

## Shaped by Intimacy

Jesus lived with twelve disciples. He travelled with the twelve, ate with the twelve, taught the twelve, sent the twelve out to herald the good news and heal the sick, and prayed with the twelve. There were times when he prayed with the twelve and no one else. "One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him" (Luke 9:18). But there were other times when Jesus was only with the three.

We might compare the twelve to a kind of task-oriented small group. It was training ground for the twelve and Jesus was their discipler and teacher, but--as we shall see in the next lesson--it was a group in which Jesus was himself apprenticed as well. But the three is something different. In a group of three or four, intimacy can happen in ways that does not usually happen in a group of twelve or more.

Intimacy defies definition. It is a subjective, personal experience of being in relation with another. It enables one to actually see into the other: "into-me-see" or intimacy. It is sharing ourselves, our experiences, our feelings, our secrets, our lives. It is letting another person into our real selves—to let them see how we see truly see ourselves. Obviously, then, intimacy needs safety; intimacy only happens in safe places with safe people. It only happens where there is trust. And it usually only happens within a small group (three to five people) or with a few people.

Jesus built this kind of intimacy with Peter, James and John. He shared life with them in more intimate ways than he did the twelve, according to the record we have. He took them places and did things with them that he did not do with the twelve. Jesus built an intimate trust with those three.

*When they arrived at the house, Jesus wouldn't let anyone go in with him except Peter, John, James and the little girl's father and mother. (Luke 8:51)*

**We build intimacy with others through *shared experiences*.** For some reason, which is not explained in the text, Jesus did not take the twelve into the daughter's room. He only took Peter, James and John. He shared something with them that deepened their friendship and developed intimacy through shared experience. We partner with each other in a task, or spend time with each other in personal, tragic or thrilling moments. Through the shared experiences we learn to trust each other as we see each other coping with reality.

Jesus took Peter, James and John into the inner sanctum of his miracle-working on this occasion. He shared this liberating, amazing and thrilling moment with them. The shared experienced bonded them in ways that only experiences can. The utter ecstasy and joy of seeing this adolescent girl come back to life seared this moment in their group consciousness. It was an intimate moment between them.

*Jesus took Peter, John and James up on a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. (Luke 9:28-29)*

**We build intimacy with others through *shared strength*.** The Transfiguration takes place immediately after Jesus begins to tell his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to die. This moved their relationship to a deeper level and it must have generated stress, confusion and alarm among them. As he faced this final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus needed affirmation and blessing. The Transfiguration was a divine affirmation and blessing: "This is my Son whom I love."

Jesus brought Peter, James, and John with him as a small prayer group, and God showed up. Together, as an intimate group, the four are strengthened, renewed and affirmed by the divine presence. Jesus finds strength not only in the divine presence but a divine presence experienced in community with his intimate friends. They share this moment of strength, affirmation and blessing. They are mutually encouraged and strengthened.

*He took Peter, James and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. (Mark 14:33-34)*

**We build intimacy with others through *shared feelings*.** Jesus had just come from an emotional last supper with the twelve (Judas had betrayed him, the disciples had argued about who was the greatest, Jesus had washed their feet) and had walked over to the Garden of Gethsemane with the eleven during which Peter and the rest pledged their loyalty to the death (but then they failed to keep their promises). He took the three deeper into the garden than the other disciples. He would lean on them for support in more intimate way than the other eight.

Walking with the three Jesus begins to feel the enormity of what is about to happen. His spirit is troubled--even frightened--and overwhelmed. Grief and sorrow flood his heart; it crushes him to the point that he wishes he were dead. He agonizes over his decision to submit to the will of the Father. Astoundingly, he confesses the depth of his feeling to his intimate friends; he reveals his true self. He shares his feelings with them. He wants his friends to "watch with him"--to share his feelings, to pray with him, to be there for him. He needs a listening ear; he needs the support of his intimates.

**Jesus needed the intimacy of human companionship.** He would not be authentically human otherwise. God did not create us to live in isolation from others. Rather, he built into us a bonding mechanism that connects with other people. This can become unhealthy (as in codepenency), but connection with other people is necessary for personal, mental and spiritual health. Humans are meant to live in relation with others just as the Triune God is community-in-relation. When these relationships remain superficial we lose what God intended intimacy to provide.

Human intimacy provides authentic relationship, accountability in living, support in times of need, companions to share the joys, and the ability to live without secrets. Jesus nurtured this kind of intimacy with Peter, James and John. His apprenticeship in human intimacy offers us a model.

The journey into intimacy is difficult. It is sometimes disappointing--even as it was for Jesus himself. But any other journey is lonely, fearful and isolating. We cannot become what God intends without intimacy with others. Without intimacy--at some level--we become a facade, a Hollywood front and we live with a divided self. We let others see one self, but the real self we keep hidden. We really don't want anyone to see us as we really are--we really don't want intimacy--because we fear their rejection and disappointment. But we cannot truly be ourselves without others--a few--knowing us.

Do you have people with whom...

you can express your deepest and most authentic feelings?

you can tell your darkest secrets?

you feel safe talking about your relationships?

you can confess sin?

you can let your guard down and be truly real?

**Questions:**

1. Why do think Jesus sometimes separated the "three" from the rest of the "twelve"? What was significant about each of the three occasions noted in the lesson?
2. Why does Jesus "need" intimacy? Or, does he? What does his need for human companionship tell us about our need for intimacy?
3. What does intimacy mean for you? Why is it so difficult to experience? Why do we fear it?
4. What parameters are necessary for authentic intimacy? What are the "ground rules" of intimacy?
5. How might we develop intimate relationships with others? What strategies would be useful?