

## THE INTIMACY DEFICIT

**Reading Christian books enriches our faith – but discussing them with others can totally transform it.** Sharing insights and wrestling with ideas together brings fresh perspectives we can't gain alone.

That's why we have a Redeemer 'Book of the Term' – an opportunity for a wide range of people in our church family to read and learn from the same book together.

You could use this discussion guide in a DNA group. DNA groups are small groups of 3-4 people (often from the same City Group) who meet regularly with a shared commitment to help one another:

- **Discover:** engaging and exploring God's word of truth together
- **Nurture:** supporting one another as apply the gospel to our lives
- **Act:** helping each other bear fruit wherever God has placed us

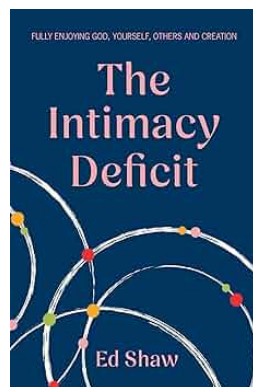
Talk to your City Group Leader if you'd like to belong to a DNA group.

Whether in a DNA group or over coffee with a friend, we hope these discussions grow your faith and help you grow deeper connections.

### The Intimacy Deficit

Ed Shaw suggests that our 'intimacy deficit' - our lack of closeness and connectedness to God, ourselves, others and creation - is at the heart of nearly all of the problems we face. Very often, the intimacy we long for feels just out of reach.

**The Intimacy Deficit** challenges the idea that intimacy is found only in sex or romance, offering us hope for meaningful connection - and a renewed vision of the church as a place of true belonging.



# Introduction & Chapters 1-2

**Key Quote:** “It should be no surprise that the biblical ways of communicating the most intimate relationship with God possible are the most intimate relationships we can possibly imagine. We were created to need this divine intimacy most of all.” (Page 17)

- How does the idea of ‘intimacy with God’ strike you - as weird, inviting, threatening... or something else?
- Which of the three biblical pictures - God as father, God as friend, God as fiance - speaks most to you? Why?
- Things that can cause us to fail to enjoy the full reality of intimacy with God include: suffering (we find him hard to trust), happiness (we’re satisfied elsewhere) and sin (we’re avoiding his gaze). Which of these most commonly stops you from experiencing intimacy with God?
- Have you ever ‘adopted a psalm’ in the way Ed Shaw describes to deepen your intimacy with God? What was the effect on you?

Close your time together by reading Psalm 23, sharing prayer requests and praying for each other on the basis of your discussion.

## Chapters 3-4

**Key Quote:** Intimacy with ourselves is “being at ease with ourselves, content as the woman or man God has made us to be, delighting in the body, the personality, the strengths and weaknesses that he has made us with.” (Page 32)

- Who do you know that is at peace with who God has made them to be, rather than wanting to be someone else?
- “In creating you with a particular physical body, in gifting you with a distinct personality, in restoring you through your union with Christ, God was creating a one-off masterpiece and, like all great artists, he wants his work to be appreciated - most especially by you.” (Page 39)  
What’s your instinctive response to this statement?

- What most threatens your sense of ease with yourself - a dissatisfaction with who you think you ought to be, or an overly low estimation of yourself?
- What could it look like to grow in 'sober judgement' of yourself (Romans 12:3) - neither dismissing your strengths nor being crushed by your weaknesses?
- Ed Shaw speaks of learning certain Bible verses to be able to call upon when his sin, wounds and weaknesses feel overwhelming, reminding him of *whose* he is. Share any verses that you have come to rely upon in this way.

If you feel comfortable, take turns to finish this sentence, "When I think about how God sees me, I instinctively feel..." Then pray for each other on the basis of what's been shared.

## Chapters 5-6

**Key Quote:** "Our Creator designed us to need close relationships with his other creatures too - and not just one person of the opposite sex but whole families and communities." (Page 57)

- Though he was single, Ed Shaw describes Jesus as being "at the heart of a whole network of friendship that met his intimacy needs." (Page 58) Should it surprise us that even Jesus needed human friendship?
- Ed Shaw writes, "No computer algorithm would have matched me with many of my best friends." (Page 64) How does the Bible's vision of friendship surprise or challenge the way you naturally think about it?
- Ed Shaw describes a range of things that can block our intimacy with others - fear, pride, masculine independence, romanticism, perfectionism, busyness or simply moving around. Which of these has been the biggest threat to you?
- What's one specific thing you could do (however small) to help Redeemer be more genuinely characterised by communities of real friendship?

- True friendship requires both constancy and vulnerability. Who in your life really knows you - and what's one practical thing you could do to open yourself up more fully to them, or to someone else?

Share one thing you'd like those you're meeting with to know about and pray for - perhaps something you don't often share. Then pray specifically for each other on the basis of what's been shared, and pray that Redeemer would be a place of rich friendship.

## Chapters 7-8 & Conclusion

**Key Quote:** "Intimacy with creation is good for our souls. It is not an optional extra. It is not a distraction from the Christian life. It is actually one of the best things we can do to increase our intimacy with God, the most important relationship of them all." (Page 99)

- How do you react to the idea that humans have been made to experience and produce beauty?
- Ed Shaw says all beauty appreciation involves genuine intimacy - deeply connecting with a creature, a place or a thing. He gives the example of a caretaker who knows a heating system as if it were part of his own body! What examples of this kind of deep, attentive connection have you noticed recently?
- Ed Shaw lists four ways that our relationship with God's creation can be thwarted: being surrounded by ugliness, making an idol of created things, not valuing this world and not making the time to appreciate beauty. Which of these is most pertinent for you?
- Ed Shaw suggests walking and enjoying poetry as two practical catalysts for cultivating deeper intimacy with creation. What has helped - or could help - you?
- Looking back over the book as a whole, where do you most feel an intimacy deficit in your own life - and what feels like a good next step?

Take a moment in silence to each think of one thing in God's creation you find genuinely beautiful. Share this with the group, and pray for each other on the basis of whatever your discussion has surfaced.