

Supplementary material, Chapter 18b: Intimacy with Jesus Is the Number-One Priority

As described in Chapter 3, I started my journey with the Immanuel Approach believing that the primary objective was to heal psychological trauma in order to relieve suffering. As also described in Chapter 3, Jesus told one of my clients, “I love my children, and I am glad to free them from suffering; but the primary, most important purpose of all this emotional healing stuff is to remove the blockages that are between your heart and me. *The primary, most important purpose of emotional healing is to remove the blockages that hinder your heart from coming to me.*”

When my client reported these words from Jesus, both she and I immediately realized, “Wow! This is huge – this is foundational!” And that’s how the whole “Intimacy with Jesus is the number one priority” component of the Immanuel Approach got started. As I have continued to ponder these words from the Lord, I have realized that this intimacy-priority component of the Immanuel Approach applies to more than just the ways in which emotional healing removes blockages that hinder our hearts from coming to Jesus. As will be discussed in more detail below, there are many components of the Immanuel Approach that *inherently* prioritize our connection and intimacy with God.

This chapter also shares more of my personal journey regarding intimacy with Jesus, and presents additional data supporting my conviction that intimacy with Jesus is the primary, most important, number-one priority for the Immanuel Approach and for our whole lives.

I. Mary, Martha, and Jesus:

Anybody who’s been in church for a while knows the story about Mary, Martha, and Jesus. Jesus and his disciples stop by for a visit, and Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to his teaching while Martha is working on and stressing about the big dinner she is preparing. Martha eventually comes to Jesus and says, “Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.” But instead of telling Mary to go help with the task of preparing the meal, he responds with, “My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it – and I won’t take it away from her.”¹ And the main point of this story is exactly the same as the point I am presenting in this chapter: “Just being with Jesus – sitting at Jesus’ feet – friendship intimacy with Jesus – is the ‘better portion,’ the most important priority.” Which is nice, and certainly validates my point about the number one priority being intimacy with Jesus. However, my personal interaction with the Mary, Martha, and Jesus story makes another point.

For most of my life, this story irritated me instead of blessing me. I knew I was *supposed* to be like Mary, but my totally honest, spontaneous, involuntary reaction was to think and feel and act like Martha. And not only did I think and feel and act like Martha, but in my heart I secretly

¹Luke 10:38-42.

defended these responses as the right ones. Even though I knew I was *supposed* to be like Mary, my secret internal response to this story and it's "intimacy with Jesus is more important" message was, "Yeah, right. That's a nice luxury for the fortunate few, but in the real world the first priorities are to make the pain stop, to solve problems, and to accomplish tasks." What felt true to me was that being relational and connected and prioritizing intimacy with Jesus would compromise efficiency and self-protection to the point that civilization would fall apart and we would all die. "I mean, that touchy-feely 'relationships are more important' stuff is all well and good, if we can afford it and if there are no crises that need to be addressed. Be if we stop pretending, we all know that most of the time it's not feasible in the real world."

When I was feeling particularly frustrated and non-relational, I would even have thoughts like, "Go for it Martha – call his bluff. Go and join Mary at Jesus' feet, and when supper time comes pretend like you don't know what happened: 'Oh my! It looks like nobody has prepared the meal! Why, how did that happen? I guess we will just have to fast and pray this evening.'" It never occurred to me that Jesus would have truly welcomed Martha to join her sister, and that he would have cared for the practical issues in some reasonable way.²

For the first forty-plus years of my Christian life, during which I spent a lot of time with my relational circuits subtly offline, I could not *feel* the truth that intimacy with God should be the number one priority for my whole life. And when I could not feel this truth and was secretly defending my non-relational focus on stopping pain, solving problems, and finishing tasks, my thoughts, feelings, and concrete choices would usually look more like Martha's.³ In contrast, in recent years, as I have been spending more and more of my time with my relational circuits online,⁴ and as I have actually been experiencing the joy of interactive connection with the tangible presence of Jesus, I am more and more able to feel the truth that my number one priority should be intimacy with Jesus, and my thoughts, feelings, and concrete choices are looking more and more like Mary's. My thoughts, my feelings, and my actual choices are more and more likely

²If they had a jug of water, a biscuit, and a fish, all he would have to do would be to turn the water into wine and multiply the bread and fish. "Dinner is served!" Or maybe they *would* have just spent the evening fasting and praying – not the end of the world by any means.

³When we are experiencing pain (either physical pain or intense negative emotions) and/or when we are triggered, our relational circuits tend to go offline. And when our relational circuits go offline, we cannot *feel* the importance of relationships. Instead of perceiving relationships to be the most important part of any situation, we will focus on making the pain stop, we will focus on solving problems, and we will focus on accomplishing tasks. For additional discussion of relational circuits, and how we think and feel and behave when our relational circuits go offline, review Chapter 6 in this book and see Chapters 12 and 16 in *Outsmarting Yourself*.

⁴As described in many of my personal-journey stories, I have spent the last twenty years working diligently to resolve the traumatic memories underlying my triggered reactions, and also working to build capacity and maturity skills that enable me to stay relational even while experiencing intense negative emotions. The happy result of all this work is that I am spending more and more of my time with my relational circuits online.

to prioritize intimacy with the Lord.

If you cannot feel the truth that intimacy with God should be the number one priority for your whole life, if you secretly defend a non-relational focus on stopping pain, solving problems, and finishing tasks, and if your thoughts, feelings, and choices usually look more like Martha's, I encourage you to embrace the Immanuel Approach lifestyle⁵ and to deliberately build your capacity and maturity skills.⁶ I encourage you to do whatever it takes so that you can *feel* the truth of the greatest commandment (see below), and so that your thoughts, feelings, and choices grow to look more like Mary's.

II. Not Necessary *and* Most Important (Ironic):

It is interesting to note that this new intimacy-priority component is not actually necessary for the Immanuel Approach to work. That is, you can connect with Jesus, you can get healing, and you can enjoy good, lasting fruit even though you do not name, understand, believe, or internalize that intimacy with Jesus is the primary, most important purpose. Furthermore, intimacy with Jesus as the first priority is hard to hold onto because most recipients come in asking for symptom relief. However, I was facilitating the session in which Jesus said that *the primary, most important purpose of emotional healing is to remove the blockages that are between our hearts and him*, and this continues to feel profoundly true to me. So I feel strongly that this new intimacy priority should be included not just as *one* of the foundational components, but as the *most important* component of the Immanuel Approach. It seems ironic that this particular component is both not necessary *and* most important.

III. Immanuel Encounters that Support the Priority of Intimacy:

As mentioned earlier, the Immanuel encounter in which Jesus talked to one of my clients about the main purpose of emotional healing was how the whole “Intimacy with Jesus is the number one priority” component of the Immanuel Approach got started. Also, many of the Immanuel encounters I describe throughout this book provide *subtle* support for prioritizing intimate, friendship connection with the Lord. (For example, the many, many Immanuel encounters in which Jesus manifests as an emotionally connected, interested, kind, joyful, attuning, interactive friend certainly provide subtle/indirect support for the idea that a real, living, intimate, friendship

⁵For detailed discussion of how the Immanuel Approach lifestyle will facilitate most of the changes that will help you to think and feel and choose more like Mary, see Chapter 35b.

⁶For additional discussion of maturity skills and capacity that will enable you to keep your relational circuits online even while experiencing intense negative emotions, see “Brain Science, Psychological Trauma, and the God Who Is with Us – Part II: The Processing Pathway for Painful Experiences and the Definition of Psychological Trauma” (available as free download from www.kclehman.com), and also THRIVE and Life Model Works material on staying relational in negative emotions.

connection with the Lord is important.) In this section, I would like to describe several more Immanuel encounters that are particularly strong in supporting the “Intimacy with Jesus is the number one priority” component of the Immanuel Approach.

“I love it when you open your heart to me”: One of these Immanuel encounters occurred in a session in which the recipient was doing a particularly good job of being transparent and vulnerable. She was courageously cooperating with Jesus to dismantle certain key defenses, she was inviting Jesus to be with her in memories that were profoundly poignant and personal, and she was inviting Jesus to look with her into the deepest, most vulnerable places in her heart. Then, at some point in the middle of this courageous, vulnerable, intimate healing work, Jesus looked right into her eyes and said, “I love it when you open your heart to me – I love it when you get words for what’s in your heart and share them with me – I love it when you let me be with you in this place.” And Jesus wasn’t just casually commenting, “I’m glad you’re cooperating with this good idea – it encourages me because I know that it will increase your spiritual progress and productivity;” or, as the CEO of Christianity, saying something like, “I’m pleased that one of my employees is strengthening the church by engaging in wise, healthy practices.”

No. Rather, the person had the clear, vivid sense that Jesus was *intensely, personally, intimately pleased*. That he was *intensely, personally* joyful, satisfied, and delighted by her choice to open her heart to him in such a courageous, vulnerable, intimate way. Jesus’ response was kind of like the response a child might have on Christmas morning if her parents figured out what she really, really, really wanted for Christmas, and then got it for her as a total surprise. It was kind of like the response a person might have if she came home from a long day of work and discovered that her spouse had prepared her absolutely most favorite meal, along with decorating the dining room and putting on her favorite music. It was kind of like the response I might have if Charlotte announced that she had arranged for a snorkeling trip to some beautiful tropical location, and that several of our closest friends were going to join us there to enhance the enjoyment by sharing it with us. I remember that both the recipient and I were like, “Wow! Jesus seems to really, *really* like this whole vulnerability, emotional connection, friendship intimacy thing.”⁷

Most of us have trouble wrapping our minds around just how poignantly and intensely Jesus longs for intimate, interactive, friendship connection with us.

“What hurts the most is that you don’t let me come with you”: The second particularly-strong-data-point Immanuel encounter occurred in the context of my working with a man who was using sex as a form of self-medication. In this particular session he was working on memories in which he had gone to strip clubs. I was coaching him to invite Jesus into these memories, but, not surprisingly, he was very reluctant to allow Jesus into the memories because he was afraid that Jesus would be horrified and angry. As I coached him to ask Jesus for help with these blocking fears, he was eventually able to sense Jesus’ presence sitting next to him in the strip club. He asked Jesus, “What do you want me to know about this, Lord?” And then, with a wave of

⁷Actually, I have observed Jesus have essentially this same interaction with a number of different recipients.

emotions and tears in his eyes he reported, “Jesus says that he’s sad about my choices, and that he will help me to change, but what really hurts him is that I don’t let him come with me when I go to strip clubs. Jesus says that what really hurts him is that he can’t be with me.”

Jesus is even more excited to be my friend: The third particularly-strong-data-point Immanuel encounter comes from an interaction with Jesus that I experienced while out on one of my exercise walks. I was doing my thing where I practice Immanuel intervention tools while I’m out walking, and on this particular day it was easy because it was the end of the week, I was happy to be out walking, it was a beautiful day, I felt good physically, and I had just seen the Lord do more cool, beautiful stuff in the last several sessions I had facilitated. It was easy to stir up gratitude, and when I invited Jesus to be with me and asked him to help me perceive his presence I quickly had a subtle internal image of his smiling face, traveling backwards on the walking trail so that he was facing me, and about ten feet in front of me and too the left. I had the sense that I sometimes get that Jesus was just enjoying being with me, as a friend – he was also enjoying the beautiful day, he was happy about the week we were just finishing, and he was particularly glad to be sharing my gratitude and my enjoyment as we walked together.

One of the pains in my childhood was that I had very few friends, and because of this past pain, these experiences in which I perceive Jesus to be just hanging out with me as a friend are particularly meaningful. As I became aware of Jesus’ presence and sensed this friendship feel to the whole encounter, a spontaneous wave of gratitude washed over me: “Wow! This is so crazy! You’re the most amazing, wonderful person in the whole universe and you want to be my friend! I know we’ve done all of this before, but it’s still hard for me to believe that it’s really true – it’s just so crazy and amazing and wonderful.” And that was all fun and wonderful, but the best part was Jesus’ immediate response. It wasn’t like he actually said anything in the form of words, but as soon as I expressed my grateful thoughts to Jesus, I immediately sensed this clear, poignant, intensely earnest response that he was way more excited and grateful that I wanted to be his friend than I was excited and grateful that he wanted to be my friend.

It’s hard to get words to do justice to the whole encounter. It’s like the most popular kid in the whole school says to me, “Hey, Karl, I want to be your friend – you can be part of my group.” And then when I say, “Wow! Really? You want to be my friend? Are you serious? That’s great! I would love to be friends with you.” He responds, “No, the pleasure is mine. I’m *so excited* that *you* want to be *my* friend. I’ve been hoping all year that maybe you might decide to be friends with me.” Totally incredible.

Sometimes, when I talk about this experience, it occurs to me that people might think it sounds trite or cliché or campy: “Oh, wow!. I’ve *never* heard that one before (with sarcasm). ‘Jesus is my *best friend!* (eye roll.)’ I got that from at least five kids every week at Young Life camp.” Or maybe, “Old news. ‘Jesus wants to be your friend!’ When I was in second grade my Sunday-school teacher said that to me every single week for the entire year.” But the crazy part is that *it’s true!* This may seem a little strange, but when I was in the middle of this encounter, it was so fresh and vivid and immediate and real that I felt like I had never before in my life heard anybody talk about experiencing Jesus as a personal friend. Even though I have now shared this story many times, I still get choked up whenever I talk about it.

Intimacy with Jesus is not just the number one priority for our lives because we want and need to have a living, interactive friendship connection with him, but also because *Jesus deeply, poignantly, earnestly desires to have a living, interactive friendship connection with us.*

IV. The Greatest Commandment:

Oh, and then there's the little thing about the greatest commandment. When Jesus was asked, "Which is the most important commandment?" His response was, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."⁸ This kind of gives the impression that an intimate relationship with the Lord is important.

V. The REVEAL study – intimacy with Jesus and spiritual growth:

A striking, surprising, intriguing, and really important data point regarding this intimacy-priority component of the Immanuel Approach is that it is supported by one of the largest, most rigorous, most statistically powerful sociological studies that has ever been conducted.

In 2004, Willow Creek Community Church began REVEAL, a sociological research project initially intended to clarify which of the many activities available to the Willow congregation produced the most benefits with respect to spiritual growth.⁹ The REVEAL research team defined spiritual growth as increase in two key attitudes provided by the greatest commandment (love for God and love for others), and increase in a number of concrete behaviors, such as tithing, serving, sharing one's faith with others, and prayer. With this definition of spiritual growth, they designed detailed questionnaires to look for correlations between every possible church-related activity, every other variable they could think to study in the lives of congregants, and spiritual growth. In two waves of surveys between 2004 and 2007 they obtained 2.6 million data points from 11,000 completed surveys from congregants at Willow Creek and six other churches, and teams of professional business consultants and Ph.D. statisticians analyzed this

⁸See Matt 22:36&37 and Mark 12:28-30.

⁹The study was intended to address other questions as well, but according to Bill Hybels, Gregg Hawkins, and Cally Parkinson, the primary objective of the study was to provide strategic focus and priority. At the time this study was initiated, Willow Creek congregants were involved in more than one hundred church-related activities, and the leadership team wanted to know which of these many, many activities should be prioritized and which of them should be eliminated. (Bill Hybels, in the Forward to Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Greg L. Hawkins, *More* (New York: Multnomah, 2016), page 29; Greg L. Hawkins, *The Big Reveal: What Needs to Change in the Church*, plenary presentation at Life Model Works Annual Gathering, April 2017; and Cally Parkinson and Nancy Scammacca Lewis, *Episode 1: The History of REVEAL*, podcast on "Resources" page of REVEAL website (<https://revealforchurch.com/podcast>), June 12, 2017.)

huge pile of data.¹⁰

Willow Creek leadership and the research team went into the project with the assumption that involvement in church activities, such as Sunday morning services and small groups, would both predict and drive spiritual growth. They were expecting to easily confirm this assumption, and then to identify which of the many, many activities available to the Willow congregation were most effective so that they could strategically prioritize these high-yield, wise-investment options. With the first wave of analysis, the church leadership and the research team were shocked to discover only the smallest correlation between spiritual growth and participation in church activities, per se. The data showed a very modest increase in the spiritual growth behaviors (tithing, serving, sharing faith, prayer, etc) with increasing activity level, and there was essentially no increase in the spiritual growth attitudes (love of God and love of others) with increasing participation in church-related activities. When the attitudinal and behavioral indicators of spiritual growth were combined, the first wave of analysis showed that level of involvement in church-related activities did not significantly predict or drive spiritual growth.¹¹

At first the church leadership were so shocked and disoriented by this finding that they didn't even know what to do with the study. However, the business consultants and statisticians eventually went back to the data to see if they could find anything that *did* correlate with spiritual growth. This wasn't what they were looking for when they went into the study, but as they examined the data from every possible angle using every possible tool to test for every possible correlation, they discovered one pattern that was especially strong and clear: relationship closeness with Jesus *hugely* correlated with spiritual growth. Love for God, love for others, tithing, serving, sharing one's faith with others, prayer, and every other indicator of spiritual growth increased dramatically as relationship with Jesus increased. *Every single indicator of spiritual growth went up, consistently and dramatically*, as a person moved from minimal relationship with Jesus to strong relational closeness with Jesus. In fact, the mostly secular statisticians who had analyzed the data were impressed by the size of the effect, and spontaneously commented that it was the second strongest correlation they had ever seen in twenty years of statistical analysis. Increasing relational closeness with Jesus consistently and dramatically predicted and drove spiritual growth.¹²

As you can see, the results from the REVEAL research project support the priority of intimacy with Jesus with striking clarity and directness. Furthermore, the study itself is exceptionally strong.

First of all, the people working on the project were exceptionally well qualified. Greg Hawkins,

¹⁰Greg L. Hawkins, Cally Parkinson, and Eric Arnson, *REVEAL: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2007), pages 22-29.

¹¹Hawkins et al., *REVEAL: Where Are You?*, pages 30-36.

¹²Hawkins et al., *REVEAL: Where Are You?*, pages 36-41; Hawkins, *More*, pages 43-46; and Hawkins, *The Big Reveal: What Needs to Change in the Church*, plenary presentation at Life Model Works Annual Gathering, April 2017.

the executive pastor at Willow at the time the study was put together, provided leadership for the whole process. Greg has an MBA from Stanford, and prior to joining the staff at Willow in 1991 he had worked for five years as a management consultant with McKinsey & Company, the world's leading independent market research firm. Cally Parkinson, director of communications at Willow at the time the study was put together, ran point on the project. Cally has a Master's degree from the American Graduate School of International Management, and prior to joining the team at Willow her twenty-five year career with Allstate had included various director and officer level positions in strategic planning, research, finance, and communication. And Terry Schweizer, who came on board in 2007, had spent twenty years running the Chicago office for McKinsey prior to joining the REVEAL research team.

The project has also benefitted from spectacular consultation. Eric Arnson, who provided consultation for REVEAL from the moment of its conception, began his career in quantitative consumer science at Proctor & Gamble. He eventually founded his own research and strategy consulting firm, he spent years as a partner with McKinsey, and he ultimately became McKinsey's North American leader of brand strategy. In addition to Proctor & Gamble, he worked with many other Fortune 500 companies, such as Nike, John Deere, the Weather Channel, Levi-Strauss, and Gatorade, and by the time he joined the REVEAL research effort he had been deep into social science research for three decades. Eric's counsel and ideas enabled the study to utilize the most advanced, cutting edge, sophisticated research methods in the field. Eric also called in favors, recruiting consultation help from friends and former colleagues. He was able to obtain help with questionnaire design from specialists at McKinsey, he was able to obtain help with data analysis from analysts and statisticians at McKinsey, he was able to obtain independent analyses from a number of former colleagues who were research veterans, and he was able to obtain a third-party assessment from an international research group. Most recently, Nancy Scammacca Lewis, a statistician with a Ph.D. in quantitative methods, has been providing regular, ongoing consultation since 2008.

Secondly, having team members and consultants with extensive relevant training and experience insured that every aspect of the study was designed with exceptional care. For example, the indicators for spiritual growth weren't just the result of a couple of hours of brainstorming by statisticians who knew nothing about the subject, but rather were formulated only after carefully studying scripture, reviewing more than one hundred books and articles on spiritual formation and human development, and consulting with experts in the area of spiritual growth. The specific questions included in the surveys provide another example. Designing good questionnaires is actually quite difficult – it is surprisingly easy to ask poor questions that result in weak data, and it is surprisingly difficult to come up with just the right questions – questions that clearly focus the most important issues, questions that avoid suggestions that would contaminate the results, questions that address many different issues, so that you can discover valuable “surprise” correlations that were not included in the initial hypothesis, and questions that come at the same issues from many different directions so that the results can be checked for internal consistency. The questions included in these surveys were not just the result of a couple of hours of brainstorming by pastoral staff that knew nothing about the subject, but rather were carefully formulated by experts with both training and experience in the science of designing

questionnaires.¹³

Thirdly, the data was analyzed with exceptional thoroughness and care. A team of analysts and statisticians from McKinsey & Company, one of the best business consulting firms in the world, looked at the data with every tool they could think of. And, as mentioned above, Eric Arnson helped the REVEAL team to obtain independent analyses from a number of different research veterans, as well as a third-party assessment from an international research group.¹⁴

Furthermore, the results from this study seem to apply to *everybody*. Since the first two waves of data collection between 2004 and 2007, the REVEAL research team has continued to gather survey responses, even to the present. Now, with responses from more than 2,000 churches, they have verified that their conclusions apply across exceptional diversity. They have gathered data from every denomination, every region of the country, every racial group, every size of church, and every cultural group. And *every* church they have surveyed – Catholic churches and protestant churches; Lutheran, Mennonite, Coptic Orthodox, Baptist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Vineyard, and independent churches; east coast, west coast, northern, southern, and Texan churches; Euro, Hispanic, African American, immigrant, and mixed racial churches; liberal churches and conservative churches; charismatic churches and liturgical churches; small, medium, large, and mega churches; older churches and younger churches – *every single church they have surveyed* has yielded this same clear, strong result with respect to spiritual growth and intimacy with Jesus.¹⁵

¹³Note regarding self-report questionnaires: When data is obtain from self-report questionnaires, an important concern is whether participants will answer honestly. The most obvious concern is that people would answer with what they know they *ought* to think and feel and do, as opposed to *what actually happens* in their lives. The team of experts that designed the questionnaires and analyzed the data were, of course, aware of this concern. And one of the ways they addressed this concern was to look for internal consistency: they designed the questionnaires to come at the same issues from many different directions and they also analyzed the data from many different angles and in many different ways. What they found was an incredibly high level of internal consistency. They asked the same questions in many different ways, they analyzed every aspect of the data from every angle and using every tool they could think of, and *all* of the data kept telling the same story: relationship with Jesus predicts and drives spiritual growth. This striking internal consistency is a powerful indicator of reliability and validity. (Hawkins et al., *REVEAL: Where Are You?*, page 40; and Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, pages 278-284.)

¹⁴For readers who know enough statistics theory to appreciate the details, specific statistical tools used in the analyses included correlation analysis, discriminant analysis, regression analysis, hierarchical cluster analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and path analysis. For additional discussion of the statistical analyses utilized in the REVEAL research project, see Appendix 7: Research Approach and Methodology (pages 278-284), in Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*.

¹⁵Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, pages 253-255; and Parkinson and Scammacca Lewis, *Episode 1: The History of REVEAL*,

Finally, the sheer size of the study provides exceptional statistical power. Now, with thirteen years of ongoing data collection, the REVEAL data base includes survey results from more than 2,000 churches and more than 500,000 congregants. With this HUGE data base, the REVEAL study carries exceptional statistical power. This means that we can be very, very, very confident that the conclusions coming from the statistical analysis of this data are valid.¹⁶

So, the short summary is that the whole study was really, really carefully designed and executed, and then the results thoroughly analyzed, by really, really smart people who have MBAs and Ph.D.s in relevant fields and who have worked for the best business consulting firms in the world. Furthermore, this study is one of the largest and most statistically powerful studies in the history of sociological research.¹⁷ And this incredibly well designed, carefully executed, statistically powerful study shows that relational closeness/intimacy with Jesus is the number one predictor and driver of spiritual growth.¹⁸

VI. The Immanuel Approach *inherently* prioritizes intimacy with God:

Finally, this intimacy-priority component of the Immanuel Approach is not just a cognitive truth that we need to hold onto with our minds and an emotional attitude that we need to deliberately develop in our hearts. The good news is that the Immanuel Approach *inherently* prioritizes connection and intimacy with God. That is, the importance of our living, interactive friendship with God is inherently imbedded in many of the components of the Immanuel Approach.

An analogy may be helpful in understanding the ways in which components of the Immanuel Approach *inherently* prioritize intimacy with the Lord. Let's say you are the president of a company that makes toys, and you want to increase the sales of a particular toy – you want to *prioritize* the sales of a particular toy. You could send out an official, explicit announcement that you want the company to sell more of the new Mega-Man action figures, and you could include cognitive explanations regarding why you believe this is the right move to make; but the

podcast.

¹⁶Parkinson and Scammacca Lewis, *Episode 1: The History of REVEAL*, podcast.

¹⁷According Nancy Scammacca Lewis, the Ph.D. statistician currently working with the ongoing REVEAL study, this research project is actually *the* largest and most statistically powerful sociological study that she is aware of. (Parkinson and Scammacca Lewis, *Episode 1: The History of REVEAL*, podcast.)

¹⁸One final note regarding intimacy/relational closeness with Jesus: The team that designed this study does not define intimacy/relational closeness with Jesus in exactly the way I would, now that a regular interactive connection with the tangible presence of Jesus is the center of my Immanuel Approach lifestyle. (If I could design new study questions, based on my Immanuel Approach experience, I think they would show an even stronger connection between spiritual growth and intimacy with Jesus.) But even with their definition, the results of this huge, rigorous, statistically powerful study strongly support the central priority of intimacy with Jesus.

announcement and explanation, *in and of themselves*, would not carry any inherent, automatic, built-in power to effect change. In contrast, there are practical, concrete interventions that *would* carry inherent, automatic, built-in power to effect change. For example, you could use advertising to increase awareness, you could decrease the price to make Mega-Man more affordable, and you could offer free overnight shipping to make it more convenient for customers to actually get their hands on the item. Launching an advertising campaign, decreasing the price, and offering free overnight shipping, *in and of themselves*, would carry inherent, automatic, built-in power to increase sales. The announcement and explanations would provide a more thorough, logical, understandable, *explicit* presentation of the priority you are wanting to establish, and this would be valuable and important; but I'm sure the reader can see that it would also be really important to include the practical, concrete components.

With respect to the Immanuel Approach, the previous sections in this chapter provide the explicit announcement and cognitive explanations regarding my conviction that intimacy with Jesus is the most important priority. And this section describes the practical, concrete components of the Immanuel approach that carry inherent, automatic, built-in power to improve our relationships with the Lord.

Deliberate appreciation: As already discussed at length in Chapter 6, deliberate appreciation increases our relational circuit activity. This prioritizes intimacy with the Lord by making it easier to establish a good connection with him.

Memories for past positive experiences: As already discussed at length in Chapter 8, deliberately recalling and refreshing memories for past positive experiences with Jesus is a component of the Immanuel Approach that helps us to perceive Jesus' presence and connect with him. This same component of the Immanuel Approach also inherently strengthens our relationships with Jesus.

Our relationships with other people are memory-mapped. That is, our relationships with other people are carried in the memories for our past experiences with them. For example, I remember the first time I ever met my wife, Charlotte. I remember writing letters to her when I was in college, I remember talking to her on the phone every day during our long-distance courtship between Chicago and Portland, I remember our wedding, I remember our honeymoon, I remember working together to fix up our different apartments, I remember prayer times with her while driving on various long road trips, I remember hiking with her in Glacier national park, I remember planting flowers together in our front-yard garden, . . . etc. I have *thousands* of memories of experiences with Charlotte, and our relationship is carried in these memories. If I spend time thinking about and activating these memories that carry my relationship with Charlotte, it prepares my brain to connect with her in the present. Furthermore, deliberately recalling and thinking/talking about the memories for past positive experiences with Charlotte will strengthen these memories, and thereby strengthen my relationship with her.

In the same way, our relationships with God are memory-mapped. Just as with other people, deliberately recalling and talking about our memories for past positive experiences with Jesus will activate these memories and prepare our brains to connect with him in the present. Furthermore, deliberately recalling and thinking/talking about memories for past positive experiences with Jesus will strengthen these memories, and thereby strengthen our relationships

with him. By helping us to connect with Jesus in the context of any given Immanuel encounter, and by strengthening our ongoing relationships with Jesus, this component contributes to the many ways in which the Immanuel Approach inherently prioritizes intimacy with the Lord.

Constant focus on an interactive connection with Jesus: The foundation for the Immanuel Approach is an interactive connection with the living presence of Jesus: at the beginning of each session we help the recipient establish this connection; throughout the middle of the session, we constantly check to make sure that the recipient is still perceiving Jesus and connected to Jesus; at any point the person loses this connection, we troubleshoot to identify and resolve the hindrances that are getting in the way; and at the end of each session, we make sure that the recipient is at a good place and connected to Jesus. This constant *functional, practical* focus on an interactive connection with the living presence of Jesus, throughout each and every session, obviously prioritizes intimacy with Jesus.

Describing everything: As already discussed at length in Chapter 16, the recipient describing everything that comes into her awareness, regardless of whether it makes sense or feels important, helps many recipients to recognize and appreciate subtle perceptions of the Lord's presence and subtle interactive connections. Just as with deliberate appreciation, this component prioritizes intimacy with the Lord by making it easier to establish a good connection with him.

Immanuel Interventions as the central troubleshooting component: As already discussed at length in Chapter 13, Immanuel Interventions – interventions specifically, strategically, especially focused on finding and resolving any issues hindering our ability to perceive Jesus and connect with Jesus – are the most important troubleshooting component in the Immanuel Approach. If the person can't connect with Jesus at the beginning of the session, we use Immanuel Interventions to find and resolve blockages. And if the person loses her interactive connection with Jesus at any point during the session, we use Immanuel Interventions to help her re-establish this connection. Furthermore, these Immanuel Interventions don't just increase our connection with Jesus in the context of a specific session. As we use Immanuel Interventions repeatedly over time, and more and more hindrances are removed, it becomes easier and easier for the recipient to establish and maintain a good connection with the Lord.¹⁹ By helping us to establish and maintain a good connection with Jesus in the context of any given Immanuel encounter, and by resolving more and more hindrances over time, this component of the Immanuel Approach inherently prioritizes intimacy with the Lord.

Deliberate, progressive resolution of memory-anchored blockages: As will be discussed at much greater length in Chapter 35c, toxic content from unresolved traumatic memories frequently gets transferred onto the Lord, and these memory-anchored issues are some of the most common, sneaky, and costly blockages that hinder our relationships with God. As we use the Immanuel Approach to work away at our traumatic memories, and more and more of these memory-anchored hindrances are thereby resolved, our relationships with the Lord will steadily, progressively improve. And, of course, helping our relationships with the Lord to improve inherently prioritizes intimacy with Jesus.

¹⁹See Chapter 29 for additional description of this steady progress over time.

The Immanuel Approach lifestyle: Finally, working all of these pieces into our *lifestyles*, as skills that we regularly practice and as behaviors that we build into our daily lives as *habits*, will especially prioritize and facilitate intimacy with the Lord. (See chapter 35b for additional discussion of the Immanuel Approach lifestyle.)

VII. “I came for healing, but found intimacy”:

As I was talking with a young missionary about her experience with the Immanuel Approach, she spontaneously commented: “I started using the Immanuel Approach to get healing, but what I found was intimacy.” I have heard essentially this same comment from many others who have embraced the Immanuel Approach as a lifestyle, and this has also been my own experience. I believe that this is the predictable result of the many ways in which the Immanuel Approach inherently prioritizes intimacy.