

GOD

ONE



Intimacy—a close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship with another person or group; simply the quality of being comfortable, warm, or familiar

It should be easy, one might think, to cultivate a relationship with God into a place of deep intimacy. After all, this is the foundation of what we are called to, isn't it? Isn't it what we teach each week to the students in our ministries?

Many of us have taken some level of education where we studied theology. We know the answers in our heads but struggle to move those answers to our hearts. I believe we want to have deep and intimate relationships with God, but in the work aspect of ministry, we worry about everyone but ourselves.

At one time during my years in college, I looked back and figured I had heard more than five thousand sermons. (Yes, some of you will remember that, way back when, we actually had morning *and* evening church!) We have heard thoughts from most of the pages of the Bible we teach from, yet many youth workers seem to have shallow relationships with Jesus.

There is a ritualistic approach now. We rush to read Scripture to prepare for the next lesson (which should have been prepared a few days ago). We pray out of duty, not a passion to intimately get to know the

Father's heart. We serve because we want the praise and affirmation of the people entrusted to our care.

≡ How deep and intimate is your relationship with God?

≡ How can you become more intimate in your relationship with God?

In the beautiful Rocky Mountains, on a youth staff retreat one time, a youth ministry volunteer once asked me, “How shallow and guarded is your relationship with God?” The question wrecked me because, as I began to evaluate the corporate youth pastor I had become, I saw how my own personal relationship with God had become exactly that—shallow and guarded.

I didn't want that type of relationship with God and certainly didn't want to model or teach that to my students, but that is what it had become. It had become something I had a good amount of knowledge in but which lacked personal passion. I could create a spiritual formation process for everyone under my care, but I didn't have time to get away with the Father.

Looking back, there were some pivotal times for me in this journey of understanding how to bring about depth and intimacy into my life as a leader of students; times and places in my life where God has asked me to rest and find my place in him. Let me share a couple with you.

I had just joined the staff team at Sonlife Ministries, and Chris Folmsbee had us meet a man named Scot McKnight. Scot had written *The Jesus Creed*, and this book was foundational in who and what Sonlife was becoming. Scot shared a definition in his book that is included in youth worker training materials that Chris has written. This definition continues to resonate with me as much as it did the first time I read it.

A disciple is one who engages with Jesus as a person and because of that relationship begins to live out the virtues that Jesus talks about.

I had to ask myself at that moment a simple question that I still ask myself daily: *How much trust do I have in my relationship with Jesus?*

The second time I was challenged in regards to the depth and intimacy of my relationship with God was when my daughter Maris entered the seventh grade. I could see she was watching me to see how deep my relationship was with God. I could tell she had questions that revolved around the general idea, *Is this for real?* and, *Does this work?* I have to be the one who can provide for her a real-life example of what falling in love with Jesus looks like.

≡ What needs to change in your relationship with God?

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus proclaims, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Come to me and I will give you rest.

I love that Jesus is asking us to come rather than expecting us to work. It is so different from what we see all around us. There is no expectation but to come. As we explore the many different relationships we are a part of, the majority of them will expect that we give something of ourselves. It just isn't the same with God. He asks us to simply *come*.

We are allowed to come tired.

We are allowed to come broken.

We are allowed to come beaten up.

≡ When was the last time you went to God for rest?

≡ How do you find true rest with God in the hustle and bustle of life?

≡ What does this look like in youth ministry for yourself, your volunteers, and your students?

There is a passage of Scripture I remind myself of almost on a daily basis. Within this simple verse, we learn five deep truths about what God wants us to experience. These five truths help us develop the depth of our relationship with God.

As you read this next section, read it through once and then come back and pray this over yourself. Experience what God is saying to you and what he longs for you to experience.

Zephaniah 3:17: The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

The Lord your God is with you. It is no surprise that, when Jesus was on earth, he continually went to his Father to get his strength. It was a reminder to Jesus that the Father was with him, that he hadn't abandoned him. God the Father goes with us as we face those frustrated-parent meetings or the daily grind of ministry.

He is mighty to save. God proclaims a message to us that he *wants* to save us—not simply from our sin but from the pain of this world. As ministry comes fast, furiously, and frustratingly at us, we need to call out to our Father, who longs to save us.

He will take great delight in you. God is proud of you before you do anything. You can't earn more or less of God's love. In Mark 1, at Christ's baptism, we see God the Father appearing in the form of a dove and simply uttering, "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." The interesting thing is that Jesus hasn't done anything yet. He has just been a good son of a carpenter. God is saying the same things to us: *I am proud of you, and you can't earn more or less of my love.*

He will quiet you with his love. Jesus needs those quiet moments with God to simply hear his Father's voice. It is in those quiet moments that we hear God's voice as well as experience God's endless love. It is critical for us, as we get busy in ministry, to have those quiet moments when we hear God's still, small voice.

He will rejoice over you with singing. God has a song for you that he wants to sing over you. Just as my wife, when our daughters were young,

sang a special song to quiet them, God has a song for you. It is a song full of love and peace to rejoice over you, his creation.

☰ **What do you need from God today?**

Take a moment, reread the previous section, and ask him for what you need. Where is your refuge?

God longs for us to understand this simple truth found in Psalm 34:8: “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”

A high school student came and made a deeply profound comment to me after a weekly Bible study we were having. She simply looked at me and said, “I would love to do that, Pastor Matt, but I need you to show me how.”

So often in our relationships with God, we put things on autopilot and just move along through the routines of life. But the people under our care desperately need to see us madly in love with the Father.

Yes, our relationships with God are private, but all we know those people who are madly in love with the Father. In my life, my parents are a perfect example of this. Their deep love for God can be seen in what they say, the advice they give, and how they spend their time. Our relationships with God must be modeled to our students in such a way that they see God at work in our lives.

PART 1

Ancient Celtic Prayer*

God to enfold me,
God to surround me.
God in my speaking,
God in my thinking.

God in my sleeping,
God in my waking,
God in my watching,
God in my hoping.

God in my life,
God in my lips,
God in my soul,
God in my heart.

God in my sufficing,
God in my slumber,
God in mine ever-living soul,
God in mine eternity.