

Introduction [Slide 1 Title]

Good morning Wintonbury! It is such an honor to open God's word with you this morning. We are in week 3 of the series titled "Intimacy with God." This has been a topic near and dear to our heart for a long time. My wife Barbara and I have worked for the last 34 years helping individuals and groups grow in intimacy with God. Which would come as quite a shock for many who knew me years ago. I am not known for being a warm and fuzzy kind of guy. I am more comfortable working with things than with people. I am a poster child for those who live in their head. And those of us who live in our head don't really get intimacy. We easily lose track of time – thinking. We often prioritize things over people. This limits our ability to truly connect with God or anyone. Building and maintaining intimate relationships can be extremely difficult.

On top of that I am a retired engineer. I spent more than 50 years designing things not working with people. I remember when I first started working and I was comparing notes one day with a friend. I was telling her about the trouble I was having with some CMOS circuit boards and she was telling about counselling some teenager who was contemplating suicide. I wasn't so blind that I didn't see the big difference. But almost.

And it was not just me. I worked with guys who didn't get intimacy. One of our employees showed up one day for work wearing this t-shirt. [Slide 2 T-Shirt]

And I have to admit that it is easy to avoid all kinds of intimacy when you live in your head.

But on the flip side, over the last 40 years I have begun to experience deep intimacy with God and that has helped me not to live in my head so much and helped me learn relational intimacy with others.

In the text we are going to look at today we are going to hear Jesus' vision for intimacy with us. And I want to tell you, even for me – an engineer who lives in his head, it is breath-taking.

Let's pray.

Before we look at the text, let me see if I can provide some more definitions of what intimacy and specifically intimacy with God is.

Definition of Intimacy

The word that best helps me understand intimacy is: ineffable. Okay, I know that's not a word I use every day – but there is no word that better describes intimacy with God – ineffable.

Intimacy is Ineffable [Slide 3 Ineffable]

Webster's tells us that something is ineffable when it is too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words. In fact, I would say that any attempt to define intimacy with God with words makes it less than it actually is. That really is the second part of the definition. Something that is ineffable is incapable of being expressed in words. The final part of the definition is that it describes an object or an experience that is often wonderful and/or beautiful. Intimacy with God is greater and more beautiful than words can ever describe.

André had a good definition 2 weeks ago. In this definition, an intimate relationship is: [Slide 4 André's Definition]

1. Close
2. Connected
3. Supported

4. Open
5. Vulnerable
6. Where we share our thoughts /emotions /dreams/ hopes

Remember that no one word captures the essence of intimacy and no definition completely can capture the breadth of it. Remember its ineffable. So, let's look at a few more definitions to help us grow in our understanding intimacy.

In [Slide 5 David Richo]'s book *How to Be An Adult in Relationships*, he gives us the 5 A's for Demonstrating Intimacy

1. We show **A**ttention,
2. We show **A**cceptance,
3. We show **A**ppreciation,
4. We show **A**ffection
5. We **A**llow the other to be who they really are

[Slide 6 The Climate] One last set of definitions that defines a climate of personal intimacy

1. Someone who wants to know you and be known
2. Someone who wants to love you and be loved
3. Someone with whom you feel safe to be who you are
4. Someone with whom you feel at home
5. Someone with whom you both can be transparent

How about you? André asked the question on the first week about what you thought about intimacy.

[Slide 7 Question] The questions I would like you to start with this week is: Do these words describe your relationship with Jesus? Do you have an intimate relationship with Jesus?

God wants to have that kind of relationship with you. For example, God wants to know you and be known; love you and be loved and so on. For those interested, there is a handout with God's intimate words to us from Scripture. It is also an appendix to the sermon text on line and a link to it in the Sermon Engagement App.

As we will see in our text today, Jesus is inviting you and me into that kind of relationship with Him.

Scripture John 10 Intimate Devotion

With that as the ground underneath us to understand what intimacy is, let's open God's word. Turn with me to John 10 verses 14 and 15. In the Bibles under the chairs, it is page 748. [Slide 8 Text]

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. NIV

Let's start by understanding the word that is being used for knowing in our text. Our New Testament is written in Greek but we always have to remember that the words that Jesus is speaking are probably in Aramaic or Hebrew. But even more important, He would be speaking from a Hebraic mindset. To understand what Jesus is saying we have to get into His mindset; his cultural and religious understanding of the time. How did the Hebrews understand knowledge? For they thought about knowledge and knowing in a very different way than we Westerners do. When we open our Bibles, we

attempt to grow in our knowledge of God by accumulating facts and principles. What we would call head knowledge. Even when we allow the words of the Bible to transform us, we are often doing it independent of our relationship with God. We read, “Be holy as I am holy” and we try to find ways to grow in holiness instead of trying to grow our relationship with the holy God. But the Hebraic view is that “knowledge of God” is all about having a life in intimate relationship with him.

The Hebrew word for knowing is not about information gathering – it is about an intimate relationship. It is relational and experiential knowledge. Let me demonstrate that in two ways:

When the Hebrew language was first put down in writing, the alphabet was initially symbols. Each letter represented an object. Later, modern Hebrew used the same alphabet but different symbols to represent them. The word for “know” in ancient Hebrew consisted of two symbols:

[Slide 9 Know] A door

An eye

To communicate the word for know, the ancient Hebrews chose two letters symbolizing something to go into – a door. And an eye to symbolize looking. To know for the Hebrew is to “go into and look”

Hmmm. Does anyone remember the definition of intimacy that Jeff Brooks gave two weeks ago when he was helping André with the sermon? [Open up to the Congregation]

“Into me see” [Slide 10 Into – me - see]

To know a person for the Hebrews of Jesus day was not to have accumulated some information or facts about the person, but to see into them. That even sounds intimate. To relationally experience them. To go in and get inside and look around.

There is one other way we can get into the Hebrew mindset of what it means to know. Look at these two translations of an Old Testament passage for Isaiah 11:2. [Slide 11 Isaiah 11:2] Here is the way we translate this text:

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. (NIV)

The Jewish Bible translates it:

The spirit of the LORD shall alight upon him: a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel and valor, a spirit of devotion and reverence for the LORD.¹

Do you see the difference? What we call the spirit of Knowledge they speak in relational terms: spirit of devotion.

Even the Greek word used four times in our text today is not talking about head knowledge but can be used to describe intimate and experiential knowledge. Like the Hebrews word for [Slide 12 Greek for Know] knowledge, Ginosko is experiential knowledge that comes from a close, intimate relationship.

When Mary responded to the angel’s proclamation that she would bear a son, she is translated as saying:

¹ <https://engediresourcecenter.com/2015/06/30/dat-elohim-knowledge-of-god/>

“How can this be, since I have not known a man?” (Luke 1:34).

And Matthew records that Joseph “²⁵ knew her not until she had given birth to a son.” (Matthew 1:25).

That is definitely not head knowledge! Armed with an understanding of what it means for one person to know another in Jesus’ day, let’s go back to our text? Do you see what Jesus is saying here? [Slide 13 Text] I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father and I know each other. Wait a minute? Is that possible? I am going to know Jesus just as the Father and Son know each other?

How well does the Father know Jesus? And how well does Jesus know the Father? We don’t have a whole lot revealed to us about the inner workings of the Trinity. But I think we can say with 100% assurance that the Father and the Son know each other intimately. And, more importantly, I don’t think they do it through texting.

Do you feel that you know Jesus as well as Jesus knows the Father and the Father knows Jesus? That’s impossible! But wait! Jesus doesn’t speak of things that are impossible.

If this is not impossible, then how is it possible? Do you know anyone who knows Jesus as well as the Father and Son know each other? It is hard to get our minds around that if we take our western understanding of knowledge. The Father must know the Son better than I ever will. When we think that way we are thinking in quantitative terms. How the Father knows more about the Son than I do.

But if we start thinking about it in relational terms, it is possible. The promise is that in the same way, in like manner; as the Father knows Jesus we are invited to know Jesus. In the way the Father and Son know each other, we will know Jesus.

So that leads to the question: How do the Father and Son know each other?

They don’t do it by sitting around and watching TV together. They don’t do it by looking at their phones while together. They do it with deep intimate communion / communication with each other / working together. That is the essence of the promise in our text today. Jesus is saying that in the same way that the Father and Son have deep intimate communion, You and I will communicate with each other. Work together.

Doesn’t that sound like an invitation we would want to positively respond to?

But How can we grow in our intimate relational knowledge of God

God has given us His written word and that is an incredible gift. A miraculous gift. It is truly a letter from God. But there is a qualitative difference between hearing God’s voice and reading His letter. I love when movies have someone reading a letter and they have the writer reading it. It makes it so personal and so intimate. We need to learn to read the Scriptures like He is speaking right to us. As we read, listen for His voice.

When we read the Scriptures listening for the voice of God, the still small voice makes the written word come alive to become the living word. There is nothing magical about the words written on the pages of the Bible or the pixels on your phone. It is the Spirit who speaks to us as we are reading that enables us to hear it as the word of God. For example when we read: [Slide 14 Never Leave You No Highlight]

“Keep your lives free of the love of money. Be content with what you have. Because God has said: Never will I leave you; Never will I forsake you.” When God is speaking through His word, it is if God is speaking right to us. We hear His still small voice. The words jump off the page. It’s as if there is a

bright yellow highlighter on the words. [Slide 15 Never Leave You Highlight in Yellow] Never will I leave you! You are talking to me aren't you God?

Did any of you try to read the Bible before you became a follower of Jesus? I did. And it meant nothing. I was accumulating some information. But it wasn't the word of God to me. But after I became a follower, God started speaking to me through the same words that I had read earlier.

The Father and Son don't know one another by accumulating facts and principles but by intimately speaking with one another. And the same is true with us.

Sometimes it is through hearing His voice in the Scripture. Sometimes He speaks to us in words apart from the Bible. We hear His still small voice speaking right directly to our situation. It never contradicts His written word but we know it is God's voice speaking to us. It is not usually audible.

Sometimes God speaks to us through people. But again, it is still the still small voice of the Spirit that says: "This is me speaking to you." And someone else's words become the word of God to you.

[Slide 16 John 10] No matter which case (the Bible, prayer, or other people), these are examples of the voice of God through the still small voice. And there is nothing like it. Words spoken just to you. Just for your situation. Whenever the quiet whisper of God's voice speaks to our hearts it is powerful, transformative and relational. It is intimate. They take your breath away. Your intimacy with God grows.

Let me illustrate the power of the voice of God and how it fosters intimacy with two stories:

Mandy and Doug

Last year at this time, Barbara and I led a small group of about 20 from a very small church in a prayer practicum. We were teaching them some of the principles about the hearing the voice of God. There was a man who was a very good church goer. But he had not ever had an intimate encounter with the living God. One day in January, he had his dog Mandy at a pond. And Mandy chased a stick out onto the pond. About 30 feet from shore the dog fell through the ice. Doug was frantic. For about 30 minutes he watched the dog struggle trying to get out. He even stripped to his shorts expecting he would have to go in. Out of the blue, he heard the voice of God say to him: "Douglas, be calm."

Immediately he became calm and was able to think clearly and he taught the dog to use his paws to break the ice. Within a minute, Mandy was free.

In the class, I asked Doug:

"If your wife was there and she said: 'Douglas – just be calm.' Do you think you would have calmed down?"

Doug replied "Absolutely not!"

I said: "Well how about if I was standing there and reminded you of what we had been teaching about prayer, do you think that would have brought calm?"

Doug was clear: "No."

This was such a clear demonstration of the power of the intimate voice of God. It is unlike any other voice. And the effect was to not just draw Mandy to shore, but it drew Douglas closer to Jesus. It was the intimate voice of God saying: Douglas, be calm.

Here's another example: Even when God speaks a corrective – it is so different than when anyone else issues a corrective. No matter who it is, when someone tells me that something needs to change about me, I don't like it. Once before I was preaching, our daughter pointed out that I had tooth paste around my mouth. Now you would think I would be glad to wipe that off and not go in front of people with tooth paste on my mouth. But I didn't like it. I did wipe it off! But when God's voice speaks a corrective, there is an intimate love associated with it that somehow makes me receive it in a different way. I cannot explain it but let me try to illustrate it.

Many of you know that Rich Ainsworth, the pastor before André, is a big Dallas Cowboy fan. A number of years ago he was given the opportunity to give the devotions to the team before a game. This was an exciting honor. And he diligently prepared a message. The next day, he was asked, on his day off, to give a devotion to another group of people who were in some sort of institutional program. It was to be on his day off. As he was preparing, he felt the still small voice of God say to him that these folk are just as important as the Dallas Cowboys. What Rich told me about that experience is that from the written word of God, he knew that every person was equally important in God's eyes. And that the message he was to give was as important as the one he gave to the Cowboys. But that intimate encounter with God's voice changed him in a way that the principle revealed in the word of God did not.

These examples don't mean that the written word of God is less powerful. Just less intimate until the Spirit of God makes it personal. We are changed by intimate encounters. If I receive a letter from Barbara telling me how much she loves me, that is awesome. But to hear her whisper it in my ear is much more powerful not because the truth content is different but because it is more intimate. And we are changed by intimacy.

The Big How

But how can we encounter that intimate voice of God as we read the Scriptures and as we pray? How can we hear His voice more often? Is that a realistic goal? André did a great job two weeks ago with the 6 P's. All were excellent. If you haven't heard that message, get it on line. Use the Sermon Engagement App to incorporate those 6 P's into your DNA. These will help you learn to hear the voice of God. But I have one more letter I want to add. If you want to regularly encounter the intimate voice of God, I have another letter for you – and it's not P but it rhymes with P.

If I was to come to you and say, Barbara and I are just not communicating very well. And when we do talk, it doesn't seem like either one of us is listening. Assuming you knew me really well, if you could give us one word of advice, what would it be?

[Open up to Congregation]

Time - Distractionless time. Like in any relationship, attentive time is absolutely critical to intimate communication with God. Not on the run. Not when others are around. Just the two of you. I'm going to propose something radical. What if you took a whole day – just you and Jesus? Or even half a day? Take your Bible, a notebook and pen and Jesus. Find a place to get away from distractions. You could

do it here at church. Other churches in the area will open their sanctuaries. If the weather was nice, you could do it outside. If you need some help planning this, I am willing to help.

[Slide 17 Take Time] As you take the time, don't read the Bible for information. As you open the word, ask Him to speak to you.

In your prayers, don't just rattle through your list of prayers, ask Him to speak to you. Turn all your prayers into questions that invite dialogue. Bring to Him a question that You want to talk to Him about. Offer it to Him.

Accept this invitation from Jesus to enter into a relationship with Him that is just as vibrant and real and powerful as the relationship that exists in the Trinity. And expect Him to speak to you. I don't envision the Trinity just sitting around the fire smiling at each other. There is a dynamic interchange of communications that flows between them. And they are inviting you into that! That is the vision of intimacy that Jesus casts in our text today. Intimate, dynamic, experiential knowing of Jesus in the same way that Jesus knows the Father and the Father knows Jesus. That's the invitation. And not just once. But regularly.

I cannot emphasize enough that intimacy takes time. How much time? More that you are probably spending now with Him. For years, while running a small high tech business, leading a ministry doing over 100 retreats a year, and putting my large family first, I was able to take a day apart most months to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus. I don't say this to make you feel guilty or to say "hey look at me! Wonder man!" I say this to encourage you. You can do it. André does it. And it's not just for people in full time ministry. It is for people who want to grow intimate with a God who longs to be called by you "My Father!"

There is no end to God. And there is more intimacy awaiting you than you can ever imagine. An invitation to know Jesus as the Father knows the Son and as the Son knows the Father. Do you really want that?

Let's take a few minutes as we close. Do you want that kind of relationship with Jesus. Where you know each other in the same way as the Father and Son know each other. Where your knowledge of God is an intimate knowledge? Jesus is inviting you "in to me see." We'll take a few minutes of silence and then I will close it.

[Silence]

[Prayer]

If you would like some prayer after the service, please feel free to come up. If the still small voice is calling you to become one of Jesus followers so that you can have that intimate relationship with Jesus in the same way that the Father and Son do, come up and one of us will pray with you to bring Jesus into your life and go through that door of intimacy.

There is a handout here that have God's intimate words to you from the Scripture. Also, check out the Sermon Engagement App for this sermon to more deeply engage with the message today.

[Slide 18 Sermon Engagement]