

Chapter One

Made for Intimacy Relational by God's Design

The Lord God said, "It is not good
for man to be alone..." Genesis 2:18

Having grown up in a small rural town in Oklahoma, I (Bruce) will never forget my first impressions of New York City. I had taken a job in a nonprofit organization located in the heart of Manhattan. I remember walking to work along Fifth Avenue that first morning. There were thousands of people on the sidewalks moving in both directions. I was looking at a virtual sea of humanity. Everyone seemed focused and intent on getting somewhere. As I made my way to the office, a profound thought struck me. I was totally anonymous! I could have stood on my head in the middle of the sidewalk and the flow of bodies would have continued. Though surrounded by people, no one knew me. There was no meaningful interaction. As far as I could tell, no one cared whether or not I existed. There were lots of people, but no relationships. I realized that more than ever before, I was alone.

As the 21st century dawns, we find ourselves in a world that produces unbelievable advances in technology, using products that were the stuff of science fiction only a decade or two before. Though technologically advanced, we are relationally challenged. We can communicate electronically anywhere on the globe, but struggle to connect emotionally with someone in the same room. In touch with the world, we remain disconnected in our closest relationships. That may explain why over 70 percent of Americans described themselves as lonely in a recent survey. This pervasive loneliness is related to the systematic breakdown of committed, trust-based relationships in our society. For example, a pattern of marriage failure is weaving itself throughout the very fabric of American society, becoming institutionalized and expected. For several decades now, divorce rates have hovered at 50 percent for all marriages. The prognosis for second and subsequent marriages is even worse, with approximately 70 percent ending in divorce. Studies have shown that divorce "begets" divorce, as children of divorced parents have a higher expectation and probability to experience divorce in their own marriages. It is predicted that more than two-thirds of our children will spend at least some part of their childhoods in a single-parent home.

These trends suggest that generations of young adults have never experienced relationally healthy and enduring family environments. How have these people been coping with their loneliness? Have they given up on relationships completely? Well, only a few have entered monasteries or retreated to Antarctica! But, increasing numbers are choosing to marry at later ages than their parents did, living with someone before making a permanent commitment, or putting off marriage altogether. Many have already experienced the pain of divorce. Some of these will marry again, though not all. Overall, these trends have resulted in declining confidence in the stability and durability of relational commitments. And no wonder, for the blueprint for relationships left behind in recent decades has been faulty at best. Not only has the disruption of relationships become ingrained in our culture, the ability to develop relational intimacy has become a lost art.

We would like to think that Christians have done much better in their trust-based relationships. However, that has not been the case. The statistics for divorce, teenage pregnancies, drug and alcohol abuse, and other social problems are not much different for Christians than they are for the general public.

Unfortunately, membership in a church does not automatically remove our loneliness or insulate us completely from relational difficulties. Can aloneness be God's desire for us? Are we really supposed to move further and further toward autonomy and self-sufficiency? Do we even acknowledge our genuine need for meaningful fellowship with other human beings? Will we settle for polite, superficial friendships? Will fear of intimacy keep us from enjoying more genuine relationships that include honest, heart-to-heart disclosure of our needs, feelings, and boundaries? Are we "stuck" not knowing how to remove the emptiness of aloneness? Do God's instructions concerning relationships seem irrelevant in our technological age? We have good news for you. There is light at the end of this tunnel—God's light. Churches around the world are refocusing on the principles of Scripture that show us how to restore Great Commandment love in our relationships with God and others. Here is an example of what that looks like.

Ray entered the worship center of a church in his city on a Friday night to find a crowd of people spread throughout the room in pairs and small groups. Some were talking quietly while others were weeping together. Curious, Ray walked over to a man standing in the back by himself and asked what the group was doing. The man in the back was Dr. David Ferguson. He explained to Ray that the people were comforting each other as they shared past and present hurts that they had experienced. Ray could sense the relevance of the moment. These people were experiencing genuine intimacy. They were relating to each other on a level he had only imagined possible. He turned to Dr. Ferguson and said, "That's what I need." Later, he would share that he had just gone through a broken engagement, his job was in jeopardy, and he had recently placed his mother in a nursing home. These events had left him defeated and devastated. He was in pain and had been facing that pain alone. But what Ray observed in the church that night gave him hope.

Ray became much more aware of his need for God and others as he encountered significant challenges and hardships. How about you? How aware have you been of your own need for meaningful relationships. How comfortable are you with the idea that God has created you with an innate need for intimacy with Him and other humans? Write down what you are currently thinking and feeling about your own relational neediness:

Aloneness Mankind's First Dilemma

No one would argue that we all have physical needs for food, water, sleep, air, and even touch. Christians certainly know that we also have spiritual needs for eternal life, peace of mind, and the presence of God. But how comfortable are you with this idea that you were intentionally created with needs that are relational? Let's look further at our need for intimacy with God and others. Let's examine the Genesis 2 account of the first human who experienced life as a single adult—Adam.

What a life! Though formed from the dust of the ground, God has provided Adam luxurious accommodations in which to live. The temperature is pleasant enough that clothes are unnecessary. The foliage is resplendent with variety and color. There is no pollution, no traffic jams, no taxes, no conflicts, and NO SIN! It is truly a perfect environment. Even work, as we know it, has not been deemed a necessity. What a place to kick back and hang out!

In addition, thanks to God's kindness and blessing, Adam possesses everything to make life comfortable and easy. Food is abundant and good to eat. The Garden is the original convenience store without the high prices. Adam is at the top of the food chain with no competition for a place to pitch his tent.

Furthermore, God has established Adam in an exalted position. He is Chief Executive Officer of the Garden. He gets to look after things, assign all the titles, and decide who gets the sunny spot next to the creek. And, he doesn't even have to work up through the ranks. Above all, Adam has a direct line to the Creator. He is in communication with God Almighty. He has an unhindered, free and open relationship with the Father because there is, up to this point, no sin to get in the way.

Adam shouldn't need anything or anyone else, right? He is in fat city, experiencing the American dream, living high on the hog. Life is good! It's good, that is, except for one thing. For you see, Adam is ALONE! And Adam is about to hear from the Creator of the Universe that it is NOT GOOD for him to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Adam's aloneness was not a mistake by a God who is sovereign and all-knowing. Instead, God's declaration is evidence that being created in the image of God includes being relational. God has designed us with an inherent need for intimacy with Him AND with other persons who are significant to us.

Did God say that it was not good for people to be single? No. He said it was not good for us to be alone. The condition of aloneness is not established by a person's marital status. It is not limited to single adults. Aloneness is not a character flaw or a sign of inferiority. And, it can be experienced after you have come to know the Lord. An awareness of aloneness is evidence that your God-given relational nature is operative within you. When you sense that it is not good to be alone you are identifying with an aspect of who God is—a relational being. Therefore, it is okay to be single and to want to be meaningfully connected with God and others in ways that remove your aloneness and bring glory to Him.

We, too, are relational beings. Therefore, it is natural and normal, even as Christians, to want to remove our aloneness through meaningful relationships with others. God agrees with that. He is the one who declared that it was not good for Adam to be alone and then made provision for his need. Consequently, single adults can embrace their need for close, meaningful relationships with God and others.

Lonely AND Whole

Several frustrating courtships and a broken marriage had left Pat feeling empty and disillusioned about the whole business of close personal relationships. The fact that he and his former spouse were Christians only heightened the frustration. The persons that he most expected to understand and meet his needs, his Christian friends and relatives, had repeatedly disappointed him. Though often surrounded by people at church and work, Pat usually felt empty and isolated. He began to think that his constant longing for relationship was a sign of spiritual immaturity. If only he could do what many had told him to do and be completely satisfied by his relationship with God. His friends assured Pat that God would somehow enable him to "rise above" his relational dilemmas such as loneliness and rejection. In essence, they were suggesting that the solution to his emptiness and pain was keeping a spiritually stiff upper lip.

What does it mean to be spiritually healthy as a single with regard to relationships? Is spiritual maturity equated with needing God alone? Are we inadequate in some way if we long for meaningful companionship with others? All too often, we have been taught that humans can function "quite well, thank you," as long as they have God. Some would say that the more spiritually mature you are the less you will need other people. They suggest that to long for meaningful human companionship is a sign of spiritual weakness. That response does not encourage the lonely. Instead, it heaps condemnation on persons who are simply reflecting the relational blueprint of the Creator. Nowhere is the pain of that accusation more damaging than among the single adult population in our society, particularly within the church.

Single her entire life, Kathy was attending one of Dr. Ferguson's conferences on relationships due to her work as a ministry consultant. Included in the conference was a discussion of the Genesis 2 account of Adam's dilemma—aleness. At the end of that session, Kathy shared with David that loneliness had been her frequent companion. Engagements had been broken and close friends had moved to other parts of the country. Kathy had been faithful to God in all her relationships. Nevertheless, she had felt guilty and inadequate for not shaking her desire for a close, personal relationship with someone. Some of Kathy's friends told her that she should really only need God. Therefore, she concluded that the presence of the longing meant that she was spiritually deficient. After hearing God's declaration about Adam's aleness and understanding that God chooses to meet many of our needs through other human beings, Kathy began to rejoice. She no longer confused her feelings of loneliness with her condition of wholeness or maturity in Christ. The truth that God Himself had declared that we are relational beings who have an innate need for intimacy with others had set her free.

Pat's struggle was made "unsolvable" by the assumption that it is wrong or immature to feel lonely or to long for human companionship. Kathy's conclusion that her faith was lacking due to the presence of lonely feelings limited her freedom and peace of mind. In truth, Pat, Kathy, and other Christians who have trusted Jesus for their salvation and life itself, can be complete and mature in Christ, and simultaneously experience aleness and a longing for human companionship. Some use the bold declaration of the apostle Paul, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19), to justify a form of self-reliance. But, it is clear in the preceding verses that Paul knew God often chooses to involve others to meet our material, relational, and emotional needs. He says in verse 14 of the same passage, "Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles." Why would Paul say this if it was better for us to remain independent of others?

Relational Intimacy

God's Antidote for Aleness

You might be asking why God, who is all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful, created us with a need for others rather than for Him only? Why didn't He just enable us to be totally self-sufficient? What prompted God to include this interdependency dynamic in the makeup of the human race? Could it be, that when God said in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." it was His desire to let us experience the oneness with Him and with others that He experiences with the Son and the Holy Spirit? Therefore, He made us with the need and the capacity for relationship that goes far beyond a superficial coexistence to a dynamic called intimacy. Could it be that He had tasted the pain of aleness already, when in His unfathomable eternal presence, He knew a time when He was separated from His Son between the Crucifixion and

Resurrection? And, having experienced this, God knew firsthand that it was not good!

We can learn a lot about living abundantly in our relationships by carefully studying and emulating the ways of our Lord. How did Jesus experience intimacy and deal with aloneness while on earth? He lived His earthly life as a single person. Jesus understood that it was not good to be alone. Yet it was not the will of the Father for the Christ to experience marriage other than to His bride, the church. For Jesus, there was no "right person," other than God, but there were right relationships.

Jesus encountered thousands upon thousands of people, was acquainted with many, and lived and traveled with a group of His disciples. But, he had special friendships with a select few, including Peter, James, and John among the disciples. He also experienced relational intimacy within a network of believing friends—His own "singles network" of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus entrusted these close associates with the deeper struggles of His life and entered their worlds as they had need.

Though fully divine, He was also fully human and experienced everything that we as humans experience, including aloneness, abandonment, rejection, and even betrayal. There were times when even His closest disciples let Him down, such as the night before the Crucifixion. In those times, Jesus depended upon the love of the Heavenly Father without denying the difficulty of His situation. Take time now to reflect upon the compelling love of Christ that found Him facing the pain of the cross for you and me. Consider that as physically painful as crucifixion was, the emotional and spiritual pain may have been even greater. He was ridiculed, shamed, and humiliated in the hours leading up to His death. Most significantly, He took our sin upon Himself that we might live. For our sake, He experienced a depth of aloneness we never have to experience as believers. He experienced separation from God. Who could claim to have been more alone than Christ as He hung on the cross, uttering the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46) He truly knows the pain of aloneness that we encounter. Can you appreciate the price He paid for you because He loves you? What feelings stir up within you as you consider such love? Write them here, along with an expression of your gratitude to Him.

The Meaning of Intimacy

Intimacy in relationship with God and other persons is the antidote for aloneness. But, what is intimacy? In our society, the meaning of the word is often distorted and misapplied. Many assume that intimacy refers only to physical or sexual encounters. Intimacy has a much broader and deeper meaning. It is primarily about knowing and being known for the right reasons and with the right motivations. Furthermore, intimacy is God's idea. It can be experienced in every dimension of our being—spirit, soul, and body. Intimacy includes knowing someone, allowing that person to know you, and seeking to be caringly involved in one another's lives.

But what does intimacy look like? How do we actually experience it in relationships, especially as single adults? Several words in the Old Testament relate to our need for intimacy with God and others. A review of these words will provide valuable insights into this central aspect of human longing and motivation.

1. Intimacy includes knowing another deeply.

YADA – to know deeply. One Hebrew word that relates to intimacy is transliterated, YADA, and comes from a root meaning "to know." It refers to having a deep personal awareness and understanding of another. This word appears in one of the saddest passages in the Old Testament, Job 19:14, where Job laments, "All my intimate friends detest me!" What makes the story of Job so sad is that he had come to feel so estranged from the very people who should have known him best, friends who were in position to remove some of his aloneness brought on by a variety of tragedies. Surely God knew us first and knows us best. He knew us from our mothers' wombs (Jer. 1:5), and is acquainted with our every thought, emotion, and motivation (Psa. 139:1-4). This kind of deep knowing of the heart and mind goes far beyond the mere sharing of facts, ideas, and opinions so common in many relationships. It is this kind of knowing that helps us understand what "oneness" requires in a marriage.

The New Testament also has a term for this type of deep knowledge of one another, *koinonia*, which translated from the Greek, means fellowship. This word speaks of a close partnership among people who share things in common. In I John 1:3, this *koinonia* describes the relationship among the Christians AND with God, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." Thus, intimacy is a desired standard in our human and divine relationships.

Deep personal awareness and understanding go far beyond the superficiality so common in many of our relationships today. The same word for close, personal knowing of another referenced in the book of Job is also used in Genesis 4:1 (KJV) which states, "Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and brought forth Cain." Here, the same word for intimacy was used to represent their sexual union, intended by God to be a special expression of intimacy reserved for husbands and wives. In this book we will show you how to experience intimacy in ways that honor God and meet one another's need to not be alone.

2. Intimacy includes letting someone know you.

SOD – to reveal or disclose. Another Hebrew word that refers to the concept of intimacy is transliterated as SOD. It refers to revelation or disclosure of one to another. This reference is even more startling than the first. It is used in Proverbs 3:32 (NASB), which states, "God is intimate with the upright." The same verse in the NIV says that the Lord, "...takes the upright into His confidence." This amazing and wonderful statement shows that the Creator of the universe chooses to disclose Himself to us, the created. We find the ultimate revelation of His self-disclosure in the coming of Jesus Christ, as, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Thus, God allows us to experience intimacy with Him. If God did not reveal Himself to us, we would know little about Him, much less, know His heart. Also, in the New Testament passage often referred to as His high priestly prayer, Jesus speaks about the eternal significance of this intimate knowing, when He boldly declares, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

In a similar manner, we must practice vulnerable communication in order for intimacy to develop in our relationships. This would include sharing the more personal aspects of ourselves, such as our hopes, aspirations, dreams, fears, regrets, and losses. We would see communication that goes far beyond the sharing of thoughts and opinions that require much less risk taking. In our

communication with our Heavenly Father, our prayers need to be open, inviting God into our confidence and trusting Him to treat us caringly and faithfully.

3. Intimacy includes caring involvement.

SAKAN – to be of use to. The third Hebrew word we will refer to, transliterated SAKAN, speaks of “beneficial or caring involvement.” In many ways, this concept suggests the motivation behind the mutual knowing that should exist in intimate relationships. Why do you think that God wants to know us so intimately, and to let us know Him? Does He use His knowledge to hurt us when we are most sensitive and vulnerable? Absolutely not! Psalm 139:1-3 (NASB) portrays God’s intimate knowledge of each person. It says, the Lord is “...intimately acquainted with all my ways.” He reveals the motive for this intimacy a few verses later, where the Psalmist records that the Heavenly Father knows us intimately in order to guide us and make us secure (Psalm 139:10).

God’s motive for intimate relationships is active, engaging, caring love. His expression of loving care is part of His very nature. He cares even though He knows all about our actions and thoughts that are far from perfect. In fact, God cares so much that He even gives sacrificially to us while we are in rebellion against Him (Rom. 5:8).

God’s knowledgeable, caring involvement in our lives beautifully portrays the liberating motivation that we need for our human relationships. Why should we seek to enter into our friend’s world? Why should we prioritize time for our loved ones? Why give sacrificially to others in the church? It should be because we care, and then choose to be caringly involved in their lives! It is not because of duty or obligation, and certainly not to manipulate or take for our own benefit. Such selfless, other-centered giving is not natural. Instead, it is supernatural, coming from God in Christ, who said, “freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8b).

Genuine intimacy is motivated by a desire for caring involvement with each other. Self-serving attitudes, on the other hand, wound others as they become vulnerable. Many adults fear intimate relationships because they were hurt as children by someone who knew them well, but used that knowledge to abuse or take advantage of them. We can allow God to build that desire within us.

Intimacy with God

Isn’t it incredible that the Creator of the universe would want you to know Him personally? Isn’t it gratifying to realize that He already knows you and wants only what is best for you? Don’t you feel honored to be asked to join His family and be included in His mission on earth? Or could it be that these thoughts are still difficult to grasp or embrace? Maybe you can identify with Joyce’s journey.

As I grew up, I saw God as a demanding, critical ruler who kept score of all my good and bad deeds. I felt a pressure to perform in order to be acceptable to Him. Though my family took me to church almost every week of my life then, I had a distorted picture of whom God is and how He loved me. At the age of 29, I came to see my sinful nature for what it was—rebellion against the God who truly loved me more than I could imagine. For the first time in my life, I knew that Jesus Christ had died sacrificially for ME, that my sin might be forgiven and my relationship with God restored. I admitted that I needed God’s forgiveness for my sins, and committed myself to the Lordship of Christ. Immediately, I sensed within that He loved me right where I was. My walk with God really began then. Now, I am learning how to know the heart of God and to love Him in return.

Intimacy with God begins when we take care of the offenses that have broken our relationship with Him—the sins that we have inevitably committed (Rom. 3:23) against God. He already loves us before we admit that we need Him (Rom. 5:8). But to fellowship with Him, we must resolve the break in our relationship caused by our rejection and rebellion against God. The good news is that the God of the universe has promised to forgive us if we turn to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. We can then relate to God in a personal way, just as we might with a very close friend for whom we hold utmost respect. We cannot earn that relationship through good deeds. It is received through believing that Christ paid the penalty for our sins and that God loves us and adopts us as His own children when we turn back to Him (Isa. 53:6; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 8:15-17, 23). Once a person is restored to fellowship with God, what does it look like to experience intimacy with Him on a daily basis? Let's return to the three Hebrew words that we used to define intimacy.

Deep knowing (YADA) – As we journey with God, we need to know his ways, not just His deeds. That means discerning the very heart of God—what He feels as well as what He says is truth. The Holy Spirit can lead us to such discernment if we give sufficient opportunity for communication with God. Reflections of coming to deeply know God would include memorizing and meditating on God's word, reflecting on what Jesus must have felt as we read about His ministry on earth, paraphrasing Scripture and journaling how it is relevant today in your life, and asking God in prayer how He might be trying to change or grow you, particularly in relationship to others.

Vulnerable disclosure (SOD) – We know that God has deeply known us from the time we were conceived (Psa. 139:3,13,16). But how vulnerable are you with God? In Psalm 51:6, David writes, Thou dost desire truth in my innermost being. Do your prayers express your contrition, your gratefulness, your dependency, or even your anger with God? Is there a humility that acknowledges God is in control but also trusts that He knows what is best for you? Can you admit to Him when you struggle to trust Him that way? Are you willing to ask the Creator to bring to your mind ways that He wants you to change? Are you willing to make yourself accountable to some trusted friends about these change areas? Admitting to God your need of Him and others and your present imperfections is essential for experiencing the joy of intimacy.

Caring involvement (SAKAN) – For most of Jesus' ministry on earth, His disciples were simply with Him. They were learning and being blessed by their relationship with Him. Eventually, however, He gave them opportunity to become involved in His work to save a lost world. He gave them a Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-19) that was to be motivated out of a Great Commandment heart (Mark 12:30-31). If we are intimately involved with someone, we will care about what they are about and become involved in some way. We will not remain aloof to His purposes. Such involvement may take many forms, just as there are many motivational gifts of the Spirit. Ultimately, we will be trying to discern what God is doing in our midst and become a part of it.

Relational Intimacy for Single Adults

When God created us with an innate need for intimacy with others, He also made provision for that need. He gave Adam the companionship of a wife and subsequently provided a family which could experience fellowship together. Later, Christ would establish His church, all those who would come to believe on Him. Though His followers would differ in talents, abilities, and personality, He gave them one Spirit that they might fellowship with the Father and each

other (John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:4). Thus, the church offers a larger community for intimate relationships.

Many singles, however, feel cheated or disadvantaged when it comes to experiencing godly intimacy with others. They have not been on the receiving end of much deep knowing, vulnerable disclosure, or caring involvement that was healthy or genuine. The same may be true for many married adults with regard to relational intimacy on an emotional level. But, an invalid perception or stigma adds to the dilemma of single adult aloneness in a couples-oriented world. Our society often regards single adults as "less than," or in a state of "limbo" that denies personal fulfillment.

How did you feel as you completed this questionnaire? Would it surprise you to know that many single adults find it difficult, even painful, to discuss their singleness? In one study, a single woman stated, "Since it hurts to talk about singleness, I choose to appear strong, in control." Another remarked, "You wouldn't understand and I don't want to appear desperate." In addition, many singles report ambivalent feelings about being unmarried. They enjoy the freedom and autonomy but often experience a sense of loss if there is no one readily available with whom to share interests, concerns, joys and sorrows. It is also common for singles to feel hurt and frustration because they are sometimes regarded as failures, particularly if they have experienced divorce. Thus, many singles carry painful emotions about singleness that they are facing alone.

It shouldn't surprise us that there is often pressure from within and from others for singles to "fix" their aloneness problem by finding a marriage partner. That, in our opinion, would be the wrong motive for anyone to marry. Instead, we would encourage singles, whether widowed, divorced, or never married, to develop a lifestyle of relational intimacy with God and trustworthy friends as a prerequisite to serious male-female engagements.

God has not forgotten single adults when it comes to their aloneness. For them, the resources available from God for meeting relational needs include families, church communities, and close personal friends. Sadly, our candidates for relational intimacy often fail us (and we them) in the meeting of these needs. This leaves us disillusioned and hurt. Often, in our frustration and fear, we settle for counterfeit forms of intimacy that never truly satisfy our longing for genuine relationship with others. Counterfeits of genuine intimacy are readily available. They often emphasize physical intimacy to the exclusion of relational and spiritual intimacy. In fact, the need for spiritual intimacy may be minimized or ignored altogether. In God's design, however, the priority is just the opposite. The condition of the spirit, one's relationship and walk with God, is the most defining part of a person, and the primary criteria for adult attachments (II Cor. 6:14).

Every manifestation of intimacy, whether of the spirit, soul, or body, should honor God and respect His commandments and principles. Soul intimacy, relating meaningfully on an emotional, psychological, and intellectual level, is something we should develop carefully with conscious effort. Physical intimacy, in the form of appropriate affectionate touch, is also important, though sexual intimacy is specifically reserved for the husband-wife relationship alone. In subsequent chapters, we will describe what each of these dimensions of intimacy looks like for single adults whose desire is to experience God's abundance in relationships.

Remember Pat and Kathy? They, like most of us, had come to regard their loneliness and desire for genuine intimacy with others to have been a sign of spiritual immaturity. They had been led to believe that if they were just spiritually strong enough, they would only need a relationship with God. They had acquired a limited and distorted understanding of the nature of relational neediness. They had not been taught how to experience real intimacy in

relationships in ways that honor God. God would not want us to live lives based upon lies and distortions. In this chapter, we have focused on the truth, recorded in the Scripture, that God created us with a need for relationship with Him and with others. We have made it clear that this neediness was not related to mankind's fallenness, but was instead part of God's intentional design for humankind to be relational even as He is. In the chapters that follow, we will discover more about our relational needs and identify practical ways to experience intimacy in relationships.

Encountering God in His Word

"A God Who Lets Us Know Him"

Genesis 18:1-33 (focal passage: Genesis 18:16-19)

Read this passage and note how the Lord takes Abraham into His confidence, saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (Gen. 18:17) Can you imagine this? The Creator of the universe is ready to administer judgment on the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, and stops to advise a mere mortal of His plans. Put yourself in Abraham's shoes. Can you think of a time when someone in a powerful or prestigious position let you in on her plans or even sought your counsel? But, this is the character of God, according to Proverbs 3:32 which says, "...He is intimate with the upright." (NASB), or "...the Lord...takes the upright into his confidence."

u Why do you think God chose to include Abraham in His plans and deliberations?

u What would you feel inside if God chose to bring you into His "board room?"

u Rewrite or paraphrase Proverbs 3:32 in your own words:

u As you apply Proverbs 3:32 to yourself personally (that God would really share His thoughts and heart with you as you walk with Him), what do you sense inside?

u Write your response here to God's offer to relate to you on such an intimate level:

Experiencing Intimacy Group Dialogue

If you do not have a designated group leader, choose someone in the group who will serve to facilitate the discussion. Begin by briefly reviewing the discussion guidelines.

Discussion Guidelines

Discussion Suggestions for Chapter One

1. Unless you have met previously, introduce yourselves and tell about the place you grew up.
2. Share something you like or dislike about the work or activity you do most.
3. Discuss what you think about the guidelines for these discussions.
4. State what you hope to gain by completing *Discovering Intimacy*.
5. Tell about your own experience with loneliness and how people close to you have typically responded to your loneliness.
6. Describe a person in your life who truly joined you at a point of loneliness or sadness and was an encouragement to you. Tell what we would have observed this person DOING that was most helpful to you at that time in your life. Which of the three dimensions of intimacy (deep knowing, vulnerable disclosure, caring involvement) was being displayed?
7. Close your time together by asking a volunteer to pray for the development of intimacy with God and others throughout the duration of the course.

Experiencing Intimacy Journey-mate Encounters

The Journey-mate Encounter exercises at the end of each chapter give you an additional opportunity to experience biblical principles about relational intimacy at a deeper level. These exercises encourage personal and relational growth. Since growth means change, there is some degree of tension or anxiety present. Sharing this process of change with a trusted friend or partner removes your aloneness and encourages perseverance. As you begin your meetings, you may want to review together the Guidelines for Discussions on page x. Here are a few reminders for your Journey-mate Encounters.

- u Set aside one to two hours for the meeting to give ample time for each person to share.
- u Select a meeting location that minimizes distractions or interruptions.
- u Read the chapter and complete all the written exercises before meeting to discuss them.
- u Purpose to start on time and complete each exercise, staying focused on the material.

Suggestions for Journey-mate Encounter #1

1. Begin by talking about what each of you hopes to gain by completing the Discovering Intimacy material and experiencing the principles in your journey-mate relationships.
2. Next, list any fears or concerns that you may sense concerning your journey-mate discussions. Share your lists with each other.
3. To learn more about each other, take turns sharing a positive memory that you recall from your adolescence that your journey-mates do not already know.
4. Now, tell about your own experiences with loneliness and how people close to you typically respond to your loneliness. (For example, teased, ridiculed, comforted, offered advice, etc.)
5. Take turns sharing from page 14 about people who modeled godly intimacy during your youth.
6. Complete the Intimacy Inventory for Single Adults (Appendix A) and discuss your results with each other. Focus on deepening your understanding of yourselves and one another.
7. Close with prayer for each other, particularly for God to increase your intimacy with Him as you go through this process.

Hiding the Word in Your Heart
Genesis 2:18a

Write the verse here:

Repeat the verse from memory each day for several weeks. Using the space below, you may want to journal ways that God has allowed you to experience the verse as you have hidden it away in your heart.

Check the box at the right when you have committed the verse to memory. Continue to repeat the verse daily for at least three weeks.