

Secret #1

The Secret of Experiencing Completeness

God's Answer to Our Need for Intimacy

We live in a broken and mixed-up world where most people not only do not believe in God, but they are hostile toward those of us who do. Their disbelief is expressed in the question, ---*“How could there be an all-loving, all-powerful God who would allow so much evil, unhappiness, and suffering in this world?”* Equally sad is the fact that so few of us who believe in God have an answer to that accusation.

From the beginning, God has made clear His perfect plan and provision for us, even in the first few chapters of Genesis. In describing His creation, the details are all focused on planet Earth and its design as the place for us to live. Then, at the very pinnacle of creation, we hear the discussion and argument among the trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), **“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.”** (Genesis 1:26)

We were specifically designed to have a loving, trusting relationship in which God would meet all of our needs. A similar design was given for human relationships. Adam was never intended to live alone, so God gave him a helper who corresponded to him (strength to weakness and weakness to strength) so that they could help complete each other in both needing and in needing to be needed. So, they lived together in a perfect world.

The question is, ---how did the world get so messed-up and out of order? The original plan was for God and Adam and Eve to act as co-regents of the world. That meant we were to choose to love and trust God, just as He loved and cared for us. Of course, God was still God, and our decision not to love and trust Him would bring conflict and death into the perfect world. The world and its elements are now in conflict, and we would have to deal with the results.

So, what were God's options? (1) God could have taken away our ability to make choices (bad or good). But that would have done away with relationships, our ability to be creative. We would never have voted for that. (2) God could decide to take the death and pain for our sin upon Himself and give us a new opportunity to establish a loving and trusting relationship with Him through the sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus Christ. Peace and joy would be ours forever, while pain and death remained on earth to remind everyone of the seriousness of rejecting His love.

Today, the anxiety you and I feel in seeing relationships go bad will hopefully generate an urgency to find how and why relationships either succeed and flourish or crumble and fail. A healthy relationship is one of knowing and being known and loving and being loved without reservation. But even in a promising relationship, we soon discover that without developing intimacy, what we considered to be love will be disappointing and unfulfilling. We must recognize that *simply being together, sharing affections, and enjoying life's pleasures together do not result in the satisfactions of an intimate relationship.*

My Own Silent Struggle

For years I lived without a sense of urgency to understand the secret of intimacy. I have been blessed with a wonderful family. We have loved each other dearly and have learned from each other all along the way. But, as my kids have grown into adulthood, they have realized that something was missing. There was an incompleteness of which I was totally unaware. My son, who is very insightful, put his finger on the weak link. He told me, "*No one could ever have a better dad than you. But I don't know who you are.*"

No dad ever had more fun or shared more love with his kids than I did. That seemed to be enough during those early years. But there was an intimacy gap, and as they grew they needed something I was not giving. When I told my daughter that I was writing about the importance of openness and vulnerability, she was surprised. These qualities have become important to her, and she asked, "*Dad, are you doing this study for others, or for yourself?*" (I was batting 0 for 2.)

Both of my kids could have easily been speaking for my wife, the love of my life. Neither she nor my kids had ever criticized or pushed me to unveil a deeper more vulnerable side of who I am. Without allowing my heart to be exposed or seeing the need to be vulnerable, I had allowed myself to become somewhat independent and to stand aloof from them. Being totally unaware that I was invulnerable, I withheld the secrets of my heart and the keys to experiencing intimacy and completeness with them.

I had grown up with a value of being transparent, honest, and open, but not of being vulnerable and interdependent. Even as a young adult, others depended on me, as a teacher and counselor, to have answers to problems in their spiritual lives, as well as in their families. My independent style was helpful as a drive to solve problems, but that did not include intimacy. As a result, my family continued without the closeness that only comes through mutual vulnerability. I write this with the prayer that you and those you love will not miss out on the kind of intimacy and completeness which, I now realize, makes such an amazing difference.

My wife once led a group discussion with women entitled "Let's Be Friends." Some of them were leaders in the church. After exploring the definition of friendship, she asked about their personal experience. Not one of them could say that they had someone who was truly a friend, someone with whom they could be vulnerable.

I worked on my own need for vulnerability for almost a year before I could pursue this subject further. I have discovered that at every stage of life, you and I need someone whom we love and trust enough to mutually share things we understand imperfectly about ourselves. Vulnerability involves hidden things we dare talk about only with those who love us and would never use what we say to hurt or make us feel unacceptable. Even more, I found that being vulnerable can be a great strength which gives us the sensitivity and insight to see and to help meet the needs of others.

These unmentionables necessarily include our secret fears and self-doubts, as well as our aspirations and the need to be needed. This all-too-rare kind of trust and sharing provides the thing our hearts most long for: a rich, fulfilling, and energizing intimacy. But there can be no true intimacy without committed love, no fulfilling love without complete trust, no deep trust without deeper knowledge, and no complete knowledge and acceptance without vulnerability. Such a satisfying relationship will

produce the joy of mutual encouragement, love, support, and esteem. For me, the most threatening part of the secret had been coming to the place where I could be vulnerable.

Intimacy Lessons from the First Man and Woman

God began unfolding His plan for intimate relationships by making man in His own image and likeness. Adam and Eve were to be co-regents with God in ruling the earth. Exercising this kind of authority and responsibility called for the gifts of knowledge and wisdom. But their practical effectiveness was dependent upon their individual trust, love, and vulnerability with God. Intimacy with Him is basic. Having this kind of relationship was His motive for creating us.

Knowing God Precedes Knowing Others

The physical outworking of this plan began **when "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being"** (Genesis 2:7). This was not simply a matter of selecting clay, mixing it, and shaping it into a human form. We have beautiful examples of the human body chiseled out of stone and molded in clay. These are done by the hands of skillful men and women, but that is as far as they can go. The creative work of God goes well beyond shaping the outward form of our incredible design. The psalmist says simply, you were **"astonishingly and wonderfully made"** (Psalms 139:14).

The most astonishing part is that God created the first man, Adam, by breathing His very life into the earthen figure. This creative act immediately resulted in two spectacular events: (1) In order to give vitality to man's ingenious outward design, God gave Adam an internal system involving circulatory, neurological, and metabolic functions, all of which began to operate perfectly; (2) Upon receiving God's life breath, Adam became a living soul. This included the capacities of emotion, intellect, creativity, will, self-awareness, honest communication, moral values, and personal choice/decision-making.

It is fascinating to see how these capacities of life were designed to correlate with God's own person. It was always His desire to bring satisfaction and completeness to us as a person. By contrast, God has no needs. Yet, because of His love for us and His desire for a relationship of intimacy, He has made Himself vulnerable to being hurt any time we fail to express love, trust, and a thankful heart. Our problem is that we have no real conception of how much He loves us. For us to see both His warmth toward us and His grief when missing us should cause us to have a great desire for intimacy and to be completely loving and vulnerable toward Him. Having these attitudes toward other people is desirable but comes more slowly.

God Provides Completeness in our Human Relationships

Without understanding our need for a complete and vulnerable relationship with God, we cannot understand how human relationships are designed to work. That insight becomes more evident as we see God providing Adam with a wife and saying that Adam was not designed to be alone and would need **"a helper suitable for him"**

(*one who corresponds to and completes him*)" (Genesis 2:18). In his relationship with God, Adam had no sense of being alone, but he was designed to be incomplete and with needs beyond himself. That design emphasizes the greatness of the need for love and trust on our part and the total sufficiency we can find only in a relationship with God.

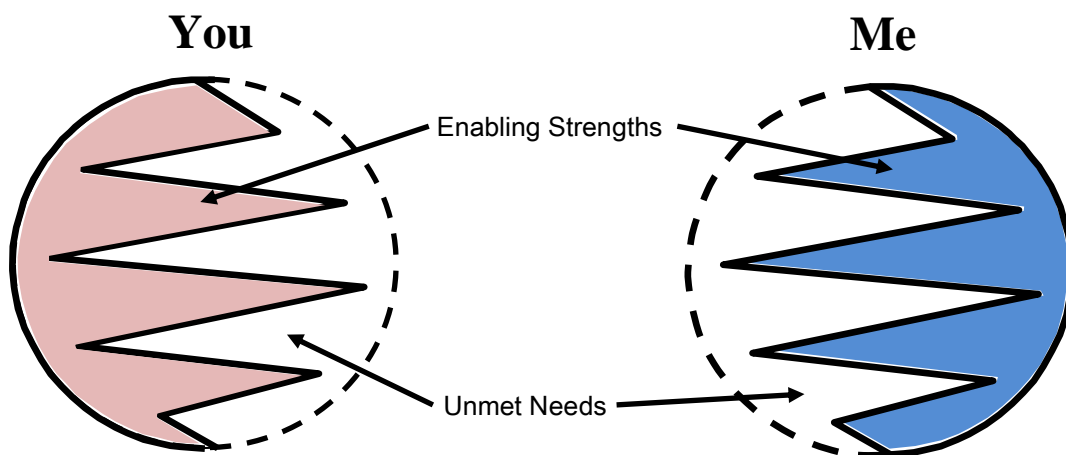
Clearly, the plan for Adam and his wife involved a more obvious balance of personal responsibility. Each of them knew that they had needs and inadequacies, but they also knew that they had enabling strengths. They were obviously never created to live independently but were designed with a need to correspond to and complement one another. Otherwise, their lives would have remained incomplete. (This initial example involves husband and wife, but God's design is for this same completeness to be enjoyed by singles and by those who have lost their mate.)

God's plan was, "**A man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and they will become one flesh**" (Genesis 2:24). This relationship between husband and wife was designed to mirror the loving relationship each of them received and enjoyed with God.

We Cannot Give What We Do Not Have

You and I run into a big problem when we attempt to come together in this complementary relationship if we are not first actively involved in a complete relationship with God. A picture of such a frustrated attempt might look like this:(Diagram #1)

(Diagram #1)



Looking at this diagram, the thing that immediately jumps out is the extent to which our unmet needs reach so deep and make us feel so vulnerable and insecure. It is scary to see that we must willingly expose so much inadequacy (*"I need you, and I am incomplete without you"*). But, this kind of vulnerability is essential if we are to meet one another's needs and to experience intimacy. *This is the very heart of a great relationship.*

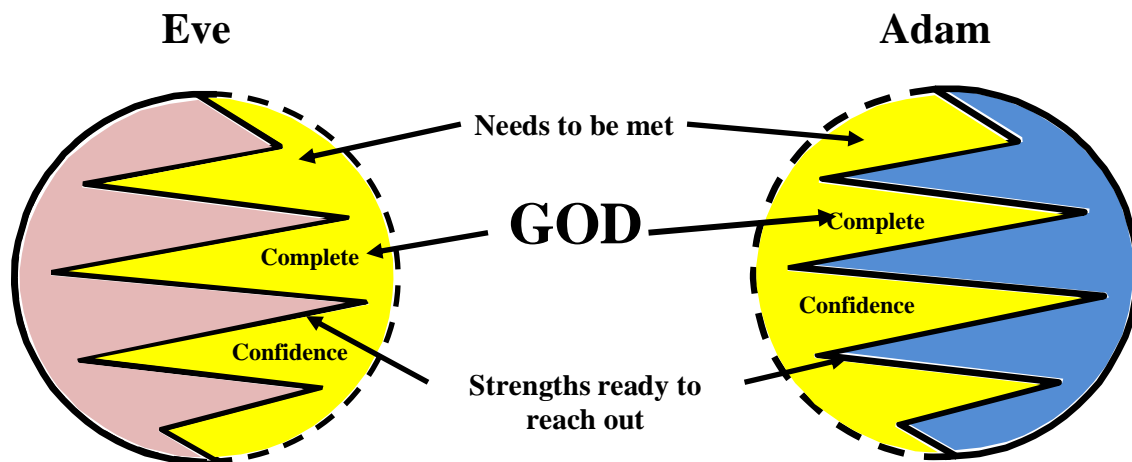
The very idea that you and I could be that open and vulnerable without being overcome with feelings of inadequacy seems impossible. Our fear is, *“If I tell you who I am, you may not like me, and that is all I have.”*ⁱ¹ Our fear is also, *If I clearly see who I am, I may not like me.* The truth is, those same fears would have silenced both Adam and Eve if they had left God out of their lives (as pictured in the above diagram).

The secret of their success was **“The man and his wife were both naked** (physically, emotionally, and spiritually) **and they felt no shame** (the feelings of not being enough)” (Genesis 2:25). Something very special and essential made their success possible. Each of them already had a complete relationship with God in which there was no fear. Knowing God’s total acceptance made it possible for them to be unashamed. Without having that acceptance, our focus turns to meeting our own needs and ignoring those of others. That independent attitude shuts down vulnerability and, in turn, intimacy.

Now, a more accurate diagram shows why this first union was successful:

First, Each was Individually Made Complete by God

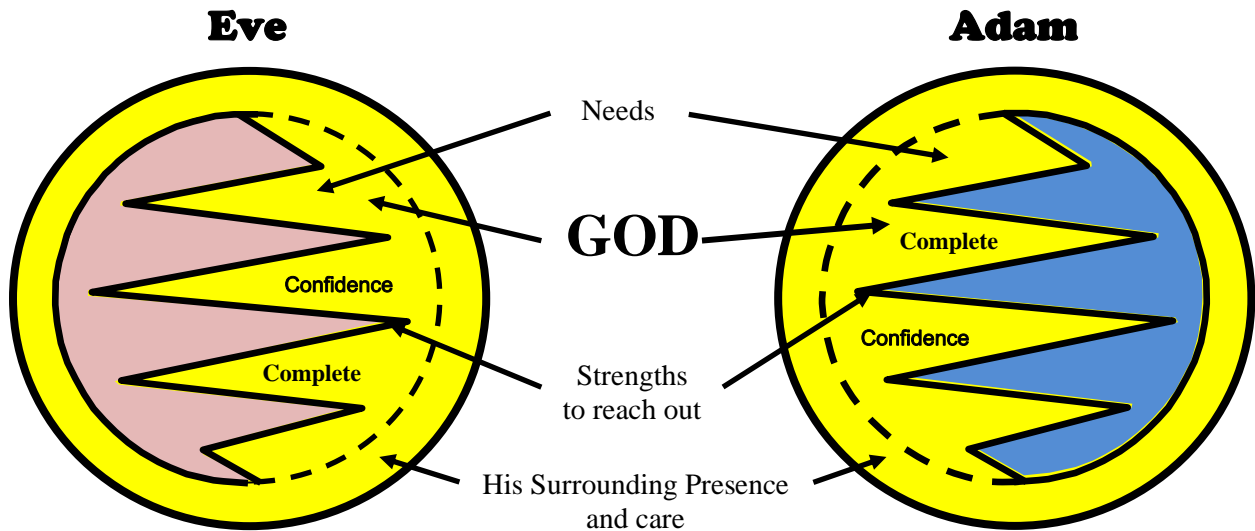
(Diagram #2)



This pictures how they were deeply known (every need, every weakness, and every strength), and at the same time felt completely secure and accepted by God. This gave them confidence not only to be vulnerable with Him, but also with each other. And, during all of this, God’s great love and grace reached beyond simply meeting their needs. In addition to living within them, He brought them to live “in Him” and to share His heart and life. (Diagram #3) As a result, there was no legitimate need for them ever having that feeling of shame (not being enough).

So, Each was Made Complete “In Him”

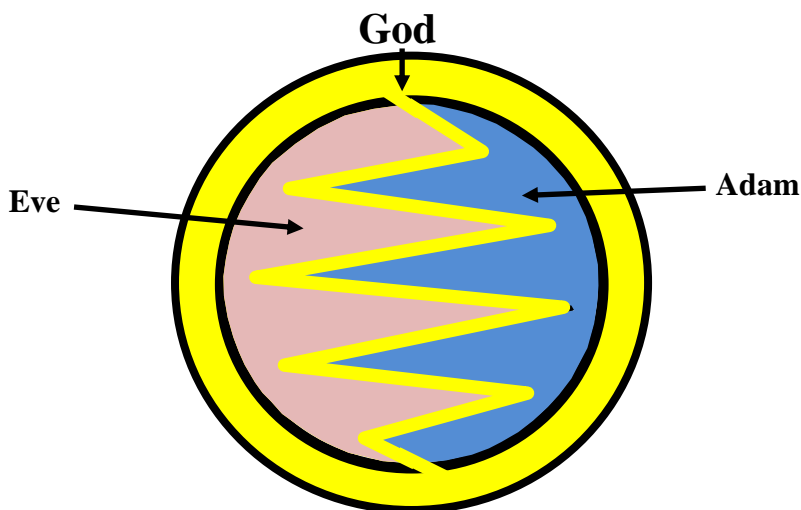
(Diagram #3)



His surrounding presence supplied the sense of stability they needed. Then, they could come together and become “one flesh” with God both integrating and encompassing their union. (Diagram #4)

Their Relationship As “One Flesh,” Complete “in Him”

(Diagram #4)



Intimacy with God allowed Him to become both the oil to avoid friction and the glue to join them together. And, because God was the primary person, the resulting three-way relationship was both effective and protected. Now, Eve could see how she had been made to perfectly correspond to Adam, and both had the joy of being united and sharing the mutual completeness that made them one flesh. The initial relationship of Adam and Eve becomes our example. In them we see the completeness which each of us may enjoy first through intimacy with God and then with each other.

How A Spiritual Breakdown Blocks Human Intimacy

Since God's plan provided perfect intimacy for Adam and Eve, why do you and I have such difficulty in relationships today? That is the question that should keep us in pursuit. The answer becomes clear as we observe the steps through which that initial intimacy was lost. Consider with me the temptation in the Garden of Eden.

The serpent was the tempter's ideal agent since he was the most beautiful and subtle of all of the creatures of the field. It seems that Eve was impressed by the serpent's beauty and charm and by his ability to speak in human language. She had no fear because only after "the curse"ⁱⁱ did he crawl and was seen as dangerous and detestable. I suspect that he was also able to fly. We see limited aspects of this in some snakes today who "glide."

The serpent's craftiness became evident as he began challenging Eve's completeness. She had never questioned it. She knew that she was complete and felt no sense of unmet needs or desires.

The serpent's question to Eve, however, was rather shrewd. He began by questioning her freedom, pointing to the limitations set for her. He asked, "**Did God really say, 'you must not eat from any tree of the garden'?**" (Genesis 3:1) Although that was not what God had said, it still put Eve on the defensive. She tried to defend herself and God at the same time. The serpent got his first victory when Eve began arguing with him without turning to God, who was always present and ready to help. Then, in answering, she mentioned that death was the consequence for eating "the apple". The very mention of death gave the serpent his greatest opportunity.

Cleverly, he implied that a loving God would never sentence her to death for eating one piece of fruit. With this, the serpent assured her that she would not die. He explained that God was using a frightening threat to keep her from sharing the power of His unique wisdom. He said, "**God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil**" (Genesis 3:5).

The clear implication of the serpent's subtle argument is that God is selfish and controlling. This called into question the very nature of God's love and His desire for them to enjoy His goodness. The challenge also implied that death is a display of God's anger and His readiness to punish. Not so! *Death, darkness, and fear are the unavoidable alternative that each of us actually chooses when we turn away from sharing the life, light, and love that is in Him.*

For the first time, Eve entertained doubt. Her feeling of being complete and satisfied was now challenged. The serpent had planted doubts as to whether her relationship with God was enough, implying that He was withholding something she needed and that He could not be trusted. Foolishly, instead of being honest and open with God about her doubt, Eve chose to act independently (That was the first sin.). In doing this, she abandoned her dependence and trust in Him. With the loss of her trust and her sense of completeness, Satan had won, and for the first time, she felt inadequate and fearful.

James tells us that a temptation is made effective when an attractive bait appeals to our desires.ⁱⁱⁱ Our imagination sees the bait as a prize and begins to envision satisfactions without realizing that it will prove to be empty. When Eve looked at "the apple", her eyes saw exceptional beauty, and her imagination began to delight

in its irresistible taste, even before she touched it. Of course, the bait never lives up to its enticement. Instead of glorious triumph, she tasted excruciating defeat. Instead of dignity and wisdom, she was covered with feelings of guilt, shame, and insecurity.

Eve shared her spoils with Adam, who had failed to provide help during her time of uncertainty. That was his responsibility. Perhaps his own desires and feelings of failure had him choose to join her rather than to turn to God for wisdom. Now with a sense of guilt and fear, they found themselves scrambling to cover their nakedness and to hide from Him.

The intimate relationship that had kept them close to God crumbled. Instead of acknowledging their lack of trust and this new sense of loss, they tried to hide it. Their cover-up intensified the problem because it ruled out the ability to be open and vulnerable with Him. The unity that had been so satisfying turned into finger-pointing and placing blame. Their fear and lack of trust naturally led to forming self-protective shields and to the hardening of their hearts.

God's original design for Adam and Eve to be incomplete was never intended to bring shame or guilt, and certainly not fear. Rather, it was to produce the sense of insecurity and need that would lead them to experience intimacy both with God and with one another. (A loving and trusting heart would allow us to see and appreciate this).

How could this great plan for complete and satisfying relationships be destroyed by biting into a seemingly harmless apple? The temptation to **"be like God, knowing good and evil"** was obviously a sham. Adam and Eve were already made in His image and likeness. They already knew goodness, but until now, had not been confronted with evil. The essence of the temptation was not simply "eating the apple". The apple was the bait. The question being raised was whether needing and trusting God, was enough. Foolishly, they chose to act independently. Instead of intimacy, they reached for control, as if they could safely launch out on their own, as if they were in control of knowing good and evil.

Their choice of independence and control was, in essence, the taste of evil. (It still is.) By forsaking the intimate trust, they had with God, they became hostage to their own appetites. Now, with their dependence on self, innocence and security vanished. Suddenly, they were startled by their nakedness, and, were flooded with shame, guilt, and fear. No longer did they feel safe in being clearly seen for who they were. Their infantile response was to create a protective shield by covering themselves with fig leaves and hiding among the trees of the garden. Unfortunately, you and I have inherited that same fear of trusting and being vulnerable. Each time we resort to self-protection and control, intimacy moves farther beyond our grasp. We seem never to learn.

Further Consequences of Spiritual Breakdown

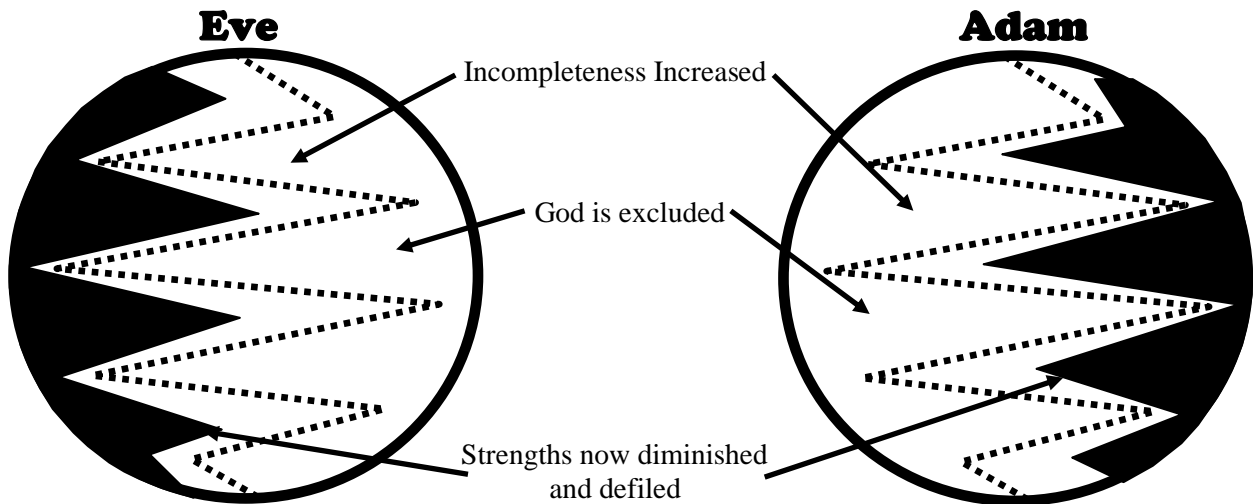
Being incomplete was now frightening. For the first time, Adam and Eve struggled with feeling inadequate (unacceptable), guilt (knowing they had done wrong), fear (dreading exposure and rejection), and contempt (disdain for anyone who failed to meet their needs). Being defensive and shifting blame was now instinctive. Without hesitation, Adam blamed Eve and then God. Today, these same shameful feelings are inevitable when you and I insist on acting independently. Notice how quick

we are to blame God when bad things happen. (Even Atheists do this.) The idea of trusting, drawing close, and finding comfort in our great God has become foreign to the vast majority.

Adam and Eve did not appreciate their relationship with God until they lost it. By making their own satisfactions primary, they pushed God out of their lives, and as a result, their strengths were diminished and defiled. Their incompleteness was now monumental. But, they were not just incomplete, they were broken and alone in a world that was now broken and hostile. And instead of being clothed in God's presence they had nothing but fig leaves to cover their shame. (diagram #5)

Adam and Eve (and us) Disconnected from God and from One Another

(Diagram #5)



While Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, this image is distorted in us today. You and I did not enter this life being innocent and knowing the security of God's presence and fellowship. We were born as sons of Adam **"in his own likeness, ...in his own image"** (Genesis 5:1-3). Intrinsic to our inheritance from Adam is a general sense of inadequacy, the fear of being vulnerable, and an instinctive lack of trust. With this inner wreckage, man's once-exquisite image is now sadly and dramatically flawed.

Because of the insecurity and inadequacy of our fallen state, any focus on meeting one another's needs has become secondary. Instead, we feel an urgency to take control and hide our incompleteness. In fact, the desire to cover our inadequacies has been a driving force since childhood when everyone around us was bigger, smarter, and more capable.

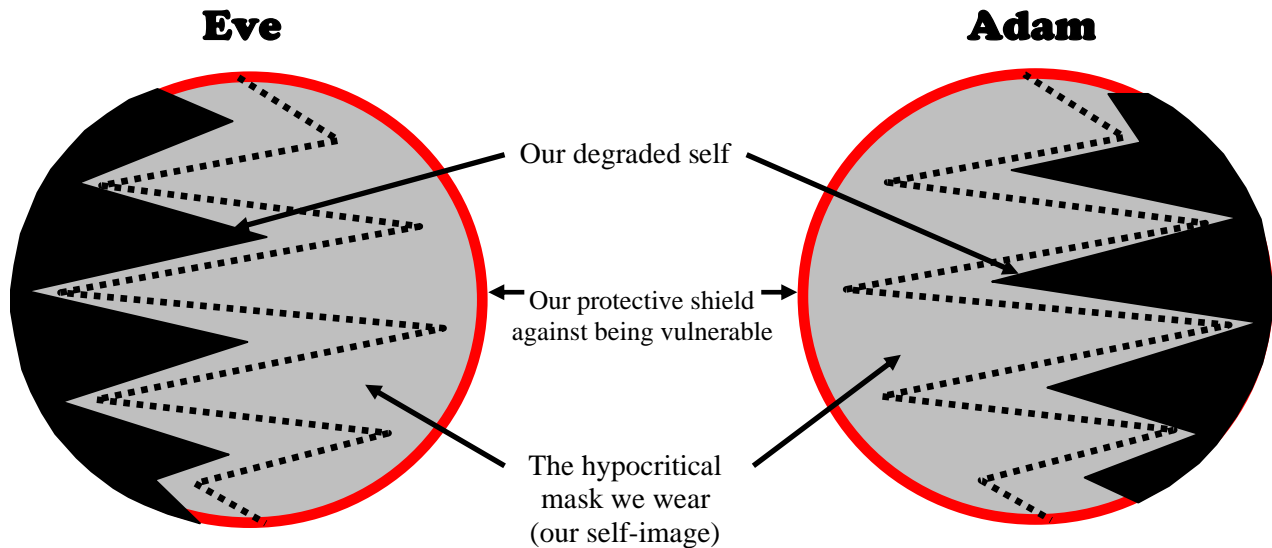
Step by step, we have invested our lives in fighting to build our self-image. Our goal has been to look socially, emotionally, and spiritually complete. We would not admit it, but our unstated (and perhaps unconscious) goal is to be in control enough that our inadequacies will never be seen.

This contrived person with a smiling, self-confident mask, is the best we can present. And to that we add our protective shield to keep others from seeing who we are. Our attempts to cover our shame are as foolish as Adam and Eve's were with

their fig leaves. Coming close and meeting one another's needs has now become difficult (Diagram #6). Our mask and protective shield make intimacy a fleeting possibility.

Our Self-made Efforts of Completion

(Diagram #6)

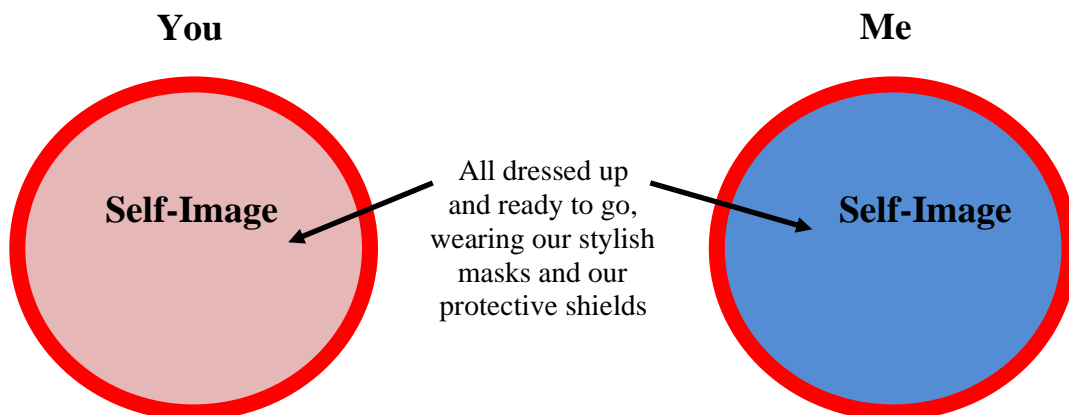


We have conveniently forgotten that eating the forbidden fruit guaranteed the consequence, **"you will surely die"** (Genesis 2:17). We are reminded of it by the weakness we experience physically, mentally, emotionally, and by our ever-present fear of the unknown. But, the truth of our inner man being spiritually dead and being unable to understand who God is have been largely dismissed. (Diagram #6 illustrates our need).

Some of us see our condition as hopeless, and we fall into a life of discouragement and sometimes depression. Others of us are more likely to take pride in our self-achievement. Bolstered by our spiritual blindness, we delude ourselves into feeling complete and in control (Diagram #7).

Our Delusion of Being Complete

(Diagram #7)



This delusion of completeness is self-destructive, and it motivates us to present ourselves as being independent and without unattractive needs. Using the right words, along with a warm smile, can often make our mask look very real and appealing. This pretense of confident independence can frequently gain respect from others. It can even dull the pain of our emptiness and our loss of intimate relationships.

Our delusion of completeness and our protective shield will inhibit intimacy in any relationship. We cling to the assumption that intimacy will naturally result from enjoying pleasure together. Our culture has become so fascinated with pleasure that the words “love” and “intimacy” are now virtually equated with “having sex.” We can happily take pleasure in this without taking off our masks and revealing who we are “under our skin.”

We are left with quickly diminishing satisfaction and with relationships that feel empty. The truth is, as long as we remain captive to our delusion, ever expressing our real needs in a vulnerable and satisfying relationship will be impossible. Without knowing and trusting both God and each other deeply, any attempt at intimacy will degenerate into a struggle for control.

An Honest Assessment to Motivate Change

In our family, I was the independent person. I enjoyed love and what I assumed to be intimacy. I had a working intimacy with God but failed to integrate it into a complete life. I was far too self-motivated and goal-oriented, but I could happily pursue my own and my family’s satisfactions. I loved encouraging and helping my wife Linda in each of her creative ventures in the same way that she supported me. We were a great team, and our delight was in helping our kids grow and develop. My daughter recently told me, *“Looking back, I know that we did not have much money, but I never felt like I was missing anything.”*

Of course I remember those times, and I do not think any of us ever felt we were missing anything. But reflecting on our past, I have come to recognize the degree to which many of our personal feelings and needs remained our own secret. I think we felt like we were showing respect for each other’s privacy. Now I realize that each of us had a shield against being vulnerable.

We had all of the earmarks of a great marriage and family, perhaps even exemplary. We enjoyed a life of love and encouragement, but it could have been so much more. If I had been an example and had set a tone of vulnerability, the entire family could have experienced much greater satisfaction through the intimacy and completeness that we were missing. I can now remember important personal things we did not talk about and to which God could open our eyes.

It is frightening to realize just how far we have removed ourselves from experiencing the kind of intimate and complementary relationships that God first established with Adam, and Eve. All of us share their loss of that original capacity for intimacy.

So, Where Do We Go From Here?

This lesson is basic. ---If we are ever to be awakened to our need, we must first recognize that our desire to be independent is our basic sin. Then, if we are to be available for the Lord to use, the change will begin by letting down our protective

shield and opening ourselves to the Lord. He is the one who already knows, loves, and accepts us completely “in Christ”. Understanding (1) *His love for us*, and (2) *who we are “in Him”* will provide the confidence to develop a complete relationship first with Him and then with our loved ones. But first, we need to discover the answer to restoring our lost intimacy and completeness. Hopefully, Secret #2 will help us to resolve the ongoing conflict between our desire for independence and our need for interdependence. Only then can we enjoy the amazing freedom we have been given by our gracious, loving heavenly Father.

These questions are to enhance your personal application and your discussion with a friend who is reading with you. Sharing this will be an important opportunity to experience being more vulnerable and real. For many of us this will be both new and refreshing.

The Secret of Finding Completeness

1. What was the most helpful or encouraging thing you learned in Secret #1? In what way was it helpful?
2. Seemingly, Eve was led to believe that God was letting her down by withholding something she needed, so she acted on her own instead of trusting Him. Think of a time when you felt that God let you down by not answering your prayer. How did that effect your readiness to trust Him?
3. Think of how Satan's temptation to Eve was almost prophetic. After yielding, she and Adam began to act as if they thought they were in control of knowing and deciding what was both good and evil.
4. Were you shocked to see (in diagram #1) the degree of incompleteness and insecurity we must overcome when God is not actively involved in our lives? How did you personally relate to this?
5. Does reading about my failure to be completely open and vulnerable in my own family remind you of something missing in your relationships? What frightens you most about the idea of being open and vulnerable?
6. Has learning to look honestly at yourself and express your needs made it easier to be vulnerable with God? To hear a beautiful expression of that desire and need (a prayer in music), go to You Tube: *More of Thee*, Lyle Johnson.
7. What helpful thing have you learned by seeing the difference between needing someone because of what they can do for you, and needing them because they bring a sense of completeness to your life? How difficult has it been to express this need for completeness to your loved ones? I am trying to remember just how often I told my wife how much I needed her.
8. How helpful has it been to realize that all of us (not just you) use protective shields to hide who we are?
9. Have you stopped to realize that our most disabling problem is that we fail to comprehend just how much God loves us? It is beyond complete understanding and is almost beyond belief.

ⁱ From the beginning, God has never been limited in His desire and power to act on our behalf. Too often we see God as a distant, powerful authority rather than a loving father who shares our pain and is totally invested in drawing us closer. But when sin entered this world with all of its promised pleasures, it also brought its own consequences, including our secret fears and isolation, as well as illness, death, and natural disaster. God allows these consequences to continue in order to open our eyes to see the connection between sin and the disaster it will bring. He desires greatly to make us complete by sharing His life with us.

ⁱⁱ John Powell. *Why I Am Afraid To Tell You Who I Am* (Allen, Texas, Tabor Publishing) 1969, p. 11.

ⁱⁱⁱ Read Genesis 3:14-19 for the complete account.