

Beloved: Vulnerability

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[0 : 00] Well, last week we started a series in a book of the Old Testament right in the middle of the Bible called the Song of Songs. This is a song. It's a love song. It's an extended poem, and in some ways it's made up of a number of poems that are collected together.

I spent a long time introducing this last week. It's a book that requires a lot of introduction and explanation. It's a very challenging book to understand and interpret, so we talked a lot about that last week.

So I won't get into as much depth this week. Suffice it to say, the song has a number of ways we can describe it. In one sense, it's wisdom literature. So just like Proverbs, just like Ecclesiastes or Psalms or Job, it's a book that is meant to orient us to the world.

It tells us the kind of world we live in, what it means to be a human being, and how to live in the world that God has made. So it's wisdom literature. In another sense, it is erotic poetry.

We talked about the debate over the centuries as to whether or not it is pure allegory, or whether it does in fact pertain to human love and sexual intimacy, and we decided it is overwhelmingly obvious that it's the latter.

[1 : 18] It is very much erotic poetry, so it's about human relationships. But because the Bible says that marriage itself is a picture of the gospel, as we read the Song of Songs together, which is a vision of the ideal marriage, we get a window into the heart of the gospel.

This is a picture for us of the love that exists between Jesus Christ and his church. And so we said last week that as we read this book together, we're going to be reading it through two lenses. We're going to treat it as wisdom and allow it to inform us as we think about our own relationships, and we're also going to see it as a window into the heart of God and the kind of intimacy that we long to have with God, the kind of intimacy we were made to have with God.

And as I say intimacy, that really centers on the central theme of the song as a whole. If there's anything that unites this together thematically, it's the theme of intimacy.

And so this is really a series about intimacy. The kind of intimacy we were made to have with one another and the kind of intimacy we were made to have with God. The kind of intimacy we all long for. I will continue to say my contention is that our society has a massive crisis of intimacy.

That while we have enormous technology that connects us, while we are oversexed in many ways, that at the same time we are starved for intimacy.

[2 : 48] And so that's why we're exploring this theme together. So the song speaks to all different kinds of relationships. It speaks to community life, like you might have in a church. It speaks to friendship.

It speaks to people who are dating, people who are married. It speaks to the kind of intimacy we long to have with God. It speaks to all of those things. And so what we're going to do this week is pick up where we left off last week, chapter 1, verse 9.

We're going to go all the way through chapter 3, verse 5. We're going to do it the same way. We're going to read a little bit. And then every so often we'll stop and draw out a point. And again, we're going to see three more points about intimacy, how to cultivate it, how to develop it, what it means to have intimacy in our relationships.

Before we do that, let's pray. Our Father, we do recognize, as we said last week, we pray that your promise, that all Scripture is breathed out by you and profitable for our growth, that you would make true on that promise, that your Holy Spirit would illuminate these words, that they would nourish us, that they would give us a vision of the kinds of relationships that are possible here in this room, that they would also give us a vision for the kind of relationship we are meant to have with you and what's possible because of Jesus Christ.

And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. Amen. So let's start reading this together. We're going to drop in at chapter 1, verse 9, and we're entering into an extended period of mutual adoration.

[4 : 25] So this is the couple professing their love and desire for one another. So as I said last week, this is a song. So remember there's a female part, the Shulamite woman, the wife.

There's the male part, Solomon, the husband. And then there's the chorus. And the chorus sort of chimes in every now and then. So the song commences with Solomon speaking.

And he says this to the Shulamite woman, I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. Now calling someone a horse does not sound very complimentary, but you have to understand that Pharaoh's chariots were pulled largely by stallions.

And there's a historical account at one point when the Egyptian army was attacking. The force that was under attack recognized that these were a bunch of stallions.

And so they used the tactic of releasing a mare in heat in hopes of distracting the horses and throwing off the attack. Now this was moderately successful until the mare was killed.

[5 : 28] But the point is, what he's saying is, you're the kind of woman who drives men crazy. You're the kind of woman who when you're around, men forget what they're doing. They get distracted. They lose their way.

Chaos ensues. So it is a compliment. You're a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments. Your neck with strings of jewels. We will make for you ornaments, says the chorus, of gold studded with silver.

They're essentially saying, you're right, she's gorgeous. We keep going. Now she responds, While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance.

My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En Gedi. Now last week we said that people over the centuries have gone to great lengths to allegorize this, to say it has nothing to do with human beings.

It is entirely spiritual, entirely about God. This is a great example. Verse 13, Cyril of Alexandria reads this verse and says, Well, it's quite obvious what this is actually talking about.

[6 : 34] You have two breasts and you have nard between the two breasts. Well, obviously, the two breasts represent the Old Testament and the New Testament. Left breast, Old Testament. Right breast, New Testament.

And Jesus is the myrrh. Now this is great biblical theology, right? Jesus ties the whole scripture together. But I think we've got to be honest. I think it's talking about breasts.

And I think what's happening is the woman is laying there and she's looking down and she's looking at a little pouch, a little leather pouch that you would wear around your neck and you would have something scented or perfumed in it.

This was a way of perfuming yourself. And she's looking down there and she's seeing this little, it's about right here where this is, and she's looking at it and she's saying, This is where I want my lover to be. It's a longing for intimacy.

You know, I want to be so close to him that he's like this little bag around my neck. That's what she's saying. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En Gedi. He's sweet, he's beautiful. En Gedi was famed for the flowers and the things that came out of it.

[7 : 33] So let's keep going. Behold, you are beautiful, he says. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves. And then it continues. Behold, she says.

You are beautiful, my beloved. Truly delightful. Our couch is green. The beams of our house are cedar. Our rafters are pine. Now, remember last week they had arranged a rendezvous out in the fields.

He was on break and she wanted to get some time with him. And so imagine they're out and they're in the woods together and they're laying in the grass and they're looking up and she's imagining in this very poetic way that the grass is like their bed.

And as they look up at the tree branches, they're imagining that the cedar and the pine branches are like the rafters of their house. This is a very romantic scene.

And it's a great setting for what happens because now the conversation shifts and gets a little more serious. She turns to him and she says this. I'm a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

[8 : 33] And then he responds, as a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women. And then look what she says. She responds with this flood of emotion. As an apple tree among the

trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men.

With great delight I sat in his shadow and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love. Sustain me.

Now she's turning to the audience. Sustain me with raisins. Refresh me with apples for I'm sick with love. His left hand is under my head. His right hand embraces me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

She's saying, if you only knew how powerful this feeling could be, if you only knew how it could wreck you, don't rush this kind of thing.

Don't mess around with it. Don't play around with it. This is serious stuff. It's dangerous. It's exhausting. So this is what she says. We'll come back to that phrase a little bit later next week because it recurs throughout the poem.

[9 : 43] It's a major theme, but we'll get into that next week. I want to go back to chapter 2, verse 1. What's happening here? I want to pull out our first point about intimacy. First point about intimacy is this.

Intimacy requires exclusivity. Intimacy requires exclusivity. When she says, I'm a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys, to us that seems as though she's complimenting herself.

But what she's actually doing is saying this. Am I just like a common, ordinary flower that you would find growing on any hillside? Or am I something more?

Am I just like one of the many wildflowers that we see laid out before us? Or is there something more between us? Now, she's not fishing for compliments.

She's wanting to define the relationship. She's saying, I have strong feelings for you. You seem to like me. We've spent all this time together. I'm imagining you very intimately connected to me.

[10 : 50] And I just want to know, do you feel the same way? Or am I just one of many in your eyes? And look what he says. He says, Well, if you're a lily, then all the other women are thorns.

And it's his way of saying, I only have eyes for you. I only, you're the only one. And in my estimation, there's no comparison between you and anyone else. If you're a lily, then they're all thorns.

And she responds. Look at how she responds to this. She responds to his, so he reassures her, you're the only one. And then she responds. She says, I sit under the shade of my lover who is a tree.

I sit under his banner, which is a banner of love. That's protection language. She's saying, now that you've reassured me, that you are in fact only interested in me, that you're not dating a bunch of people, that I'm really the only one that you have eyes for.

She says, now I feel protected by you. I feel safer with you. And then she says, I feast on apples. I feast in the banqueting hall.

[11 : 59] I feel provided for by you. So this is language of protection and provision. And ultimately it boils down to, she says, now that you've reassured me of this, I'm feasting on that reassurance, like apples or a banquet.

And now I feel safe with you. And now I can really allow myself to love you. And allow myself to become intimate with you in a whole new way.

And so this is a major turning point, because it's a defining of the relationship that needs to happen in order to make more intimacy possible. So his willingness to commit to her shows that he's a safe person.

And that's really important when you're talking about intimacy. Because intimacy means opening your heart and your life to another person. And that's terrifying. I mean, it's terrifying if you really let someone in.

But the goal of intimacy, and the way you might define intimacy, is to know and be known without fear. To know and to be known without fear.

[13 : 03] I think that is one of the most fundamental human longings. To know and be known without fear. And that's why, before intimacy, you must have commitment.

You must have exclusivity. Because when somebody commits, when somebody says, I only have eyes for you, I'm in this for the long haul, I'm committed to you, this is exclusive, you're the one, all of those are ways of saying what?

Well, as you open your heart to me, as you open your life to me, as I begin to see more of you, as you become naked, not only physically, but as you become naked psychologically, as you become naked emotionally, as you really begin to take down the walls, no matter what I see, I'm not going anywhere.

No matter what might come out, no matter what I might encounter, no matter if I like it or don't like it, no matter if it's something entirely unexpected, no matter what I see, as you open yourself up to me, I'm in this for the long haul.

I'm here. I'm committed to you. And that creates a tremendous sense of safety and security. So if we want to build intimate relationships, we have to understand the importance of commitment and exclusivity.

[14:20] And we all need relationships like this. Of course, this is in the context of a marriage. But the most foundational context for this kind of intimacy is not marriage. It's friendship.

It's friendship. Friendship, in many ways, is the foundational relationship for this kind of commitment. Marriages, the best marriages are at their core, a really strong friendship.

We need to recover this in the church. We need to recover the place of exclusive covenant friendship. You know, you have your going out friends, you have your work friends, you have your sort of casual friends.

It's great to have lots of friends like that. But every single person in this room needs at least one or two. You probably can't have many more than that. One or two exclusive committed covenantal friendships.

These are people with whom you have an actual conversation. You say, listen, I like you. I trust you. I want to commit to you. And I want you to commit to me. I want to make this friendship something that is unlike the other friendships in my life.

[15:30] I want this to be a place where I can feel safe, where I can open up, where I can really begin to confess things that I don't have anybody else I can talk to about. I want to be able to go deeper with you. I want to be able to trust that you're going to take my spiritual life seriously, and I want to take yours seriously.

I want us to encourage one another in our faith. It's that kind of covenant commitment that we've lost in the church. Wesley Hill wrote a brilliant book about this called *Spiritual Friendship*.

And in it, he says, you know, the church is full of people who, for a variety of reasons, will not get married. Or they got married and they got divorced, and they're not going to remarry. But for whatever reason, there are a lot of people in the church who are not going to have a nuclear family. They're not going to have a marriage. And he says, what has the church done? Well, we've put marriage on this massive pedestal. And we've said, well, here's the ideal context for intimacy. And unless you can attain this thing up here, there's really not much hope for you.

You know, if you can't get here, then intimacy, well, you know, the singles ministry is fun. But there's no real hope offered. And that's entirely the fault of the church.

[16:33] And what we need to do, I'm not saying we shouldn't honor marriage, but we need to bring it down off the pedestal. And this is the core contention of Hill's book. We need to equally celebrate the value of covenant friendship.

Even if you are married, you need friends like this. Because marriage cannot survive in a vacuum. And so the first place to seek out this kind of exclusive intimacy is in your friendships.

Prayerfully setting aside one or two people. Now, there's a reason that you don't come to a small group gathering with 20 people and share all of your deepest, darkest secrets. Because you have intimacy without exclusivity.

Right? And people get freaked out. They don't know how to handle it. There's not enough trust built. There's not enough commitment there. And so people come and they overshare. And it does a lot of harm in groups. You need one or two people with whom there's a commitment.

Right? Remember, exclusivity has to come first. And then you can begin to build intimacy. So it needs to exist in friendships. For those who are dating, I'll say this, if you're dating or hanging out or spending time with somebody, exclusivity must come before intimacy.

[17:41] So if you're, you're with somebody and they're saying things like, well, I just don't like labels. I just prefer not to really define things. I just like to kind of see. And there's a Christian version of it where I just don't think that we should force the spirit.

I think that we should just, you know, just trust the Lord that, that the Lord will lead us and just see what happens and why label it? That just feels so artificial. And I just want something much more authentic with you.

And I just feel like, let's just let this be, you know, all of that is code. All of that is code. And, and what it, what it translates into in English is, um, I'm not yet ready to say, I'm not yet ready to guarantee that I'll stick around.

If I see something or encounter something that I don't like, as you open your life to me, I'm not yet ready to say that I'm not going to run.

So let's just keep it casual. That's what that's really saying. And what it really means is I'm not a safe person. And so you can continue hanging out with that person all you want, but do not get intimate with them. Keep them at a distance because it's not a safe person.

[18:49] So for married couples, the last thing I'll say before we move on, exclusivity isn't just a relationship status. Exclusivity continues in your marriage as a habit of mind.

Even if you get married, even if you're, you know, you, you go on and you kind of have the ring and you have the marriage certificate and all that. Exclusivity is a habit of mind. Uh, it's the virtue of fidelity. Exclusivity begins in here.

It begins by deciding when I get on the Metro and go to work, I'm not going to check out and fantasize about the person across the way. Um, it's, it's a habit of mind that, that, that cultivates an inward devotion to the person that you're with.

And then you know what? If you want to build intimacy in your marriage, a great way to do it is to find creative ways to regularly affirm your exclusivity with your spouse, to regularly remind them you're a lily among brambles.

There's no one like you, right? So exclusivity has to come before intimacy. It's very important. That's our first point. Now we're going to move on into, uh, the next section beginning with verse eight.

[19:54] So let's go one more. Now look at what happens. This is the woman speaking. Now, now, you know, we've kind of shifted settings. Now imagine she's, it's night. She's in her house.

There are maybe some other women with her, maybe people she lives with or her family. And she hears something outside and she's like, she says, the voice of my beloved behold, he comes leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.

My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. Now it sounds like he's a creeper. You know, it sounds like he's, and it's, that's exactly what's happening.

He's standing outside and he's, he's looking in through the windows to her house. Right? But, and it sounds creepy, but there, there's a metaphor that's, that's unfolding here.

We'll explain it in just a minute. So she says, my beloved speaks and says to me, so he's sort of speaking to her through the window. And here's what he says. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.

[20:56] For behold, the winter has passed. The rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The time of singing has come. And the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs and the vines are in blossom.

They give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. Oh, my dove, in the clefts of the rocks, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face.

Let me hear your voice. For your voice is sweet and your face is lovely. Let's go to the next slide. Now, here's how she responds.

He says all of that. Come out. Let's go. Let's hang out. Come outside. Let's go have an adventure together. And she says, catch the foxes for us. The little foxes that spoil the vineyards.

For our vineyards are in blossom. What's she saying? Let's pull this out. Point number two about intimacy. Point number one, intimacy requires exclusivity.

[21:52] Point number two, intimacy requires healthy confrontation. Healthy confrontation. Here's what's happening. He comes down.

He looks in through the window, sees her, starts trying to convince her to come outside, saying anything he can possibly think of to get her to come outside. Come on. Let's go. Let's have fun.

Let's, you know, he wants intimacy.

He wants to be with her. And he doesn't want any walls between them. And he's trying to get her to come out and make herself totally, totally vulnerable to him. And her response is to say, well, before

I come out, you need to deal with the foxes.

Now, what are foxes? Well, we think of foxes as kind of cute, crafty, you know, critters that are, you know, even protagonists of cartoons that we like.

I mean, they're, you know, fox is a positive connotation. But for, for them, in this context, a fox was a hated pest. So, in D.C., we would think of rats, right?

[22 : 54] They would sneak into the vineyards and steal all the grapes and tear the plants up. You know, I had a garden years ago, and I remember catching rats coming in and out of my garden, eating everything before I could get out there and pick it.

And that's essentially the image that's being painted for us here. You've got to deal with those pests. So, here's the metaphor of this section. Your relationship is like a vineyard.

And you're co-owners of that vineyard. And the relationship, like a vineyard, produces fruit. It produces lots of fruit, like joy, like mutual support and encouragement, like solidarity, like unity, strength, right?

Shared purpose, enjoyment, right? There's lots of fruit that is produced from good relationships. And she says, but there are issues in the relationship that, and these are the foxes, and those issues are robbing us of the fruit of our relationship.

They're robbing us of joy. They're robbing us of unity. And until we deal with those issues, I'm not coming out. Now, I think this is very interesting, because there's lots of ways it can apply to our lives.

[24 : 09] Foxes are the little things, the recurring issues, that rob us of the fruit of our relationship. A lot of times, it can just be, in marriages, tension over chores. Early in our marriage, we've been married 10 years.

My wife's named Laura. And early in our marriage, we worked out that I would be the one on Tuesday nights to roll the trash cans out to the road, so that the garbage people could pick them up on Wednesday. So that was our agreement.

And then I just kept forgetting to do it. So it would, you know, get to be 10, 30, 11, 11, 30. And Laura would say, you forgot to roll out the trash cans. And I would be about, you know, about collapsing sleep.

And I would get angry. And I'd be like, oh, and I would kind of put my shoes on. I'd say something grumpy, and I'd stomp outside and like, you know, roll the trash cans out, just letting the world know how angry I was, you know.

And then she would resent the fact that I hadn't done it on my own. And I would resent the fact that I was about asleep, and I now have to go out in the cold and do it. And it would rob us of joy. We were having a great night, and it would just rob us of joy.

[25 : 07] We'd go to bed annoyed at each other. Now that happens once, no big deal. Twice, no big deal. That happens a few times, no big deal. But it just kept happening. It just kept happening. And it just became this thing that would just rob us of joy on Tuesday night.

And then one day, it was as though God said to me, do you love your wife? And I said, yeah. And he said, take out the trash. And I got it.

And I began to realize, guess what? Here's the secret. It's not about the trash. It's not actually about the trash. What's really going on is that when I'm willing to set a phone alarm, or write a note to myself to remember to take out the trash on Tuesday night, without there even being a conversation between us, what I'm conveying actually is that I am invested in our common home life together. I'm conveying to her, you're not the only one worrying about our house. I'm actually invested as well. And you know, what I began to realize is, I can say, I love you, but the words, I love you, don't actually make my wife feel loved.

Really. I mean, they kind of do, but not really. Just words. But what I realized is, in the exchange rate of our marriage, one Tuesday, where I come home and roll out the trash cans, is worth about 10,000 verbal I love you's.

[26 : 29] The exchange rate is obscene. And so I just began to realize, if I actually love my wife, if I actually love my wife, I just need to set a phone alarm, and take out the trash.

And she's, guess what? Going to actually feel loved. So, we dealt with the fox. In that case, it was setting a phone alarm. But there are these issues, that recur and recur and recur. And we need to deal with them, if we want to have intimacy.

So, it could be, something more serious. It could be an ongoing lack of forgiveness. Some people, keep lists, mental lists. There's that thing that you did, six years ago.

And I'm never going to let you forget it. And every time we fight, I'm going to bring it up. Right?

That's a fox. That's an unresolved issue. It could be a cycle that plays out, an emotional cycle, in your relationship.

You know, maybe, maybe, she, hates it, when she feels disconnected to him. And maybe, maybe whenever he starts to get distant, or seem like he's checking out, maybe she responds out of fear, and she becomes critical, to try to motivate him, to re-engage.

[27 : 38] And maybe, on the flip side, the more he feels criticized, the more he disengages. And so, you have a cycle, of criticism, and disengagement, and disengagement, and criticism, and criticism, and disengagement.

And it's driven what? It's driven by fear. It's driven by hurt. It's driven by insecurity. That's a cycle. It's a fox. It's robbing you of fruit. You need to deal with that.

Now, some of these issues, we can deal with on our own, and some we need to go, and find a good counselor, and deal with them. But the point is, they need to be dealt with. If you want to build intimacy, in your relationships, you have to catch the foxes.

And, a relationship, where that is not happening, even if you're not fighting, that does not guarantee intimacy. If you're not dealing, with those issues, actually rooting them out, whether you're conflict avoidant, or more of a direct person, it doesn't matter.

If you're not rooting them out, you don't have intimacy. You have, a temporary ceasefire. And there's a huge difference, between ceasefire, and intimacy. So, that's the second point.

[28 : 38] Intimacy requires, healthy confrontation, of the foxes, in your relationship. It's not you versus him, or her, or, you know, it's not, together you need to problem solve, those issues.

That's the second point. Third point, we're going to get into, this really interesting section, where she has a dream. So, let's move to verse 16. My beloved is mine, and I am his.

He grazes among the lilies, until the day breathes, and the shadows flee, turn my beloved. Be like a gazelle, or a young stag, on cleft mountains. So, she's wanting to spend, all night with him, right?

Be like a gazelle, on cleft mountains. I'm not going to unpack that too much, but essentially she's saying, I want you to, to be like a gazelle, on the mountains of my physique. And then we get into, so that's in actuality, what's happening.

They're together, they're wanting to spend the night, it's incredibly intimate, she's sexually attracted to him, and vice versa. But then, look what happens. On my bed by night, I sought him, whom my soul loves.

[29 : 39] I sought him, but found him not. Commentators, a lot of commentators agree, that this is a dream sequence. So she falls asleep, and even though they're together, she falls asleep, and has a nightmare, that she wakes up, and he's nowhere to be found.

I 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 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, who conceived me.

Now again, that sounds strange to us. Here's the room, where I was conceived. We don't normally do that, in relationships. Maybe you do, but that's not like a big thing, for most people. But in this situation, what she's saying is, when she finally finds him, she's so filled with fear, at the idea of losing him, that she says, I'm not going to let you go, until I know, that you will never, ever, ever leave.

Until I know, that this is consummated, until I know, that we are sealed forever. That's what she's saying. I don't ever want to feel, that fear again. And this brings us, to the third, and I think one of the hardest things, that we'll say, over the course of the series, about intimacy.

[30 : 54] And that is this, that intimacy requires, vulnerability. Making yourself vulnerable, to pain, to loss.

She wakes up terrified, she panics, she runs into the streets, she goes to the police, they haven't seen him. This is a manifestation, of a deep fear, residing in her.

A fear that one day, she might lose him. And this is the hard truth, about intimacy, that everybody has to accept, if you want intimacy, in your life. Intimate relationships, carry with them, the

possibility, of pain and loss.

They go hand in hand. The more you care, the more some part of you knows, if anything happens, to this person, it will destroy me. C.S. Lewis famously says, in the Four Loves, to love at all, is to be vulnerable.

Love anything, and your heart will be wrung, and possibly broken. So even the best friendship, or the best marriage, might fail you. Even the most well-intentioned person, might let you down.

[32 : 02] Even the healthiest, youngest, most active person, might unexpectedly, pass away. There's always the possibility, of pain and loss.

And some people, simply cannot live, with that possibility. Some people cannot, handle it. And so people deal with it, in different ways. Some people, have intimate relationships, and they just deny, the reality.

They just deny, the possibility of pain and loss. And so when it happens, it completely catches them off guard, because they like to live, assuming, well those kind of things, happen to other people, but not me. Not us. It could never happen to us.

Some people, respond differently. Some people, avoid love and intimacy, altogether. And maybe, maybe we're, maybe this describes, some of us in this room. Some people just keep, everybody at arm's length.

Maybe, maybe they even get married, but they never really, let people in. They never even let their spouse in. Right? Everybody stays out here. Because maybe, when you were young, maybe, a parent walked out on you.

[33 : 00] Or maybe, somebody that you loved, or cherished, maybe they died. Or maybe, a parent wasn't, the kind of parent, that they should have been. And maybe they hurt you. Whatever the case, you learned early on, I don't ever want, to feel that again.

And so everybody stays out here. Nobody gets in. Because, I can't take that again. Some people respond that way. Then there are some people, who respond to this possibility of pain, by, by, becoming more, and more, and more controlling, and manipulative, in the relationships, with the people they love.

They say, well, if I can coerce you, and manipulate you, and control you enough, then I can guarantee, that you'll never leave me, or hurt me. You know? And what often happens, sadly, is, they become so controlling, and so manipulative, that they drive those people away.

And that reinforces, their fear of abandonment. You know? And so, there are only so many ways, we can deal with this problem. I want to be intimate, and yet I'm terrified, of the pain that it will cause. But Lewis says, if we, if we avoid this all together, here's what Lewis says happens.

He says, if you want to make sure, of keeping your heart intact, you must give it to no one. Not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around, with hobbies, and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements, lock it up safe, in the casket, or coffin of your selfishness.

[34 : 19] But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken, it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

To love is to be vulnerable. You can't have it both ways. There is only one way, that I know of, to be able to truly have intimacy, with human beings, and to truly face, and embrace, the possibility, of pain and loss, as a result, as a result, of those relationships.

The only way, I know to be able, to do both, is to build your life, around a core relationship, make one relationship, foundational, with a person, who will never leave you, never abandon you, never betray you.

And the only person I know, who is like that, is Jesus Christ. I don't know anyone else, who fits that description, who can live up, to those expectations. As we've learned about, what it takes to build, intimate relationships, we've talked about three things.

It requires exclusivity, it requires, healthy confrontation, it requires, vulnerability. I don't know anyone, who has done that, better than Jesus Christ.

[35 : 41] You know, Jesus comes to us, and he says, the only kind of relationship, we can have, is an exclusive one. It has to be, 100% exclusive. And he says, I know that, over the course of your life, you have given yourself away, again and again and again.

You know, what the Bible calls idols, right? All of these promises, were made to you, about success, or money, or influence, or education, or the approval of others, sinners, and all of these things, that you gave your heart to, and none of them delivered, on those promises.

And you've been hurt, and let down, again and again and again. And he says, I want you to give your whole heart to me. And in return, I will give my whole heart to you. And here's what he says, no matter what I see, no matter what I see, no matter what is in your heart, no matter what you've done, I'm not going anywhere.

I'm committed to you. There is healthy confrontation, with Jesus, right? Jesus does confront, the sin in our lives. He confronts things, that we know about, he confronts things, that we haven't told anybody, and he confronts things, that we didn't even know were sin.

He confronts all of that. It can be painful, it can be so offensive. And right as our defenses are kind of, and we're getting ready, to justify ourselves, Jesus says, it's okay, I'm taking the blame for all of it.

[36 : 55] All of it. I'll take all of it. And then he makes himself, completely vulnerable, unimaginably vulnerable. The God of the universe, taking on flesh, allowing himself to be brutalized, mocked, tortured, and killed, in order to deal with, all of that sin, in order to make it possible, to have perfect intimacy, between the two of us.

Perfect intimacy, between ourselves, and the Trinitarian God, of the universe. The kind of intimacy, where we know, that his promise in Matthew 28, is true. I will be with you, always, to the end of the age.

No matter what else happens, no matter what other people do to you, no matter how much you're let down, I will never do that to you. I will never leave you. And the only way I know, how to have vulnerability, and intimacy, to embrace the risk of loss, and pain, and hurt, and at the same time, plunge into our relationships, is if our core, is built around Jesus Christ.

So that we know, that we know, that we know, that no matter what happens, no matter what pain, we have to face, no matter what unexpected tragedies, life brings, that our life is built, on a foundation, with someone, who will always be there with us, no matter what.

Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. iksistic Music