

# *This is Love*

6 Days of Growing In Intimacy With God

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## **Day 1**

*Read: Ephesians 2:1-5; 1 John 4:9-10*

We don't share a friendship with God because of our "spiritual" bent of mind, our special ability to commune with Him, or our supposedly stellar moral track record.

The simple truth is that God initiates a relationship with us.

*He* does the reaching out. *He* pulls us out of the muck of our sin. *He* offers us grace.

And He did all of that by sending Jesus to pay the price for our sin.

If you and I long for intimacy with God, let's begin by recognizing that, in His sovereign grace, *He* chose us and made Himself known to us.

In today's Bible reading, we see that we were dead until He gave us life. There's next to nothing a dead person can do to secure life for themselves.

Knowing God intimately and personally begins when we recognize we bring absolutely nothing to the table. Very simply, the only reason we can be friends with God is that He offers us friendship. Take a moment to ponder these words from today's Scripture portion: "But because of His great love for us, God... " (Ephesians 2:4).

He is the initiator of that love relationship with us.

In recognizing our "deadness" and absolute helplessness in rescuing ourselves, we come before Him in surrender and awe, and there begins an intimate friendship with our Creator.

***This is love—not that we loved God first but that He loved us. May we respond to His love.***

### ***Lean In***

Father God, I come to You in wonder and awe. I come to You and say, "Jesus paid it ALL, ALL to Him I owe." Because of one reason—Your great love—You rescued me and gave me life. Lord, as a response to Your love, I long to grow in my intimacy with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Day 2

Read: Psalm 34:17-18; Revelation 3:19-20

In our journey to know God more intimately, there's one thing we can't ignore: God hates sin.

Ouch, I know—not exactly a popular or culturally kosher thing to say, but there are no “nice-isms” to couch that truth in. God detests sin because He is perfectly holy.

If you and I want to know God more and truly experience close fellowship with Him, then we are called to brokenness and repentance.

Scripture says He is close to the brokenhearted. When we're truly repulsed by our sin and understand how it hurts the heart of God, it breaks our hearts, and we draw closer to Him.

Intimacy with God requires a repentant heart. In His love, God says when we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to cleanse us. That cleansing restores our fellowship with Him. In today's reading in Revelation, we see Jesus speaking to a self-reliant community of the Laodicean church. Through His call to them, we have a powerful picture of Jesus knocking on the door of our hearts. He wants to come in and eat with us. Still, if the dining table is full of junk and we've just gorged on double cheeseburgers and extra-large fries and thick chocolate shakes, chances are we won't want to open the door to Him because we've already glutted ourselves on what was not meant for us.

We don't have to hang our heads in shame. He still offers to come and sup with us. When we give Him full access to our lives, He cleans up the greasy takeout boxes and offers you and me a seat at His banqueting table.

Today, friend, let's pray for brokenness over our sin, a contrite spirit that mourns over our transgressions, and a grateful heart that accepts God's forgiveness through Jesus.

***This is love—that God offers us forgiveness and freedom through Jesus. May we respond to His love.***

### ***Lean In***

Father, I pray for true brokenness over my sin so I won't go crawling back to it, buying into the false idea that the things of the world are more satisfying than You. Lord, like the Laodicean church in today's Bible reading, I tend to be lukewarm in my faith. I tend to be too self-satisfied and self-reliant. I tend to be distracted by the things which promise to satisfy but are only ploys of the enemy to steal, kill, and destroy. I pray that You would foster in me a repulsion for the things that take me away from You and stir in my heart a passion for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Day 3

Read: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Philippians 4:6-7

There is no intimacy without communication. Every married person knows that, and if they don't, I'm guessing they are (repeatedly) told by their spouse. As an extrovert who needs to share my thoughts regularly, I often find myself lecturing my "man of few words" husband on the merits of communicating. And, hey, know what? It turns out I'm in good Company! (Yes, that would be Company, with an upper case C.)

While God doesn't lecture us on communication, He loves hearing from us and speaking to us. He knows your thoughts from afar but waits for you to come into His presence.

Scripture says in James 4: 8, "Come near to God and he will come near to you."

He's never too busy, never too tired, never too distracted to listen to you and speak to you. If we long for a friendship with God, we are to communicate with Him. As you know, communication is a two-way process: listening and speaking.

We primarily listen to God's voice through His Word. When we go to His Word with expectation, giving Him the space to communicate to us through His Spirit who reveals the truth, God speaks. Friend, it's time we got excited about this. Maybe we've become apathetic to it because we've heard it all our lives—but think about this stunning truth: the God of the universe speaks to you!

We primarily speak to God through prayer. Our prayers are not about presenting a laundry list of requests to God. Our prayers are meant to be far sweeter as we pour out our praise to Him and empty our pain before His throne of grace. Prayer is not about going to God because we need something from Him. It is going to God because He is our everything.

These two aspects of communicating with God—reading the Word and prayer—go together. As Tim Keller says in his book *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, "Our prayers should arise out of immersion in the Scripture. [We] speak only to the degree we are spoken to. . . . The wedding of the Bible and prayer anchors your life down in the real God." Friend, do you want your life anchored in God? May you seek Him in His Word and pour out your heart in prayer in response to His voice.

***This is love—that the God of the universe speaks personally to you and inclines His ear to hear your voice. May we respond to His love.***

### ***Lean In***

Father God, I long to know You more—and, in Your grace, You've given me a way to do that through Scripture and prayer. Lord, may I never take the privilege of reading Your Word or speaking to the Almighty God for granted. Give me a hunger for Your Word and a heart of worship and prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Day 4

Read: Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Yesterday we saw how God draws us closer to Himself through Scripture and prayer, but here's a danger I've experienced. My time with God can often become another item on my to-do list. Once it's checked off, I tend to move on to the "real" stuff of life.

When we compartmentalize God, giving Him air time only during specific segments of our day or week, we essentially see Him as an add-on to our life rather than the very center of it.

Intimacy with God comes from practicing His presence through our day in every area of our lives.

It's only then Jesus can be the Sure Foundation of our lives, the Rock on which we stand, and the Chief Cornerstone by which the whole building holds together.

In his book, *Practising the Presence of God*, 17th-century Christian monk, Brother Lawrence writes, "Let us occupy ourselves entirely in knowing God."

That sounds like a noble and worthwhile goal, but how do we do that?

Brother Lawrence gives us a glimpse of what it means to occupy ourselves with God:

"He does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act of adoration, sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces, past and present, He has bestowed on you, in the midst of your troubles to take solace in Him as often as you can. Lift up your heart to Him during your meals and in company; the least little remembrance will always be the most pleasing to Him. One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think."

Friend, in the fleeting moments of our daily lives, let's cultivate little bursts of time to connect with God. It may not come naturally, but it's something we can pray for and develop over time.

We grow in our intimacy and friendship with Him when we become more aware of His presence through the day, live ordinary moments for His glory, seek Him through our everyday questions, be still and know He is God, thank Him for little joys, and cry out to Him in trials both big and small.

***This is love—that He is with us in every moment. May we respond to His love.***

### ***Lean In***

Father God, forgive me for sometimes seeing my time with You as something I need to check off my list before moving on with my day. Lord, I pray I grow in my awe and wonder of You, so my heart's greatest desire is to occupy myself with You. Teach me daily what it means to practice Your presence. I need Thee, O, I need Thee, every hour I need Thee. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Day 5

Read: Hebrews 12:1-3; Philippians 2:5-8

Maybe you've had what is referred to in Christian culture as a "mountain top experience." It's one of those times when the atmosphere at a Christian camp or conference is charged, and you feel an intimacy with God like never before.

While those scared and powerful moments can fire up the engine of your faith, intimacy with God is not limited to those times when hundreds gather, the lighting is perfect, and the worship team hits the right chords.

No, intimacy with God is lived out in the ordinary, everyday, humdrum, often mundane moments of our lives.

God calls you and me to walk in obedience to Him where He has placed us. This means running the race He has called each of us to. A close friendship with God requires we follow Him despite the cost because the prize is invaluable. Obedience to God is core to walking closely with Him. Intimacy with God creates a radically counter-cultural life. Let me give you some practical examples:

If you're a student and the rest of the class is cheating its way through tests, obedience may look like hunkering down and studying while everyone else is partying it up.

If you're in the corporate world and your colleagues are cutting corners, obedience may look like working as unto God and not unto man, even if your reward is not immediately evident.

If you're a mom and the other moms in your group of friends believe that endlessly complaining about their kids is the best way to destress, then obedience to God may look like wiping dirty countertops and runny noses with a heart of gratitude.

You can't conform to the world and expect to share a close walk with God. He calls us to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to Him.

Jesus modeled this obedience to the Father and presented Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

***This is love—that Jesus obeyed the Father and went to the Cross for our sin. May we respond to His love.***

### ***Lean In***

Father God, Walking in obedience to You is not always easy or comfortable, but thank You that Your Spirit empowers me for whatever You call me to. Thank You for Jesus and the perfect example of obedience and sacrifice He set by going to the Cross and laying down His life for us. Father, when the temptation to think and speak and act like the culture around me is strong, may I remember that He who is within me is greater than he who is in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Day 6

Read: Isaiah 53:3; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 5:10

As a young girl, I read the story of Joni Eareckson Tada, who, as an active and athletic 17-year-old, met with a diving accident that would leave her with quadriplegia for the rest of her life. Now in her 70s, Joni has spent her entire adult life in a wheelchair, survived two battles with cancer, and dealt with chronic pain daily, and yet she is full of joy in Jesus. For several decades, Joni has shared her life, testimony, messages, and music with thousands around the globe. The world may look at Joni and ask, “How? How is she so full of joy when she is so riddled with pain and disabilities?”

Joni’s answer is always Jesus. Her relationship with God gives her the strength for each moment. In her suffering, her dependence on Him is absolute.

I love this quote from her: “When life is rosy, we may slide by with knowing about Jesus, with imitating him and quoting him and speaking of him. But only in suffering will we know Jesus.” Only in suffering will we know Jesus. In good times, we may know Him at arm’s length. We may choose to keep a “comfortable” distance between God and ourselves, but we are stripped down to our most vulnerable in times of suffering. Our self-reliance and self-sufficiency come to a full stop. We reach the end of ourselves, and we have no option but to cling to Jesus. Intimacy is strengthened with God through suffering. The Bible is clear that we will all endure suffering. It’s not something we should surprise us, but may we pray our suffering draws us toward a God who endured the Cross for our sake. ***This is love—that He came to be a suffering Servant, wounded and bruised, tortured and mocked, rejected and isolated so He could identify with our humanness and die in our place.***

### **This is love**

That God first loved us.

That God offers us forgiveness and freedom through Jesus.

That the God of the universe speaks personally to us.

That Jesus obeyed the Father and went to the Cross for our sin

That Jesus came to be a suffering Servant

**May we respond to His love.**

### **Lean In**

*Father God, Your Word says Jesus came into the world, but His own did not receive Him. It says Your Son had no place to lay His head. It says Jesus emptied Himself for us. He was bruised and stricken for our transgressions. Your Son was a man of sorrows, acquainted with suffering, but He endured suffering so we may have life, life to the full. May we be trained by our trials to be more like Jesus. May we grow in our intimacy with You through our suffering. Thank You for showing us what perfect love is. May we live in response to Your love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*