



THE SEARCH FOR INTIMACY

I have found the one whom my soul loves . . .

Upon my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. "I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves." I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen found me, as they went about in the city. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

—Song of Solomon 3:1–4 RSV

The University of Northern Iowa offered an art course that included a most unusual exercise. The teacher brought a shopping bag filled with lemons and gave a lemon to each class member. The assignment was for each student to keep the lemon day and night—smelling, handling, and examining it. The next class period, without warning, students were told to put their lemons back in the bag. Then each was asked to find his lemon. Surprisingly, most did so without difficulty. This caused me to question, "If people can get that close and personal with a lemon overnight, how intimate could our relationship with our Creator become if we spent more time with Him?"

One of the richest treasures in our faith journey is the joy and blessing of cultivating a secret, intimate life with God. Imagine being hidden away in a quiet room behind closed doors. You're comfortably sitting, exploring God's Word. You feel as though Jesus Himself is seated across from you. You can almost smell and physically feel the fragrant breeze of the Holy Spirit as He gently blows through your soul. You talk some, but you listen more as Creator speaks in the language of intimate friendship that cannot be fully described to anyone else. Your spirit is ignited. Your mind is renewed. You almost hesitate to rise and go about your normal activities for fear of losing the closeness.

Hell will do everything imaginable to hinder and distort this indescribable delight and turn it into nothing more than ritual or obligation. What you find, however, is the more you fight the distractions and invest the time and energy to squeeze in every precious moment in this place of intimacy, the more you will sense His vibrant life-giving presence throughout your days. Your time with Christ becomes like a refreshing glass of lemonade on a hot summer day. You find yourself developing an almost compulsive addiction to the secret place and your attitude becomes contagious to those around you.

Song of Solomon is filled with a language of not only the love of a bride and bridegroom, but of a holy love through which our hearts can commune with our Lord. It portrays an intensity of Christ's love for us, the church (His bride), and our love for Him. Let's explore five important principles, found in Song of Solomon 3, for cultivating intimacy with Christ.

 **PERSONAL OR
COVENANT GROUP
INTERACTION**

Take a few moments to write in your prayer journal or share with two or three other group members your response to the following:

1. “I recall a time when my heart and soul so longed for a deeper relationship with Christ that I was willing to _____.”
2. What did you discover in your intimate times with the Lord that helped to sustain you in a later night season or time of confusion, loss, illness, or distraction?
3. As you read the words of Isaiah (58:6–9), what do you sense the Lord saying to you about helping others, who may be facing a night season or living a disenfranchised life?
4. A Spirit-empowered disciple discerns the relational needs of others with a heart to give of His love (Phil. 4:19, Luke 6:30–31). Share a time when the light of hope and love broke through in your life as you ministered to someone in need of encouragement or provision?

I. RISE FROM OUR COMPLACENCY

First, this search of the soul involves rising from our complacency. We must learn to define and clearly distinguish between the active and passive life. Notice the beloved Shulamite woman had to be willing to be inconvenienced even in the middle of the night. She longed so for the one she loved that she climbed out of bed to go and search for him. The Hebrew word translated “sought” indicates searching by any method—specifically in worship or prayer. It implies a striving after, asking, begging, desiring, and inquiring. She had to rise from bed because she couldn’t wait until a later time.

I recall a time, years ago, when I was preparing to minister in an island country with a spiritual atmosphere darkened by a history of pagan traditions and practices. As we prepared for the trip, I sensed an urgency in my spirit to spend an entire night in prayer. Although I had done this in group settings, it was different alone. Of course, I experienced a struggle with my flesh wanting to slip in and out of sleep mode, but I persevered until early the next morning. The result was a new level of sensitivity to the voice of the Lord and a powerful time of ministry for our entire team.

Seeking the Lord even in the night seasons—the silent and solitary times of the soul—is a true expression of our love. The night Solomon speaks of is a “twisting away of the light,” a time when the light “holds back” and darkness sets in. Causes for the night times in our lives can be the result of confusion or questioning, loss or illness, times of distraction or worldliness. Often in those times when we are seeking our own desires, we neglect His desires and lose touch with His heart.

How much God’s heart also longs for us to minister to others who find themselves in dark places. As we attempt to put life in proper perspective—looking beyond our desires or struggles—this idea of helping others becomes transformed into a call from the Lord. His call from a place of intimacy will cause His church to rise out of the bed of our comfort and complacency to not only search for Him but respond to His directives as never before.

The prophet Isaiah, speaking God’s Word to His people who were fasting and intensifying their seeking of Him, gave this challenge:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: “Here am I” (Isaiah 58:6–9 NIV).

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

—Psalm 63:6–8

Remember, night times are not always bad times. It was in the night when God delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt. The Psalmist often speaks of seeking after and worshiping the Lord in the night.

II. SEARCH FOR HIM PERSISTENTLY

Not only did our searching woman have to rise from her complacency, she had to seek for her lover persistently. Sometimes in our pursuit of intimacy, we will find the Lord is not always easily found. Mary and Martha experienced this when their brother Lazarus was ill to the point of death. Christ didn't delay coming because He did not love them. Scripture plainly tells us that Jesus loved the two sisters and their brother (see John 11). Yet, He may have been withholding something they had already witnessed, so they could experience something greater. They knew Jesus could heal, or they would not have called for Him. Perhaps, He longed to reveal Himself to them in an even mightier way than ever before, as the Resurrection and the Life.

John records Mary Magdalene's search for Jesus' body and her conversation with the angels following His death and burial in this way:

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" (John 20:13–15 NIV).

That's almost comical when you try to picture this woman attempting to carry a dead man's body across rugged, Middle Eastern terrain. Yet, you feel the intensity of her passionate desire for Him. Much like the woman in Solomon's Song, she was searching persistently.

III. PRESS IN TO FIND GOD PERSONALLY

The Beloved rose from her comfort, began searching persistently, and then she began to seek help from the watchmen. Historically, the Jewish priests or leaders were considered watchmen, but even they could not tell her where to find the one she loved and was so desperately seeking. She had to press in to find him personally.

In Hebrews 13:17, we are told that our leaders keep watch over us as those who must give an account for our souls. Denominational leaders, ministers, small group leaders, and friends are great blessings in our lives, but we cannot exist on someone else's experience or anointing. Drawing near to God and experiencing intimacy with Christ is a very personal and sensitive issue.

Just as you cannot tell a young groom a step-by-step process for how to make love with his bride, neither can someone tell you how to find intimacy with your Lord. Can you imagine some of the young couples in your church, who may be getting married this summer, going on their honeymoon with a point-by-point card of "how to have intimacy with your bride"? Step one: tell her

The power of knowing leads to an intellectual experience. The power of loving leads to an unquenchable passion for union with Christ.



**PERSONAL OR
COVENANT GROUP
INTERACTION**

Spirit-empowered disciples experience God as He really is through deepened intimacy with Him. Take a few moments and respond to the following in your personal journal or with other group members:

1. Have you ever come to the place in your personal or public worship times that you want to tell God: “I’m tired of coming into this room every morning or every Sunday and hearing myself talk, pray, or sing with no response!”
2. Share about a time when you tenaciously continued past the enemy’s roadblocks to intimately commune with the Lord.
3. How did your freedom to love and worship Christ impact others who were observing (Matthew 5:16)?

she is beautiful. Step two: gently touch her cheek and run your hand through her hair. Step three: turn down the lights. Step four . . . well, you get the picture!

We must distinguish between the power of knowing and the power of loving. The power of knowing leads to an intellectual experience. The power of loving leads to an unquenchable passion for union with Christ. We must search to find and experience the presence, power, and anointing of God for ourselves. Powerful sermons can challenge us. Beautiful, anointed music can motivate us. Other people’s testimonies can encourage us, but we must always press in to experience God individually. Most often that means avoiding the crowds, activities, and social media that may be substitutes for true intimacy.

IV. HOLD TO HIM TENACIOUSLY

Notice what the Shulamite did when she found him: *“Scarcely had I passed [the watchmen] when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go till I had brought him to my mother’s house, to the room of the one who conceived me” (Song of Solomon 3:4 NIV).*

When she finally found Him, she wouldn’t let Him go. The word “held” is from a root word meaning, “to seize” with the idea of holding in possession. I picture a wife holding her husband who has just returned safely from military deployment on foreign soil or a father seizing and clinging to a child who is running toward a busy highway. Oh, that we would seize and hold to Christ in the same way that we hold to so many other, less beneficial things. Our possessions, our pride, our prejudice, and our misdirected passions can do more to drive us from Him than to draw us near Him.

When we find the Lord, we must not be easily satisfied. At times, when we are spiritually seeking and pressing in to God, we get a taste of His presence and draw back from seeking or holding to Him. This is where we miss so much of the victory and overcoming power He longs for us to experience. We must be like Jacob who wrestled with the angel of the Lord all night until He blessed him. He would not let this mysterious stranger go. We need to hold to our Lord tenaciously with a bulldog’s stubbornness until we experience the fullness of the blessing, guidance, anointing, and power He has for us. When Jacob wrestled with God he was changed from a “deceiver” to a “prince with God.” The transformation of his intimate encounter was so deep; he literally walked differently from that point forward.

As we cling to God and refuse to give up our search for intimacy, we will experience the fullness of His blessing and favor. We will experience a greater transformation into His likeness. The watching world will want to experience the same joy in place of their strife and emptiness. We consistently encounter people like this. We work beside them, worship beside them, live next door to them, or perhaps live with them. They are just about to despair of ever finding peace and intimacy in any relationship. They’ve had their share of disappointments and need to see what the little boy, frightened by the storm, called “a God with skin on.”

“Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.”

—Isaiah 26:8

Christ told His followers: “. . . let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). How tenaciously are we holding to our Lord and the testimony of His goodness?

V. COMMUNE WITH HIM INTIMATELY

We rise from our complacency, search for Him persistently, press in to find Him personally, hold to Him tenaciously, and finally, we must commune with Him intimately.

Notice where she took her lover when she had found him. In Song of Solomon 1:4, he is the one who leads the bride into his chambers. Here, she leads Him into her mother's chamber (3:4). In some seasons of life, the grace of Jesus Christ seems to draw us more intensely to Him; and other times, we are desperate to draw Him to us.

In the Eastern culture, one large apartment often serves for the whole family, so the bride speaks of her mother's apartment and her own together. Some writers explain that our mother after the Spirit is the church, the new Jerusalem. We could also see this as representing our human family, our mother after the flesh.

I believe God is wanting to birth new things in the kingdom of God. This place of intimacy could refer to the chamber where new birth is conceived. Chamber is defined as “the innermost part” or what I see as the secret place with God where deep intimate love is found, and the seed of His plans and purposes are sown afresh in our lives. We were conceived or brought into the kingdom by faith. In our searching for intimacy, new faith is born.

CONCLUSION

Jean Vanier describes our need for that intimate place by stretching out his arm and cupping his hand as if he is holding a small, wounded bird. If he opens his hand fully, the bird will try to flutter his wings, fall to the ground, and die. If he closes his hand, the bird will be crushed. An intimate place is like his cupped hand, neither totally open nor totally closed. It is a place where growth and healing can occur.

This secret place of intimacy with the Lord is vitally important to receiving the fullness of all He wants to birth in the world today. Out of this place of abiding under His shadow is where the creative force and power of His Spirit will be released in our lives through faith. The demonstration of God's power to perform signs, wonders, and miracles through His people will be the direct result of our spending time communing with Him intimately in the secret place under the shadow of His glory. We must guard our time with Him and the seed He places within us.

Out of this place of abiding under His shadow is where the creative force and power of His Spirit will be released in our lives through faith.

*“The Search for Intimacy” was written by Kay Horner, Executive Director of The Helper Connection. You are granted permission to print, reproduce, and utilize this for personal devotion or covenant group settings without prior approval from the author.

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