



fully known

An Invitation to
True Intimacy with God

MO AIKEN

New York Times Bestselling Author

“There’s a place of intimacy with the Lord exclusively reserved for the bride of Christ. In *Fully Known*, my friend Mo Aiken uses Scripture, personal struggles, and the analogy of marriage to help guide you into experiencing greater depths of intimacy with God that we all desire to know.”

Lisa Bevere, *New York Times* bestselling author
and cofounder of Messenger International

“This book is a bold and Spirit-breathed invitation into deep intimacy with the One who longs to heal us and make us whole. Mo powerfully unpacks how the layers and depths of physical intimacy actually reveal to us greater depths of the full gospel story—a lifelong journey that is often hard but always holy. This message is for everyone!”

Rebekah Lyons, bestselling author of *Rhythms of Renewal* and *You Are Free*

“Whether you’re exploring God for the first time or you’ve been following Jesus all your life, *Fully Known* will help you better understand the single most important aspect of your life, your identity, and your eternity, which is being fully known and loved by God. Most people go through life feeling uncertain of their worth and their purpose when God is inviting us to live life rooted in His love and presence in perfect intimacy. Mo Aiken’s masterful book invites readers on a journey of discovery that will undoubtedly enrich your faith and serve as a healing balm for your weary soul. It’s not an overstatement to say that this book could quite literally change your life.”

Dave and Ashley Willis, authors of *The Naked Marriage*
and hosts of *The Naked Marriage* podcast

“The unapologetic call to know and be known by God in a culture desperate and wounded from our own idolatry crisis is what Mo Aiken brings to this world and this book. Through the noise God

is making His voice heard, loud and clear: *I am what you want*. Mo's single focus on Him continually drives me there. You won't waste a single minute reading these inspired words."

Lisa Whittle, bestselling author of *Jesus Over Everything*, podcast host, and Bible teacher

"Are you restless? Dissatisfied? Questioning? Hungry? Thirsting for more of God yet at the same time wondering, *How do I bridge this gap?* Mo states, 'You have everything available to you that you need for a vibrant, healthy, restored, and radical relationship with the One True God,' but do we truly believe it? And more importantly, do we know how to live it? This book is a beautiful invitation to surrender into the arms of truth and love incarnate. It's a book of the pursuit of the One who has already pursued you with His entire life. Mo's passion and urgency for you to hear, turn, and run into the arms of the Father seep out of every page. If there was ever a book for the hour we find ourselves in, this is the one."

Andi Andrew, wife, mom, church planter, speaker, and author of *She Is Free* and *Fake or Follower*

"Christian bookshelves are filled with helpful resources on sex, dating, marriage, and healing written out of each author's personal experience and expertise. This book is different. As I read it, I had the sense that the words didn't come from Mo's personal thoughts but passed through her. This book contains profound spiritual truths few have been willing to plumb and receive. If your soul is weary from shallow fixes for your deep loneliness and brokenness, this book is for you. Be warned . . . God will convict you, not to pour on shame but to perform a surgery of the heart that will ultimately invite you into a greater freedom than you can even imagine. Be courageous, friend, and go on the beautiful journey Mo has set before us to be *Fully Known*."

Dr. Juli Slattery, cofounder of Authentic Intimacy and author of *Rethinking Sexuality*

“I felt this was the sort of book that I wanted to read one page (or even one paragraph) of, then go away for a while to fully reflect on it before moving on. I found myself rereading sentences and paragraphs so I could fully grasp the depth and richness being communicated. It challenged me to the core, provoking me to reexamine what it really means to follow Jesus. In a Christian culture that prefers to paddle in the shallow end of the pool, this book is a prophetic and timely wake-up call to plunge into the depths of true intimacy with Christ. Only there can we find the true satisfaction for our souls we are looking and longing for in so many other places. Sexuality, repentance, holiness, intimacy, surrender, submission, fruitfulness, and so many other key biblical themes are interwoven and integrated to paint a stirring picture of what authentic, abundant life in Christ can look like. What life in Christ *should* look like. It’s a book that most Christian authors would be too scared to write. I applaud you.”

Craig Cooney, lead pastor of Hope Church in N. Ireland, author of *The Tension of Transition*, *Spirit Speak*, and *I Hear Yahweh*, and curator of Instagram account @daily.prophetic

“This book is an invitation to the *more* we’re all longing for. I had that well-recognized feeling of, ‘these words were written just for me!’ I couldn’t put my highlighter down, and I believe they will be highlighted on my spirit. So thankful for Mo sharing her journey with the Lord to help lead the rest of us into the intimacy we always hoped was possible. She takes us on a journey of learning to abide rather than trying to achieve at doing the ‘right’ thing. It’s both powerful and a bit painful to read as you have your own revelatory moments over these pages.”

Caitlin Zick, codirector of *Moral Revolution* and author of *Look at You, Girl*

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True Intimacy with God

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For all those who hunger and thirst for more.



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introduction

Let me start by sharing a truth your heart is likely longing to be reminded of . . .

You were made to know intimacy with God.

You were created to commune with your Creator.

Tuned to know the sound of the Good Shepherd's voice.

Designed to experience His dignifying touch.

And sculpted by Him to house His perfect and powerful Spirit.

You. You are who He loves. And God has made a way for you to know Him and be known by Him both now and forevermore.

It's this very thing that sets the gospel of Jesus Christ apart in a sea of man-made religions, ideologies, theories, and cults. It is, in fact, what makes a life in Christ distinctly different from the worship of every false god and every mockery of the true faith that labels itself as "Christian." While every other religion hinges on people's ability to work their hardest to ascend to God, the Good News of Yeshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus) is that God Himself has descended to us. The Maker of the heavens and the earth, the Alpha and Omega, the One who was and is and is to come—He came into the company of the rebels and wanderers, the sick and suffering, the unclean sinners like you and me, and

brought both dignity and divinity into our midst. He came to us and called us His own. And by believing in Him and the truth about Him—that He was God in the flesh—we are not only freed from our enslavement to sin but also encounter our true identity and are invited into an intimate relationship unlike any connection we’ve ever known. We are offered oneness, intimate and passionate oneness, with the One who made us. A oneness that transforms us, restores us, and empowers us to do His will.

So, if intimacy with God Almighty is freely offered to us through the Savior we claim to love, why do we, as professed believers, often feel so far from God? Where is the disconnect?

Is there anything we can learn about intimacy with God through the physical model of intimacy He has given us?

This book serves as my best effort to answer those very questions. Because I too found myself in a season of faith where I was wrestling with Scriptures I didn’t understand, fighting feelings of discouragement and disqualification, and ultimately feeling unfathomably far from the God I loved and longed to serve.

But in the midst of my deepest valley, He came to me and called me His own. Yet again. He heard my cries, had compassion on my confused heart, and ultimately gifted me with revelation that changed everything. He gave me eyes to see more of His nature and His great design of intimacy like I never had before, pouring out prophetic understanding that has transformed both my spiritual and my physical life.

And I now feel pregnant with purpose. Brimming with great expectation and joy. I wholeheartedly believe that some of the revelation and understanding about intimacy He opened my eyes to has the power to transform your life as well. I believe through this message, by the grace of God, He will bring revival to hearts, restoration to homes, and resurrected spiritual intimacy to every member of the body of Christ who longs to know Him more.

But before we dive into dissecting some of God’s design and investigating what He has unveiled about intimacy with Him, there

are several things I want to say in a very blunt fashion. Primarily because I, personally, benefit most when those who love me teach hard truths in the same way.

These pages seek to fill you with beauty, clarity, invitation, and tender grace. But they also hold many matter-of-fact, unapologetic, and hard pills to swallow. There are a few gut punches and strong reprimands along the way, several portions that may cause you to pause, and searing sections that may prod unhealed wounds. I assure you this is all for your good and His glory, so I hope you'll stay. Even when it's easier to run, stay.

Know that I love you. I don't know you, most likely. But I know that you're an image-bearing creation of God who carries immeasurable worth, value, and purpose no matter what season of life you're in or sin struggle you're wrestling through. You were made by the Creator, whom I love, and His works are wonderful; my soul knows that very well (Ps. 139:14). He loves you, so I love you. And I want nothing more than for you to walk forward in the fullness of truth, covered by His grace and filled with His perfect Holy Spirit.

Since I love Him, and love you, it's my job to accurately communicate with you in the fullness of biblical love. Not the self-serving, feel-good, pleasure-based lust lorded by emotion that we call "love" but genuine, Christlike love. Love that is both affectionate yet unwaveringly absolute in nature. Love that carries both delight and discipline, comfort and conviction, healing and hard accountability. Love that values the state of your eternity more than your momentary comfort.

True love. That is the goal of my heart in these words. So here goes.



I am finding, more and more, that one of our greatest struggles within the body of professed believers is our deep lack of

personal relationship with the Lord. We say those words often, “Oh, it’s relationship, not religion,” yet many hearts are wholly hypocritical in living out of that truth. We look to religion and the religious institution for all of our answers and all of our “intimacy.” We know the voice and opinions of our favorite pastors and “Christian influencers” better than we know the voice of the Good Shepherd. We would rather watch a highlight reel on Instagram than hole up with His presence. We would prefer to work ourselves to the bone in the name of “service to the kingdom” in hopes those labors will prove to others and God that we are all in. (Trust me, I know from experience on that one!) We feast on the fast food of self-motivation and self-empowerment that others dole out, chasing a spiritual high rather than committing to abiding intimacy with God. We flock to pulpits that are occupied by motivational talks rather than movements of the Spirit. And we line our bookshelves with the paperback opinions of creative authors while His Word collects dust on our bedside tables. We praise the Jesus we’ve sculpted in our own image rather than the Jesus of the Bible. And we raise our hands to worship music, if it lives up to our taste and has a catchy build, rather than allowing our imperfect praise to build a throne for the Almighty in our midst.

We know a lot about God, but we don’t truly know God.

It’s no wonder we feel disconnected, disheartened, and void of true intimacy.

You know how babies deprived of touch and interaction fail to thrive and oftentimes die? I wonder if our souls are suffering the same fate. We earnestly want to know God and be known by God, but we are looking to everyone and everything apart from God Himself to find Him. Why?

I hope that in picking up this book to better understand true intimacy with God, you are not solely looking to my words instead of *His*, as if I will have an answer you could not access on your own in His presence. Because that is a lie.

There is no hidden mystery for the one hungering for righteousness. There is no secret knowledge withheld from the pure heart thirsting for Living Water. I want to challenge you to stop right now and reflect on why it is you feel others have an answer you can't seem to find. Is it laziness in your "faith walk"? Insecurity? Inherited religion void of a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Shame? Fear? Abuse you have endured under the thumb of other authority figures in your life?

What rests at the root of your restlessness?

The same God who graciously provided me the revelation and understanding that fill the pages of this book is the One who calls you His. You have everything available to you that you need for a vibrant, healthy, restored, and radical relationship with the One True God—the finished work of Christ, the offer of the Holy Spirit, and the living and active Word of truth.

In fact, if you continue to open and press into that Word, you will find Scripture after Scripture that affirms these very truths.

The anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. (1 John 2:27)

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. (Jer. 31:33–34)

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (1 Cor. 2:12)

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

It is my prayer you would know that the Maker of the heavens and the earth has made Himself available to you. I pray that as you move forward in pursuit of greater intimacy with Him, you would not be like the foolish ones who failed to understand Christ's parables but rather like those He called blessed—those who had faith to believe He would make Himself known to all who cared to find Him. As Jesus said,

To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

“You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.’
For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.”

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (Matt. 13:11–17)

I want to make it profoundly clear that I, as a person, hold no authority over you. We all, individually and corporately, come

under the pure and perfect authority of Christ. And yes, in His Word He also designates structures of earthly order and stewardship, and certainly of marital structure, which I am not seeking to negate. But I am seeking to dismantle the idolatry and apathy that have a grip on so many and cause them to not pursue intimacy with God individually as well.

I am not seminary educated; I am not ordained or entitled to some grand position of authority in the mega-institution we've somehow made of the church. I am simply a young woman made in the image of my Father who encountered His great grace after years of eating disorders, self-harm, horrific life circumstances such as the suicide of my dad, prideful seasons of earthly success, depression, anxiety, promiscuity, trauma, and counterfeit faith. I came into revelation of my sin and my need for salvation, and I repented with a reverent heart. I was overwhelmed and indwelled by the Holy Spirit of God and have moved forward from there in a dynamic and delightful journey of faith. I continue to recognize, repent, and receive more and more revelation of Him day in and day out.

That's really it. My dog peed on our rug this morning and I am usually elbow-deep in diaper changes and tiny toddler clothes. There is nothing unique or inaccessible about my life or my words. All I bring you is an ever-growing submission to God's Word, God's will, and God's grace. I have a lot to learn, but I hope, if anything, that is encouraging to you and shows you the true nature of the gospel—that when we strip back all of the pomp and circumstance and degrees and titles that are merely man-made additions to the simplicity of truth, we learn that intimacy with Him is available to every single one of us . . . right now . . . today. On earth as it is and will be in heaven.

I am a follower and a messenger, a daughter with deep urgency burning in my bones to point you to the Father that you may become a true child of God too. Not because of my words but because He, alone, reveals Himself to you as you personally seek

Him. Test everything I say in these pages. Weigh my words against Scripture. Take what's offered here to Him, please. Don't put your trust in me—passionately pursue Him, and He will lead you in the way you should go.

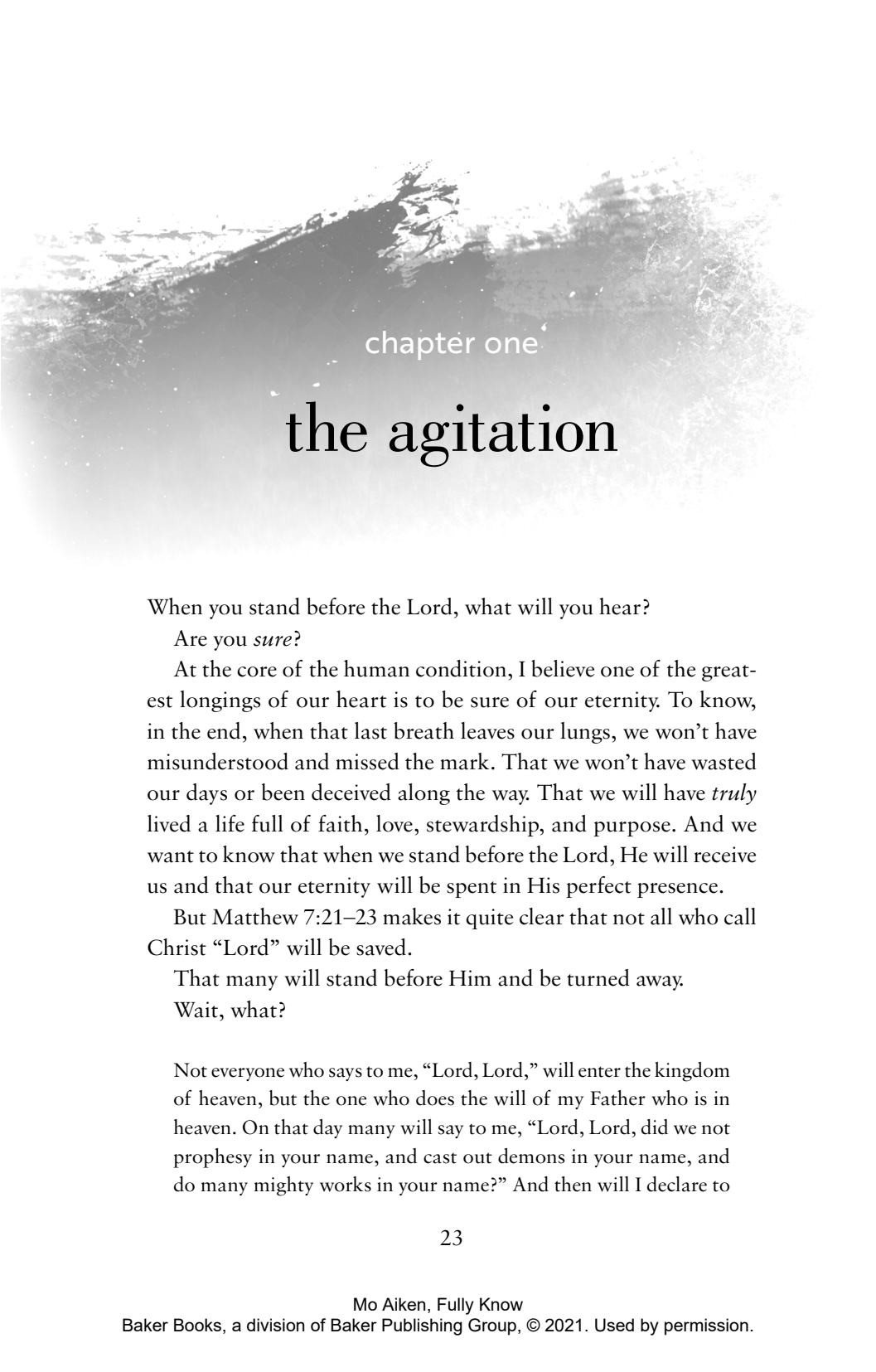
Read these pages with an honest heart. Pray God would make Himself real, rich, and clear to you as you begin each chapter. When He answers, as I know the Father will, you will receive a taste of His sweet manna that cultivates your appetite for true intimacy. Intimacy that is intoxicating, soul-shifting, and transformational. Ask, and you will be answered. Seek, and you will find. Press forward in a right-postured pursuit, and you may just discover the One you've been longing for is sitting at your well, waiting by your side.

Heavenly Father,

I love You. I thank You for who You are. You are mighty, holy, and just. You are full of authority, strength, sovereignty, and power. And, in the same breath, You are tender, kind, patient, and full of love. Hallowed be Your name. You know every hair on my head; You knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank You for seeing me. Thank You for meeting me right where I am and for communing with me. As I read through these pages, I pray You will speak. I pray You will translate each and every word to my spirit. You know every detail of my story and every circumstance in my life. Please give me understanding and please allow my faith to rise. When I have doubts and questions, strengthen my faith to prevail over my fear. Anoint my head with oil and bless me with revelation. Open my eyes; give me ears to hear and a heart to receive. I long for Your will to be done above all. I long to know and surrender to Your ways. Bind up my pride, in Jesus's name. Please, Lord, give me humility and wisdom as I digest these words. I know You will not withhold

humility and wisdom from those who earnestly seek You, so I pray You will pour out these gifts of Your character into my heart. I pray, in the power of Jesus's name, that You will protect me as I press through these pages. I rebuke any and all efforts of the enemy to confuse, deceive, distract, or discourage me. No weapon formed against me, as I draw near to You and Your heart, will stand. I pray the blood of Jesus, of Yeshua, over myself and over the spaces I will occupy as I read in the days ahead. Thank You, God, for Your great invitation. I exalt and bless Your name.

Amen.



chapter one

the agitation

When you stand before the Lord, what will you hear?

Are you *sure*?

At the core of the human condition, I believe one of the greatest longings of our heart is to be sure of our eternity. To know, in the end, when that last breath leaves our lungs, we won't have misunderstood and missed the mark. That we won't have wasted our days or been deceived along the way. That we will have *truly* lived a life full of faith, love, stewardship, and purpose. And we want to know that when we stand before the Lord, He will receive us and that our eternity will be spent in His perfect presence.

But Matthew 7:21–23 makes it quite clear that not all who call Christ “Lord” will be saved.

That many will stand before Him and be turned away.

Wait, what?

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to

them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matt. 7:21–23)

I remember first coming across this Scripture when I was younger in the faith. I brushed past it quickly—sweeping the words to the side, self-righteously certain they were not applicable to me. If I had never heard any teaching about them in church, then they must not be that significant to the gospel story. I chose not to wrestle with them, because, ultimately, it’s often easier to avoid what confuses us. To simply trek over ground that truly needs excavating. It takes concerted effort to concern ourselves with matters of great measure. And, truthfully, the words in my Bible that I didn’t understand often pulsed a wave of fear through me.

So I dodged that passage—along with many others—for many years.

It’s interesting . . . our deepest longings are to be *sure*, yet we’ll settle quickly for *feeling safe* if the exploration of truth challenges our comfort. Isaiah 30:8–11 reveals the heart of humanity quite unapologetically: we are stubborn rebels who loathe discomfort. We would often prefer to hang the hope of our eternity on lies that satisfy our emotions rather than truth that saves our souls.

We claim to want to live bold, courageous, and confident lives of faith, but we often fight with and run from the harder callings and the harder questions because, at the core, our human nature prefers “neutral.” “Just enough” feels more palatable when the just nature of God is intimidating to explore. Lukewarm is appealing when our sinful flesh is sensitive to extremes. But does God not make His thoughts clear on that condition in Revelation 3:16? No, we usually prefer to fall back to what we know and like: comfortable, cultural Christianity. After all, religion is the thick robe we often hide our raw selves behind.

Rather than wrestling with His words and petitioning Him for understanding, I simply pressed forward. I boldly professed my faith in the Lord, gave what I knew of my heart to give, and

did my best to serve the kingdom without ceasing. I worked and worked and worked for the cause of Christ. Late nights and early mornings. Flights and drives and travel far and wide. I penned books and spoke on stages. Fielded emails, calls, and interviews. I worshiped at the golden calf of my iPhone, serving social media with every word and revelation and encouragement I discovered. I prayed bold prayers for miracles and healing and hope for all who needed such petition. I laid down my life in matrimony, surrendered my body in childbearing, juggled every task and deadline and motherly to-do as best as I knew how. I worked and worked and worked unto the Lord . . .

Until the day I looked up and realized the intimate presence of the Lord was nowhere to be found.

I was working unto myself. And I was completely burned out.

I remember sitting in the dark of my daughter's bedroom one night, and the culmination of my "going," my fatigue, and my frustration overwhelmed me. I whimpered, "God, where are You? Have You somehow departed from me? You told me You would never leave me nor forsake me, but somehow in the midst of living for You, I miss You. Have I *missed* You?"

From all I had previously known and all I had been churched to believe, the questions I was crying out seemed foolish. I had been *doing* fruitful, faithful, and full things, yet somehow, as I came up for air, I felt distant from the One whose name I prayed all of those works glorified. I couldn't deny how I felt. I was ten years into following Christ and somehow this separation, this feeling of desperate distance from God, was suddenly very real and very heavy. My spirit felt burdened and my heart wrenched within me. How could this be?

It was then that Matthew 7:21–23 echoed in my mind. I found myself fragile (more fragile than I would care to confess) as the living and active Word pierced through me (Heb. 4:12) and began to divide my fleshly want for comfort from my spiritual need for clarity.

I never KNEW you . . .

The words were deeply, deeply agitating. And they certainly weren't what I wanted to hear the day I stood before God, so it disturbed me that they were all I heard echoing through my mind for days, weeks, months. This entire passage of Scripture sat like a weight on my chest. It rested like a puzzle before me, dust atop its scattered pieces. It was a puzzle that had been patiently waiting for me to acknowledge it: to pick it up, investigate every portion and part, and put it together.

I knew 2 Timothy 3:16–17 to be true, that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the [messenger] of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” So even though it was uncomfortable at face value, I had to believe that particular line—more specifically, that one word, *knew*—served as a corner piece imperative to my understanding. Key to the fullness of the puzzle's image taking shape.

But what did all this *mean*?

How could one possibly call Christ “Lord” yet not be received?

Can we *call* Him Lord without actually *knowing* Him as Lord?

What is the will of the Father in heaven?

In Matthew 7, those before Him cry back to Him describing the miraculous works they did in Christ's name . . . all they did *for* the Lord . . . yet they are still dismissed.

Are our fruitful works not the fullness of His will?

Can we be working for the Lord yet miss Him entirely?

And could many of our efforts ultimately be works of lawlessness?

If, in light of everything, reception into the kingdom of heaven hangs in the balance of knowing and being known by God, then what does that *mean*?

To know Him. To be known by Him. Truly.

Those words wound themselves through my heart and reminded me, with each pulse, that my uncertainty and insecurity meant there were gaps in my understanding of His glory. That

the perverse fear welling up when I read through His Word was evidence His perfect love had not yet been made complete in me (1 John 4:18). No, there was *more* of God, and it was imperative I investigate. And if the state of my eternity was woven together with rightly understanding His words, then this exploration was expected of me. Just as it's expected of you.

After all, 2 Corinthians 13:5 reminds us to “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

Sure, it would have been easier to just run. To just stop caring, stop thinking so deeply about it, stop digging into the depths that brought discomfort. It would have been easier to just numb it. To distract myself with mindless entertainment, to keep myself busy with work, to suppress the conviction of the Holy Spirit urging me to care. But something about His Word presented itself as an oddly packaged invitation. It coaxed me into its company, even in the midst of my confusion.

I truly believe there are moments in all our walks of faith when God allows for deeply unsettling angst, tension, and conflict in our spirits. When He orchestrates encounters with parts of His Word or His nature or His ways that disrupt all we thought we knew. Moments when He allows for elements of our belief structure that once seemed light and clear to feel heavy and clouded. When He prompts our minds to call into question the theology we've always hung our hat on. When He invites us to weigh the countless words we've heard regurgitated from popular pulpits. Moments when He ultimately calls us to take accountability for our own faith. And to seek Him for the answers that evade our own understanding.

My encounter with this Scripture was one of those moments for me. And while I admittedly feared what I might find when I drew near to His Word, what He unveiled to me was a gift of revelation that changed everything.

To Know

I never knew you.

The line continued to echo through my mind as my restlessness truly rooted on that simple word: *know*. There was a weight to it, as if the whole of my understanding of the passage hung on its right interpretation. And what stood out to me most was that it seemed to have very little to do with the efforts and labors of those pleading their cause.

Clearly the parable was speaking of those who, at bare minimum, acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord with their lips and, likely, their minds. And it would seem as though they had committed some portion of their lives to serving God and carried some degree of spiritual authority, as they argued all they had *done* for the Lord. Miraculous and powerful works, even! They pleaded He pay attention to what they had produced, that He take into account their work. Yet still He dismissed them as strangers—workers of lawlessness, even—who had misunderstood what was most important along the way. They utilized His name for labor and gain but somehow they missed being *known* by God.

The thought was disconcerting, as I resonated deeply with the subjects of the story. When and where these words found me, I likely would have argued the same. In so many ways I was a goer and doer. An achiever and worker. To some degree, aren't we all?



We long to be acknowledged. To be seen. To have a place and a purpose in the world. To be loved and received. So, we busy ourselves with service and applaudable efforts and vain pursuits and a calendar that mocks the model of rhythmic rest. We perform for the applause of others, saying yes to every opportunity set before us. We put on a pretty face, trying to ensure that people see only the version of us we've had time to doll up. We commit our time and energy and effort to convincing ourselves

and others we are capable of doing it all, though behind closed doors we're wearing thin and feeling far from the One we claim we are living for.

It's not that our intentions are all bad. In fact, many times, we're earnest-hearted and sacrificial in the assignments we take on. But if you are anywhere near the place I was, you're tired. Disconnected. Unsatisfied. And it's hard to deny, in your heart of hearts, that something is off. Something is missing. Though the *more* your soul longs for seems hard to identify.

In our efforts to *do*, we've either forgotten or diminished how to simply *be*. And it's negatively affected most every area of our lives.

But if there's one thing I've come to learn about God's nature, it is this: He is absolutely intentional. Clear. Unchanging and precise. He makes Himself explicitly available. Those who seek Him, find (Deut. 4:29; Prov. 8:17; Matt. 7:7). When I came to the end of my rope and finally confessed to Him that there were fundamental pieces of understanding missing in my life, it was then that He faithfully opened my spiritual eyes.

In my exploration of what He meant by "know" and my disjointed revelation that solely doing for God was quite different from being with God, the puzzle worked itself forward and then backward again. It was the concept of being with God that ultimately brought to life the meaning of knowing God. That to know God and be known by God explicitly implied intimacy, unity, and oneness with Him in our lives.

Know, by biblical definition, means "to be intimately familiar with." The Merriam-Webster online dictionary goes on to define it, in archaic form, as a verb meaning "to have sexual intercourse with." We can see this phrase used repeatedly throughout Scripture to note when a man and woman came together in sexual intimacy. For example, in Genesis 4:1 we read, "And Adam knew his wife, and she conceived," just as in Matthew 1:25 it is said of Joseph toward Mary, "but [he] knew her not until she had given birth to a son." The Hebrew term used is *yada*, which carries layers of

understanding in interpretation but ultimately lends to a culmination of meaning that implies deep, personal intimacy.

While at first I was put off by the concept of physical, sexual intimacy relating, in some capacity, to spiritual intimacy with God, I began to understand that there must be some weight, some substance, behind the concept of knowing and being known. If to know means to be intimately familiar with, and intimate familiarity is said all throughout His Word to create oneness, then what could God be revealing to us about oneness with Him, in Spirit, through his model of human oneness in the physical sense?

Could it be that God, the great Designer of marriage, sex, and family, fashioned right-natured relational intimacy in such a way that it reveals more of His divine character to those seeking to understand His heart? Could it be that God deeply cares about how we intimately interact with others, as it directly edifies or dismantles the picture of how He interacts with us?

Layer upon layer of connection, correlation, manifestation, and transformation flooded my mind. And while the onslaught of understanding was almost blinding—like when you remove your sunglasses and suddenly can barely squint open your adjusting eyes—I was simultaneously flooded with a supernatural peace and joy.

It was as if embracing right-natured *intimacy* became a key to rightly understanding the gospel. Over the next several months, God taught me much of what true intimacy with Him meant and how His design of relational and sexual intimacy serves as a road map for the Christ-surrendered life.



Let's look again at those verses in Matthew:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in

heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matt. 7:21–23)

We know from the Scriptures that sin and lawlessness are defined by the breaking of God’s laws. And the totality of God’s laws is summarized by Jesus like this:

[He asked,] “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 22:36–40)

So, in understanding the essential nature of intimate oneness with God, what we see clearly is that the workers of lawlessness failed to uphold His greatest commandment, His first invitation. No matter what list of mighty works they yielded and produced, perhaps they failed to know intimate and abiding love with God Himself.

In their doing “for” God perhaps they missed *being* with God, and rejection from eternal communion with God was the grand and disastrous result of it all.

Love. Fellowship. Intimacy. I realized, in the most delightful and equally sorrowful sense, that if our ability to grasp and experience the fullness of healing, wholeness, and salvation here on earth as it will be in heaven centers around our understanding and surrender to intimacy—right-natured and dynamic intimacy with both God and with others—then He, Himself, was going to have to teach me what that looked like. Because, probably like many of you, I looked around and realized there were only a few whole, healed, vibrant, and fruitful examples of intact, intimate relationships in my life.

Relationship, Not Religion

“It’s all about relationship, not religion.” We make this claim often, don’t we? It’s one of the foundational pillars of a believer’s faith. It is the profound and wonder-working privilege directly testified to when we bear witness of Christ’s love to the world.

We literally advocate for the faith by attesting to the power and willingness of El-Shaddai, God Almighty, the Maker of the heavens and the earth, to personally dwell within us and transform our hearts by way of relational love.

Yet we can look around at an inconsistent, apathetic, rebellious, and often entitled body of professed believers, and it is quickly evident there are important and eternity-shifting components missing in our understanding of the Christ-surrendered, Spirit-filled life of rich relationship. We proclaim the power of intimate relationship but are communally struggling with relational brokenness, self-serving lifestyles, fractured marriages, disjointed families, superficial friendships, and heart wounds that define our lives.

How will the world ever be enticed by an offer of intimacy with the One who has made a way for them eternally when all they see are people who don’t understand how to cultivate healthy, God-honoring relationships in their own lives? If we are struggling with rightly navigating intimacy with others, could we also be struggling to rightly understand the fullness of relational intimacy with God?

Conversely, if we are framing our understanding of God’s nature solely by how we have encountered broken, imperfect, or self-serving intimacy with other people, we will likely misunderstand the gospel’s glorious invitation and refining grace.



Physical fruition is a manifestation of the spiritual condition. That’s an important concept to embrace as we move through the pages of this book and peel through the revelation God is ready to unpack. And that’s not new age, hyperspiritual, or “enlightened”

gobbledygook. It is an elementary scriptural principle we must understand if we profess to commune with and worship God both in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23–24). He is a God who is Word and also Word made flesh. Who is Spirit and also man, in Christ. He first existed and spoke, and the sound of His voice crafted the world into physical form.

What occurs in the physical world we know is a manifestation of what is occurring in the spiritual world. The collision of these realms is both real and rhythmic. They are wholly intertwined layers of our existence that testify to one another. We are spiritual beings who hold physical form for our time in this life. Whatever is going on in our earthly, physical lives points to what is going on in our spiritual lives.

Nothing is as compartmentalized as we would like to rationalize. We are complex, layered creations. We must embrace and understand that reality to ever move forward in processing Spirit-revealed insight.

The beauty of that is once we understand intimacy with Him in the Spirit, we will see healing and restoration in our intimacy with other people. As we navigate healthy intimacy with others, we will find reinforcement and encouragement in the truth of His gospel-grip on our hearts. Understanding true intimacy with God helps us understand the “why” behind His perfect design of intimacy with people, and vice versa. If we can grasp one, we will grasp the other . . . and in Jesus’s name I believe we will see kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. The two greatest commandments will mutually be fulfilled, and they will testify to one another.

So for those who are tired of shallow faith, of going through the motions, of being stuck in the same cycles, and are longing to know true intimacy with God, look with me to God’s model of relational intimacy—singleness, marriage, sex, and the family unit—as a frame of reference to truly coming into oneness with Christ, embracing the process of refinement by the Holy Spirit, and living out the Great Commission as we’re called to do.

I want to make it explicitly clear, as we step into unpacking how our physical relationships move through layers of progression and intimacy to prophesy the gospel, that I seek to unveil how the systems and processes God has designed for us can spiritually point us to Him. He uses physical intimacy and the evolution of right-natured relationships as one means of that, which we will explore, but they are pointers only. I pray you approach these words with a clear mind and pure heart, knowing that the sole focus is Him. Purely Him. Just Him.

Anything we think we need or cannot go without, apart from an intimate relationship with Him, is an idol. And while we can look to His design for human relationships as a model for better understanding the revelation of His gospel work, thinking we can understand God fully only once we are married or have had children or exist in a perfectly healed and whole family, we are wrong. These words are just as much for single individuals as they are for those who are wed. Understanding intimacy with God through utilizing this physical parallel of marital intimacy is for all of us, no matter our present circumstance.

Wherever you are, whatever relational condition you are in, a greater degree of intimacy with God is available to you right now. If you are single, I pray you will celebrate, right where you are, the spiritual marriage you can and are intended to presently know with Christ—no matter if God has willed marriage or children for your physical life or not. Don't let marriage be an idol in your life. After all, the apostle Paul celebrates singleness for its beautiful allowance of knowing and being known by God exclusively free of distraction. By the nature of God's love, all things should be nothing to us apart from Him. So many beautiful things are from Him and reveal Him, but if we idolize these created things over our Creator, we have misplaced our worship. We are to love nothing more than we love God, so pray in advance against forming any false belief that you can know Him and be known by Him fully only if your life parallels the seasons of life processed in these

pages. They are God-given pictures that can help us see Him more clearly—but He wants all of you, right now, right where you are.

As I noted before, God is intentional. Clear. Unchanging and precise. He makes Himself explicitly available. Those who seek Him, find. When we can wrap our heads around the reality that He has given us a map, a system, a design in our physical lives that can help us see how to know Him and be known by Him in our spiritual lives, we can jump feet-first into the great adventure of seeing our relationship with Him through a new lens. And we can ultimately rest in the beauty and wonder of His multidimensional design. We can and will discover the restoration of intimacy in our lives, as well as begin to identify and rectify what stands in opposition to His model. We can find healing, freedom, and power as we seek to align our lives with His will, and His ways give us new sight.

Becoming Mary

Do you really want to know and be known by God?

Do you truly *want* intimacy? To be fully known?

Because genuine intimacy does come with great cost. Even greater gain, but also cost.

In light of His invitation to discover the *more* your soul has been longing for, will you recognize and respond? Are you willing to come out of hiding? And are you willing, for even just a little while, to stop running? To set down your Styrofoam shield of “strong Christian” and let your humanity and your vulnerability be exposed for a while?

If your answer is yes, then you’re probably already wondering where we even begin on the journey of learning to abide.

I found myself nervously there too, if that’s of any comfort to you. It’s truly incredible how even a drop of God’s living water holds the power and force of a sweeping tsunami, disorienting, dismantling, and deconstructing what we thought was sure and stable in our lives.

While I was overwhelmed and overjoyed to be coming into fresh revelation, I also began to tangibly feel the opposition of the enemy, seeking to disrupt my progress and confuse my mind. My thoughts were constantly racing. The thought . . . the startling and unnerving reminder that our God is big, vast, and complex—that there is always more of Him to know, to seek, to explore, and to discover—ignited in me a fresh urgency. But, in the same breath, it was disorienting.

Intimacy is an intimidating word when you're not sure you know how to do it "right." My long-suppressed relational issues reared their heads like vicious vipers ready to strike, and the constant, nagging lies from the enemy were deafening. I didn't know how to handle the wounds and worries that were bubbling to the surface in my heart. And I didn't like it. I didn't like the tension and discomfort and conflict that persisted in my spirit.

It's not uncommon, you know. The seasons of tension and struggle in our walks.

It's what I call "the agitation."

And, speaking from experience, it's not very much fun. It's like spiritual puberty. It's necessary but disconcerting. Awesome but equally awkward.

It's God agitating the holy hormones within us, for lack of a better term. Arousing feelings and heightening senses in the unseen realm so as to spur us on toward spiritual maturity. And it brings attempts from the enemy to stunt our growth, thwart our progress, and keep us blind. But if our goal is to grow in understanding how we can cultivate intimacy with God, then, again, we can look to our natural lives as a metaphor of what is occurring in our spiritual lives.

Did you long to know, understand, and delight in intimacy when you were a prepubescent child? Or did your interest in intimate connectedness expand only as you matured and moved through and beyond the unsettling hormone shifts of adolescence? The same can be said of our progression in the faith. There comes a point, and perhaps it is upon you now, where our elementary

understanding of Christ, and our first simple and euphoric encounter with His great grace, must advance. Where happiness must mature into abiding joy. Where simplicity must mature into divine depth. Where a fear of pain must mature into fortitude. Into an embrace of long-suffering surrender. Where ease must mature into enduring, steadfast assuredness. Where routine must mature into real, dynamic relationship.

Unlike physical adolescence, this is not just a one-time occurrence; our whole walk is filled with growing pains and seasons of unsettling, stirring, and often disorienting waves of tension and challenge. But, if anything, we should be encouraged by this agitation—it stands to spur transformational development in us if we remain faithfully willing and allow it.

Second Corinthians 3:18 explains this concept beautifully: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Just as our faces take shape to resemble, in ever greater degree, the mature faces of our parents as we physically age, so our spiritual growth and engagement mature us further into the likeness of Christ. From one level of glory to the next, we are invited to live by the Spirit and stay in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), ultimately developing more and more into God’s divine nature, even when that development is uncomfortable at times.

Psalms 84:5–7 reminds us that persevering through the tension and friction and angst actually serves to strengthen us:

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
As they go through the Valley of [Weeping]
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.

Regardless of your physical age or the extent of time you have professed faith in Christ, such agitations are inevitable. These shifts, changes, and feelings we can't quite place are the very stimuli that progress us forward. They prompt us to explore the more we know is ahead, to wrestle through the restlessness within us until we come into our own—until we come before His throne and all His majesty.

The beauty is that God promises if we humble ourselves before Him, He will lift us up (James 4:10) in recognition of our hunger, our confusion, our fatigue, and our humanity. If we draw near to Him, He will faithfully draw near to us. It is simply our responsibility to recognize our deep need for Him to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. We are double-minded sinners (v. 8), but He is a perfect and gracious Savior, full of compassion and pardoning mercy ready to abound. He is inviting us to return to Him, to feast at His table, and to stay awhile.

In fact, Jesus informs us that there is only one thing worth being anxious or troubled about in our lives, and that is finding our way to His feet.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38–42)

As Martha labored, Mary rested. She listened and learned from the Messiah. As Martha toiled in good labor done unto the Lord, Mary hung on His teachings and found herself in submission to His words, spiritually feasting on the Bread of Life.

While the learning curve may seem daunting, intimacy begins with our willingness to be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10). Isaiah 30:15 (NLT) states, “This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel says: ‘Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength.’”

The first true step forward toward intimacy with God is a humble step back in reverence of His Majesty. To become like Mary, with a pure-hearted posture of silence at His feet. Do you notice that she did not have to defend herself in light of her sister’s complaints? Nor will you have to defend yourself in light of a world’s demands you continue to prioritize the *going* and the *doing*. As if your worth is found in only what you offer, rather than who you are and whom you belong to.

No, the holy words of hope that flow from the lips of Moses stand true: “The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Exod. 14:14). You need only to hold a posture of presence and humility at His feet. If we long to one day stand before Him in confidence and great assurance, then we would be wise to humbly receive the invitation, today, to sit before Him, to listen and receive.

At the beginning of my journey, when I slowed my wild and worrisome heart enough to be able to rest at His feet, He spoke to me while I prayed. I hope the words He whispered to me encourage you to press in and ask Him to speak to you as well.

Be still, my daughter. Settle down. Settle in. Grow roots. Deep and wide and right where you are. I sustain and I will provide. I will not leave you barren. Your land will burst forth with life. Hope in Me. Trust in Me. Listen. I am calling you, weary-eared daughter. You have nothing to prove but to honor Me. Stop chasing what’s not before you. You carry forth My favor. Only I know. Stay awhile. Be with Me. The unexpected will be seen.

So, come as you are, right where you are, and sit down with me. He is longing to teach us about intimacy that has the power to change everything.