

How God Reignites Our Intimacy With Him

Today is warm sunshine on my hair, cool garden soil between my fingers. The world is full of flowers, and I mean full of flowers. Dogwoods, redbuds and magnolias line every street. I count over 70 tulips in my yard, and more than half of them now form bouquets inside my house. And behold the gigantic lilac bush right outside the kitchen door, a sort of purple descendant of the burning bush. This fellow desperately needs a trim, but every autumn I don't notice, and every spring I can't bring myself to cut back the loveliness. The lavender cloud hovers so heavily it bombards innocent passersby, and the heady fragrance of all this sensual music occasionally sends me fleeing for fresh air.

Life brims over now, the days getting longer and the sun rising higher. Sunshine pours into my kitchen in the mornings, as we sit happily half-blinded at the table, munching our cereal and breathing in flowers. Sunshine lights up the living room in the afternoons, while in the evenings, dusty beams still play peekaboo through the shades as I put my children to bed.

It's easier to hear the music of life in the summertime. All creation is jubilant, redolent, and God throws flower-petal confetti everywhere. I can see the song, and I can smell the song, so there must be a song.

In the midst of so much beauty, joy gives trouble a run for its money. Despair is wiped down as redemption bombards us, cleansing and making all things new. God's presence awaits us, inviting, dancing, His love embodied and made tangible all around. The Creator plays impishly, calling us to awaken and join Him, running up and tagging us with laughter and crab-apple blossoms.

Intimacy with the Creator is a basic need, like food and air and family. My soul longs for God, the psalmist sings, thirsts for him, like a dry and weary land with no water (see Ps. 63:1). These ancient words still ring true to our experience 3,000 years later. That God actually inhabits this earth, living here among us—well, that is not a trivial matter. We so deeply need His love to be real, to be near. Have you ever felt discontent, restless, on edge—then been interrupted by a sunset, a smile, a song? He meets us, somehow, startling us out of our routine. Even a taste can keep us going. Even one day in His house is better than a thousand elsewhere (see Ps. 84:10).

But why are we so parched? I have such grand plans to seek him in my daily breath and bread, in the snatches of silence and the chaos of His good gifts—but then, somehow, I don't. I don't remember to peer just beneath the surface and find my Creator's love upholding each moment of each day. He is here, always, everywhere, yet we forget to seek, have such difficulty finding. Like frustrated, tantruming toddlers, too exhausted to know what will truly bring comfort, we wear ourselves out rather than rest in His steady arms. We forget He is hiding in plain sight.

"Seek Me and find Me," He invites (see Jer. 29:13), "come to Me and rest" (see Matt. 11:28). But from the moment I wake until I lay my troubled heart and spinning mind on the pillow, there are emails to write and crises to avert, so many tasks and troubles. He can be found in all these things—but I forget to lift my face to His. I keep my head down while the moments and days bleed together into decades.

Mercifully, He doesn't let us wander lost forever. He's left reminders, interruptions, all over this world He made. Like the family photos we hang around our living rooms and offices, I look up and see glimpses of Him. Encounters with beauty shake me awake despite myself. God's nearness becomes easier to touch, like low-hanging fruit, branches weighed down by

heavy blossoms, tangling up in my hair as I rush by. God drifts with the pollen on the breeze, falling from the sky like petals, pushing through the earth like an onslaught of lilies. Each one of them proclaims the glory of His presence. As the poet-theologian Rich Mullins sang, "Everywhere I go, I see you" (Rich Mullins, "I See You," *The World as I Remember It*, Vol. 1, Reunion Records, 1993).

I'm grateful that God always runs down the road to meet His prodigal sons and daughters, even when we're still a long way off. Too often we imagine Him standoffish, demanding that we plead and cajole Him to come near. But, no, our salvation is that He is here already, watching for us, inviting us to come near.

I'd like to get better at meeting Him halfway.

For me, finding God often happens by accident, when beauty startles me out of distraction. But there are ways to wake up at more regular intervals.

The ancient Prayer of Examen, instituted and practiced by St. Ignatius of Loyola, aims to help us "develop a reflective habit of mind that is constantly attuned to God's presence" (Jim Manney, *The Prayer That Changes Everything*, Loyola, 2011), to become detectives of God's love amid daily life. Ignatius considered this awareness so important that he asked his followers to complete this exercise twice a day—midday and evening—even if life allowed no time for other spiritual practices.

Like a recipe, the steps can be followed to the letter or adjusted a bit to meet your specific needs, but the basic flow is this:

- Remind yourself of God's presence. Step into His light and love, ask for eyes to see, remind yourself that He is here.
- Look around yourself with gratitude. Give thanks for the

details of this day and this moment.

- Consider the feelings, emotions and thoughts this day has stirred. Invite God into them.
- Reflect on what is wrong, broken or painful. Ask for forgiveness, or the strength to forgive, heal, restore.
- Look forward to the coming moments or days. Ask God to walk with you and for a reminder of His presence.

Each of these five steps awakens us to God's presence here, the intimacy we can step into now. By God's grace, He's already running down the road toward us. Immanuel, God is with us. He waits only for us to behold.

This interruption of summer loveliness strikes me as the perfect time to begin. {eoa}

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