

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Upon my return to God, I began to get to know and speak almost exclusively to Jesus. It wasn't intentional on my part, but at the time, God the Father was still a faraway concept to me. What I needed in that season was the ear of the Wonderful Counselor. My heart needed the Great Physician in order to even beat again.

All these years later, I still have countless needs. So when I walk with God in the cool of the day, the God who walks with me is exactly who I need at that moment. I began this book by telling you I was meeting with God the Father the morning I was given the You. Are. Loved. message. Walking with God based on my specific need has been one of the most beneficial and real aspects of my overall walk with the Triune God. I run to God based on my desperate need of the moment.

At times, when working on this book, no matter how much progress I make, I feel unqualified and ill-equipped, and rightly so. I can't tell you how many times I've just sat with Jesus, shaken my head, and said, "I can't do this. It's too big for me." In those moments, I sat with Jesus as my King and remembered that I am a servant of His kingdom. This is His call on my life in this season, so I can trust *the Word* to give me the words.

It never fails that something comes along to remind me it's His power, not my own, that propels this book forward. One morning I read these red-letter words:

"The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works." (John 14:10)

I underlined that verse and even copied it over into my journal as a reminder that it's His resurrection power that dwells within me and will do the work through me. I'm not able. This is too big. But He is able and bigger than any overwhelming task.

That verse was encouraging and powerful, but the truth is I still felt just as overwhelmed. Then I received this text from my son:

Walked by your bible study stuff sitting in the kitchen last night and saw the live loved binder... i remembered you talking about how you don't feel qualified to write the nonfiction stuff that you are writing and a quote came to mind about it.

*God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called.
You got this.*

God was in my midst that morning. Just when I needed it, He gave me the encouragement to keep moving forward no matter my doubt. I'm telling you this: God is in your midst just like He is in mine. I hope that by sharing examples of the little and big ways He's shown up in my life, confirming His faithful love, you will see He does the same for you. You have to be on the lookout. That verse at the right time was no coincidence. For my son to take the time to send that text was at God's urging. God is in my midst. God is in your midst. Keep your eyes open, and you will see Him.

When the God of all the universe steps into the small places of my daily life, I am amazed. How can that do anything other than prove He's a loving Father and Friend who wants to be a part of my life?

One of the foundational truths you must stand on is God's love for you as a Father. The other is Jesus' love for you. I find their love for me differs, yet is intensely the same. Though I need to be loved on many different levels, the Triune God's capacity for love far exceeds my need.

As many broken women as I have known over the years, I rank right up there with them as one of the biggest messes I've encountered. On the outside for most of my adult life, if you would have met me, you would have thought I was fairly pulled together. That was mere deception on my part. Because I was the victim of sexual abuse as a little girl, I learned early on to be someone else, anyone else but the mess

collection of insecurities that raged within me. I was an empty façade, with an underscore on the word empty.

And on top of that, my parents divorced when I was only five, so not having a father in the home chipped away at any foundation of security that I might have had as a little girl. I have a good relationship with my father, and I never doubt his love for me, but back then I felt anything but loved. I'm not even sure I felt abandoned since I don't think I saw it in those terms. Instead, he was just gone from my home, nonexistent in my daily life.

I am tempted to share all the dreadful decisions I've made in life, all the wrong choices that labeled me chief among sinners. That isn't what this book is about. You know what it looks like to try and get your needs met by the world. No matter if it's your own daddy issues you are trying to work through or if your perspective of love is skewed by abuse or abandonment, there is only one thing that matters: God is your Father if you have become His through faith in His Son, Jesus.

Your history doesn't matter. Your family tree doesn't matter. Your past choices don't matter—other than you are likely living out consequences of them. What does matter is that you find a way to God the Father and know the love He has for you. When I say find a way, that may be misleading since He has never left you. He's right there. Your hindrance may be your own mistrust and false notions of what a real Father looks like.

I personally am still working through this. I drew near to Jesus and developed an intimate relationship with Him long before I could approach God as Father with any comfort. I would sit with Jesus and run off at the mouth for hours at a time, but when it came to Father God, I was shy and timid in my conversations. All the years of this journey, in my mind I have sensed Jesus next to me always. Until recently, God the Father seemed farther away, like I had to travel to get to where He was just so I could pray to Him. I don't experience that distance at all now. Just as Jesus is with me always, I feel the presence of God the Father in my daily life as well. This new relationship with God as my trusted Father has taken years to develop and has required me to believe His Word even when my heart was too wounded to relate to Him as my Father.

Here is what opened my eyes to the difference. One day while in my quiet time, something came to mind. When I was a little girl, if I was at the store with my mom and near the checkout, I would start begging for candy or whatever grabbed my attention. I didn't hesitate to ask. If I was visiting my dad and at a store with him, however, I wouldn't ask him for anything. I didn't feel comfortable enough with him to ask since I wasn't actually doing life with him. If he offered, I'm sure I accepted, but I couldn't bring myself to ask my dad for anything I wanted or needed. God brought that memory to mind to show me that I did the same with Him. I would share my deepest needs and wants with Jesus but not with God the Father.

Besides what we covered in our earlier list of the facets of God, Scripture describes Him as having many different roles in our life. Anything you need Him to be, He already is. You have no need, spiritual, emotional, or physical, that He can't meet.

For some, you may more easily relate to God as Father and struggle with an intimate relationship with Jesus the Son. What many believe, but would never admit, is that to them, Jesus isn't enough. They think, "Jesus is fine to get me to heaven, but He can't actually make me feel less lonely when I'm all alone here on earth, right?" That's the wrong thinking that kept me such a mess for many years, even after I had decided to sincerely walk out my life with God. Deep down, I didn't think He was enough. The serpent deceived, and I ate.

My old need for romantic love was so great that it took the love story of all time to eventually capture my longing heart and break its power over me. Out of my skewed perspective of love and sex, my history had been riddled with one failed attempt after another to fill the emptiness within me through relationships with men. Never once had that worked. When finally desperate enough, I focused on Jesus as my Beloved, and His faithful love ended my relentless pursuit.

What finally opened my eyes? There was a song on Christian radio, "By Your Side," by Tenth Avenue North. Sung from the perspective of Jesus, these were the lines that changed everything: "Why are you looking for love? Why are you still searching as if I'm not enough?"

That was it; those two lines of a song exposed my heart. I was still searching for human love to fill and complete me. I had to sit with Jesus one morning and admit, “You’re not enough.” I was wise enough to add, “But I want You to be.” From there we set off on a journey where Jesus genuinely became enough. He has become my first love, the One I put above all else in my life. All that I do is for Him. Whether it is countless hours banging on a keyboard trying to share my experiences with other women so that they might see Him for who He really is or searching out the Scriptures or praying or journaling, it’s all for Him. Because the word *in* implies being contained within something or submerged, I can say that I have fallen *in* love with Jesus. He is who I am now, He in me and I in Him.

Little did I know, all that time when I was only willing to meet with Jesus, I was missing out on something spectacular: My real Dad. When the grocery store memory came to mind and its implications began to rattle around in my head, I had to sit with God the Father and admit to Him, “I don’t really see you as my Father, my Dad who can be trusted. That’s why I don’t come to You and ask for anything. That’s why I hardly talk to You at all.”

Conversely, those of you who have close relationships with your earthly dad may struggle as much. If you depend on your dad and his advice here in this life, your soul won’t likely long for your Heavenly Dad. You would be wise to look inward, examine your heart, and take that to God if you find you lean more on your biological father and less on your Heavenly Father.

As you get to know God through His Word, the one common theme throughout Scripture is God’s love for His children. It is seen throughout the Old Testament and carries over into the New Testament. He pursues us, woos us, and is jealous for us.

“The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’” (Jeremiah 31:3)

He loves us with an everlasting love. His love can’t be compared to that of the human experience. It is in looking through the lens of human eyes that we underestimate His love for us. While He often uses father/child and husband/wife relationships in Scripture as a basis of comparison of His love for us, something most of us can identify with, we still can never seem to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18).

We must, at all costs, grasp and take hold of such life-altering love. Love was the game changer for me. Little things He did for me, little things He has shown me, those signs of affection from Him crept into my heart, softening it toward Him, causing me to dare to believe that such love could actually exist. I can hardly remember the time specifically when the floodgates actually opened and my heart was filled. I remember it seemed sudden, like I went from a woman who desperately needed love to a loved woman. I felt complete in a way I had never known before. Until you have your spiritual eyes opened to see God’s love for you in action and in your daily life, rely on the Truth of Scripture. God is Love. You. Are. Loved.

Paul prays for us to:

“... know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”
(Ephesians 3:19)

We can be certain of this: His love for each of us is so vast and beyond human perception that, once we even catch a glimpse of it, there comes with it an immense filling of what is said to be the fullness of God. That is when we finally feel complete. That empty place you’ve always known is a place only God’s love can fill.

Contrary to what your deceptive heart tries to convince you of, what you have always wanted and needed can only be found in the Person of Jesus Christ, in intimate relationship with Him and with God the Father in the day-to-day living out of your life. As early as childhood we become convinced that our deepest need for love and worth can be found within the bounds of a human relationship, specifically with the opposite sex. We have accepted the world’s view that ultimate love is human love. Not so!

Ultimate, completing, fulfilling, and unconditional love can only be found in God the Father and Jesus the Son.

If you find you relate to only one or the other, it's time for you to explore the basis of that. Some reasons are textbook examples, like my coming from a broken home. Maybe you feel it's only reverent to speak to God as Father. I won't try and alter your beliefs if that is how you feel. I can only speak from my own experience.

I recently heard someone say that we can only pray to God the Father. His basis for that was the Lord's Prayer, which is a model not a directive. If we are expected to only pray that specific prayer, then how can we account for the fact that we are told to be wary of vain repetition in prayer? I admit, the man's statement sent me reeling since I was just about to write this chapter. Literally, I was to begin writing on this topic the following day.

I researched his position and came to my own conclusion. I found that some of my favorite pastors, Bible teachers, and commentators believe we can address Jesus in our prayers and even encourage it. Before the research, I said to my husband: "Good thing I didn't know I couldn't talk to Jesus all those years He was healing me." I was kidding, of course, but that truth did lead me to my primary reason to believe I can talk to Jesus directly. Even more than what other people said about how I can communicate with the Triune God, the proof of Jesus' intimate presence in my life and in my prayers was the miraculous transformation in me spiritually. I had prayed to Him, and He heard and healed me.

That may be what you need, miraculous transformation. In that case you must pursue an intimate relationship with both Father and Son. No matter the cost, chase after the One who chases after you. You will discover Him walking with you through your day-to-day life by His Holy Spirit.

"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

(Jeremiah 29:12-13)

CHAPTER TAKEAWAY

Key Point

God is to each of us exactly who and what we need.

- 1) At this time, what would you say is your most critical need in each area: spiritual, emotional, and physical?

- 2) What present tasks in life feel too big or too overwhelming for you to accomplish?

- 3) Can you think of a verse that reminds you that God will meet your every need?

- 4) Think of a time when you knew God was in your midst as He sent you a much-needed verse or someone with an encouraging word at just the right time.

- 5) Would you say you are on the lookout for God in your daily life? What are some little ways and big ways God has shown up in your life recently?

Key Point

We are invited to experience a relationship with both God the Father and Jesus the Son.

- 6) Was my description of an individual relationship with God the Father and Jesus the Son a new concept for you?

- 7) Read John 14:23 and John 17:3. How do these verses express their oneness, yet distinction?

- 8) Do you view your relationship with God the Father distinctly from Jesus the Son? If so, in what ways?

Your walk with God the Father and Jesus the Son may not look exactly like anyone else's, and it's not supposed to. You are His only you. God will be to you exactly who you need. Trust that.

Key Point

The Father loves you as your perfect Dad.

- 9) How might the Father's love meet certain needs in your life?

- 10) Did you have a more positive or negative relationship with your earthly dad? Explain below.

- a) How might a negative history with your earthly dad create mistrust or false notions of who God the Father is and misrepresent His love for you?

- b) Conversely, how might a positive or dependent relationship with your earthly dad interfere with you running to God as your Father?

Key Point

Jesus loves you as your faithful Companion and so much more.

- 11) It makes sense to see Jesus as your Savior, but do you see Him as your constant Companion, the One whom your heart loves?

- 12) List some of the names or roles Jesus is said to serve through Scripture. Examples might include Groom, Beloved, Friend, etc. Challenge yourself to find as many as you can.

- 13) Deep down, do you believe walking in relationship with Jesus can fulfill your innermost longings for love, even surpassing the human love that you desire?

- 14) Have you been taught, based on the Lord's Prayer, that you should only pray to God the Father?

- 15) After reading through this chapter and considering the verses you looked up, do you find it as an invitation to meet with both God the Father and Jesus the Son?
