

DRAW *near* TO GOD. TO EACH OTHER.

GROUP DEVOTIONAL

BY JENNIFER MILLS

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." Hebrews 10:22-23 (ESV)

A BEAUTIFUL INVITATION

The Lord does not command us to draw near to Him. Instead, He offers a beautiful invitation to draw near. It does not depend on our perfection or performance. So take a deep breath, girl, and lean in. He has already taken the first step toward you by sending His Son Jesus to bridge the gap and fill the chasm between us and Him — to restore right standing and a sweet relationship with Himself in the sweetest and most gentle pursuit.

He leaves the next move up to us. He invites us to pursue Him and respond to His sweet invitation to spend time with Him. We have the opportunity to respond every day—and, let's be honest, often moment by moment throughout the day. Before we pick up our phones and scroll in the morning, in the middle of the day when our souls grow weary from the chaos around us, and at night when our thoughts are racing as we lay our heads on the pillow—it is in these moments that He invites us to draw near! Our time with Him should not be treated as a box to check but as a lifeline of desire to meet with the God of the universe.

We can sometimes feel as if there is a barrier in our relationship with Him, like something has hindered this sweet access to Him. If that's the case, we should always examine our lives and ask ourselves: Is there sin that hasn't been confessed in our hearts that needs to be repented of and dealt with? Have we chosen to pursue and prioritize things other than Him and drifted from Him

as a result? Let me remind you, friend, when we feel distant from Him, He is not the one who left us or drifted away. He pursues us relentlessly. We just need to turn back to Him.

There is no need to live in the tension of striving or feeling the need to “clean ourselves up” to come to Him. Hebrews 10:22 tells us we’re already cleansed and forgiven because of Jesus’ finished work on the cross. All we must do is lean in and surrender to the invitation. When we draw near to Him, we’re positioning our hearts before Him so that transformation can happen. Our nearness matters to Him as we respond to His invitation.

Drawing near to God starts with creating a consistent place and space to meet with the Lord every day. We simply need to show up with Him in His Word, with a heart posture bent toward Him each day. We come before Him available and surrendered to what He wants to do in transforming us to become more like His Son that day. My dad always told me growing up, “You become like the people you hang out with,” and this is true of us with the Lord. If we want to look more like Jesus, we must spend time with Jesus! He wants our time and affection. He wants the real YOU that is vulnerable and honest, who comes to Him with joyful adoration and gratitude each day. For as Hebrews 10:23 says, “He who promised is faithful.”

DISCUSS WITH YOUR GROUP

- **What comes to mind when you think of drawing near to God?**
- **Is it about a process** that looks a certain way, with a particular method or formality involved?
- **What are some situations or strategies** that have helped you grow a deeper desire or desperation to draw near to God?
- **What can hinder you from drawing near to God?**
Examples: Busyness, noise and distractions, shame, unconfessed sin, self-sufficiency.
- **Share examples or personal stories** of how you have been hindered from drawing near to God.

THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness an epidemic, warning that its health impact is as dangerous as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. Chronic loneliness increases the risk of heart disease, dementia, stroke, depression, and premature death. Strong, meaningful connections are essential to our overall well-being.

Loneliness has deeply affected our society as a whole. We're "connected" and "friends" with so many online through our social media platforms, yet not really known by anyone. The real, the beautiful, the hard moments of life aren't often displayed online for all to see. Loneliness plagues us today because we compare our behind-the-scenes to everyone else's "highlight reel."

This passage in Hebrews 10 doesn't just speak of drawing near to God, but as you continue reading, it also tells us to consider drawing near in community with other believers:

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

Can we just declare today that we need people? We were never meant to do this life alone. In our culture there is a need for this now more than ever, as technology and devices have taken up residency in our lives and have replaced real people, dinners with neighbors, and face-to-face conversations. As believers, it's imperative that we lean into verses 24-25 — "and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

In God's invitation for us to draw near to Him, He also provides a solution to this deep need in the heart of every human, this need for connection and community with others. He provides this through the gift of the Body of Christ — the Church! The Church is the cure. Connecting with Christ and with other believers is essential.

As women, it's especially vital that we connect with other women. We need to do life together and not alone. The beautiful thing about drawing near to God and to one another is that it fulfills the great commandment, which is summed up in a call for us as believers to love God and love people.

Ladies, we need each other! We need each other to laugh with, to cry with, to remember with, to be encouraged by, and to pray together with. The list goes on and on. But it doesn't just happen. We must prioritize and pursue authentic community in our lives.

It's vulnerable and risky to open ourselves up to other people because we're all human and broken, and no one likes to be hurt, and that sometimes happens in human relationships. But that's not an excuse to wall up our hearts and never let anyone in. There is something so powerful that happens in authentic community with others who love the Lord, where you find yourself asking, "You too? I thought I was alone in this." We must make the time.

So I encourage you today: pursue that introduction. Invite that lady at church to coffee.

Sometimes we need to take the first step and not just sit and wait on someone else to pursue us first. Take the first step and open your life up to other Jesus-loving women. Let's love God and love those around us well today.

"You will never know the multidimensional glory and beauty of your Savior unless you know Him in community. You need a whole other pile of people who also know Jesus well, who are different than you, and you've got to know them to know Him." – Tim Keller

DISCUSS WITH YOUR GROUP

- **Has it been easy or difficult for you to draw closer to others? Why or why not?**
Examples: vulnerability, insecurity, trust issues.
- **What lies have you believed** when it comes to pursuing authentic community?
- **Take time to close today** by speaking words of life and encouragement over the women in your life this weekend.