nodded her head.

Very softly and gently I said, "Well, honey, if you ever want to see Baby Tweezers alive again . . ."

Bottom line, my body was sharing the same space as my children, but I was not sharing in their experience. I was in a hurry. I was worried that other people watching would think I didn't know how to control my family. (As if that were even an option.) I was preoccupied with getting on to whatever the next thing was that I had to do that day. I was concerned about the money we were about to spend on a picture of three crying children that—if we went ahead and sent it out for Christmas—would probably have the social services people coming after us.

The act of "being with" someone requires patience and sacrifice. It means putting the other person's wants and needs above our own and being willing to invest as much time as it takes to make the person feel valued and loved.

### THE MASTER OF THE SHARED EXPERIENCE

Jesus was a master of fostering intimacy through time and attention. We see this especially among the circle of people with whom he was closest—the friends who kind of became his family.

The Gospel of Mark highlights Jesus' intention when he chose his disciples: "He appointed twelve that they might be with him."<sup>2</sup>

It was just that simple: *that they might be with him*. When? Well, as it turns out, a lot—when he taught, when he traveled, when he worked, when he ate, when he rested, when the crowds loved him, and when the crowds left him.

He often withdrew from the disciples to pray and be refreshed, but he devoted much of his life to simply being with them. Now, he wasn't always *happy* with them—in fact, they actually made his work a lot harder—nor did he always try to make *them* feel happy. But here's what you never find: You never see one of the disciples come up to Jesus in the Gospels and say, "Hey, Jesus, how come you never have time for us anymore? Now that you're famous, with big crowds coming to see you, everybody calling you Messiah, speaking requests, and healing campaigns, we never see you anymore." From the beginning, when it was just them, through the intensity of when all of the attention and demands of a nation and the weight of the world rested on Jesus' shoulders, his friends always knew one thing: Jesus had time for them.

For three years, Jesus invited his friends to share the experiences of his life. Recently, I took a look at some of the experiences that Jesus shared with his disciples, and I was amazed by how many I found.

### *They walked together*

The most common thing they did together was take walks. In fact, this was the very first experience they shared with Jesus: "One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew. . . . Jesus called out to them, 'Come, follow me.'"<sup>3</sup>

*Follow me.* That may be the greatest and most life-changing invitation to intimacy ever uttered. Jesus didn't say, "Obey me," though of course obedience is part of following him. He didn't say, "Believe the right stuff about me," though as they grew in intimacy with him, his followers *would* believe. He

didn't say, "Serve me," though that would become their greatest purpose. He simply invited them to go for a walk. As it happens, the walk lasted for three years.

Walking together is how it all began, and even after the Resurrection, Jesus went on a seven-mile walk to Emmaus with a couple of disciples.

Taking a walk is so simple. It's very low cost. It's very low skill. And it's very high connection. Jesus utilized walking together so much that "walking with Jesus" became a common way of describing discipleship in the New Testament. To love Jesus meant to walk with him. It still does.

### *They ate together*

Again, so simple. Everybody has to eat. It's low skill. And it can be low cost. When Jesus wasn't out walking with people, he was often at a table eating with people. "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the most famous meal in history—the Lord's Supper—is named for Jesus, and the Bible says he "eagerly desired" to share this meal with his disciples, even though he knew he was about to die.<sup>5</sup> Talk about an intimate act!

### *They learned together*

Jesus often spent time teaching his disciples. Time and again, the Bible tells us that "his disciples came to him, and he began to teach them."<sup>6</sup> Something happens in a relationship when we're learning and stretching and growing together. Just think about how much richer the experience of reading a book is when you can engage in a spirited discussion about it with friends.

*They did favors for each other*

“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”<sup>7</sup>

Running errands and doing favors isn’t a barrier to Kingdom work; it actually *is* Kingdom work, because Kingdom work is about love. If we’re too hurried to love, we’re too hurried, period.

*They rested together*

“Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’”<sup>8</sup>

*They went for boat rides*

“They went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.”<sup>9</sup>

*They went mountain climbing*

“Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.”<sup>10</sup>

*They prayed*

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’”<sup>11</sup>

*They went fishing*

“When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’”<sup>12</sup>

*They went for car rides*

“On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were together in one Accord.”<sup>13</sup>



What we see in Jesus is a presence that doesn't place efficiency above intimacy. He was perfectly willing to accomplish his tasks more slowly if it meant being with his friends more deeply.

### THE "10,000-HOUR RULE"

How devoted was Jesus to being with his closest friends? As best we can discern, the Bible indicates that the disciples were with Jesus for about three years. Let's assume they were with him ten hours a day, and for the sake of argument, let's say they had a couple of days off each month. That would give them about 340 discipleship days each year. Now let's do the math:

10 hours/day × 340 days/year × 3 years = 10,200 hours  
of discipleship with Jesus

Journalist Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, writes about what he calls the 10,000-hour rule. The underlying idea of this "rule" is that it takes time to master a demanding craft, and 10,000 hours seems to be a magic number—whether it's playing a violin or programming a computer or doing surgery or hitting a curveball.<sup>14</sup>

If we were to apply this idea to Jesus' disciples, what "craft" would we say they were mastering during their 10,000-plus hours with Jesus? Well, right about the time they hit the 10,000-hour mark, he told them, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples."<sup>15</sup>

So it might be said that time spent together—shared experience—is the key to mastering the art of living in an

intimate relationship with Jesus and with each other, and that *love* is what defines our success.

### THE GREATEST GIFT

As they did with the disciples, the same principles apply whether we are seeking intimacy with God or with each other: Share experiences. Carve out time. Be present.

Because God is *always* present, intimacy with him is possible every moment of our lives. He's already here. We just have to show up and spend time with him.

When you need help, tell him. Then pay attention and look for him to give you the strength or wisdom or the right idea you need to keep moving forward. When you are joyful, recognize his goodness behind the joy and take time to praise him. When you see beauty, recognize the hand of the Artist and thank him. And ask him to open your eyes even more, so that you can see the world from *his* perspective. Ask God to share his experiences with you. Say, "Father, what do you feel when you look at this person? What was in your heart when you created this tree? How much joy do you experience when you look at the vast beauty of what you created?"

People who are intentional about being connected with God have a way of finding him in the unlikeliest places. St. Ignatius spoke of finding God in all things.<sup>16</sup> Missionary Frank Laubach called it playing the "game with minutes," in which the goal is to "bring God to mind at least one second out of every sixty."<sup>17</sup> Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth-century Carmelite monk, described it like this:

During my work, I would always continue to speak to the Lord as though He were right with me,

offering Him my services and thanking Him for His assistance. And at the end of my work, I used to examine it carefully. If I found good in it, I thanked God. If I noticed faults, I asked His forgiveness without being discouraged, and then went on with my work, still dwelling in Him.<sup>18</sup>

Give it a try. You may just find that an ordinary day—such as *today*—can become the most intimate day with God you have ever spent.

But wait—there's more.

If intimacy is shared experience, then perhaps the ultimate example of an invitation to intimacy is the Incarnation—that mystical, miraculous moment when God chose to become more like us—coming to earth, taking on flesh, and living with all the joys, sorrows, temptations, and triumphs that we do, so that we would better understand how to become more like him.

He could have loved us from a distance. But he wanted to do more than just love us. He wanted to be intimate with us. So God became fully human to fully share the experience of humanity. Through Jesus, God shared our experience of loneliness, fatigue, anxiety, and sorrow. He shared in our joy and our pain. He shared in our comfort in being held and our despair at feeling forsaken.

The Incarnation tells us that the story of our world is the story of God's hunger for intimacy; his pain at its loss in the Fall; his determination to recapture it; and his fierce joy at its redemption.

If that's the case, then maybe we're already closer to God than we think we are. Maybe intimacy with God isn't just something we can *do*, but something we can also *receive*.

And maybe, just maybe, we can rest in that for a while.