

# *Proximity*

by

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I'm making a departure from my normal devotional form to share my thoughts about a new book I have recently written, and was released a couple weeks ago. The book's name is *Proximity*. I would like to share with you why I wrote it and why I feel it could be a powerful influence on Christian leaders in making disciples. I need your help in getting the book out to these leaders through your influence and relationships with them. But before you do this, I ask you to read it yourself and see if it resonates in your own heart. Why did I write the book? To answer this I must share with you what I have been seeing.

I have been discipling and mentoring men and women in the Body of Christ for 35 years as a businessman, church leader, and now as a full time ministry leader. During those years, I used most every plan, program and strategy that was vogue at the time. But something was missing in those programs. While the focus on God's word, His majesty, His sovereignty, His mercy and grace was within the programs, it seemed as if God was so distant from me because of His holiness and my sinful condition that I could never come close to Him. I was taught that I could be saved by Him and that I needed to study about Him, but, I was never taught how to have a close relationship with Him. As a result, I never felt that I was His son, even though scripture taught I was. I began to look around me and I saw that I was not alone in my condition. Most everyone I knew had a longing relationship need to be close to our Creator but didn't know how to enter into it. We all tried the religious route with heavy church attendance, serving to exhaustion, giving deeply of resources, and being involved in those discipleship programs that I mentioned. We heard good sermons, and listened, applauded, and sang like everyone else. But everything we did fell short of that "connection" we were longing for, and we knew that our efforts in serving Him were lame at best.

After 10 years of these failing efforts, I sought God's wisdom with what was missing in my efforts, and in His own way He spoke to my heart and said, *"You are failing to connect with My heart. You cannot change yourself or others with outside disciplines. You must abide in Me and I in you to understand what this means. This is where an inside out transformation takes place in your life. It happens by living in close proximity to Me. This is where you find what you are longing for."*

It was then, in 1984 that I read John 15 in a new way and understood that at the core of what was missing in me was to have an intimate, abiding relationship with Jesus, as the disciples had with Him when Jesus first spoke this passage. For the next 15 years He began to teach me what this "connection" looks like, what it will produce when it is in place, and how to go to this special place with Him. But it couldn't stop with it being just for me once I discovered it. I learned that to be a disciple of Christ requires me to be involved with helping make other disciples. So in 2001, God led me to share what he had taught me with seven other men in our first *Journey Group*, and those men discovered that which was missing in them as well. We knew that we had been given something of great worth that is needed by the Body of Christ, and as a result, *Influencers* was birthed that year. It has been established with one purpose, which is to take God's family to an intimate, abiding relationship with Jesus using *The Journey*. So, why did I write *Proximity*?

I have been very concerned for years that the Christian culture in America has become spiritually anemic and is not producing disciples as Jesus defined “disciple.” I have watched shallow believe-ism develop because of watering down the Gospel to make it *user-friendly* to entice people to attend church. I have also seen the Gospel become a platform for moneychangers who espouse ideas on prosperity and feel-good messages to motivate and stimulate giving to their ministries. All the while, I see good, hungry followers of Christ who are looking for something real, but like I once was, not finding it. I see good, faithful pastors and ministry leaders growing discouraged with the condition of the people in their church and not knowing what to do about it. Most of the programs they’ve tried have not sustained or reproduced. Very little real life change is being seen coming out of those popular programs, and these pastors are discouraged. Sure, there are exceptions. But by in large, attendance is down, giving is down, indebtedness grows, divorces in the congregation grow, families become damaged by all manners of sexual sins, financial failures, relationship problems, and on and on. Because of this, I have grown greatly concerned. But I believe with all my heart that God has given us the answer in how to stop the bleeding and turn this downward trend around. It must be found in coming close to Him so that He can transform us. Now, to answer clearly why I wrote the book.

Have you ever felt so strongly about something that you feel you will explode if you don’t share it? Like a person who knows the cure for cancer, could he keep it to himself? As he watches millions of people, even his own loved ones and friends who are being eaten alive by this dreaded disease, would he hold the secret to himself? No! Absolutely not! He would broadcast it broadly. He would get it out through every social media form he could use. He would ask the people who know him best to join with him and get this good news out to those who are sick and discouraged. He knows that his words are discounted the further out it goes from him, except those people who know him best. But those people know people he doesn’t know, and their words would not be discounted. So he asks them to help him by spreading the word. Of course the best people to give a testimony would be those who listened to him and followed his advice as he shared the secret. His secret discovery became real to them and they joined in the mission to bring life to the sick, the discouraged, and the dying, for it cured their cancer. They are the most credible, the ones who were cured.

Just like the man who discovered the cure for cancer, I feel that God has given to me His insights on what is missing in the current discipleship efforts being made by many churches and ministry leaders. I want to share with them what can be gained in their ministries by moving their congregations and participants to close proximity with Jesus. For 15 years, Influencers has seen the results from our intentional efforts to lead thousands of men and women into close proximity with Jesus by using *The Journey*. I want to share this. We have seen massive benefits in the home, family relationships, churches, prisons, and any place where the life of a man or woman who abides in Christ touches. Whether or not my book inspires leaders to use *The Journey* is not the objective. The objective is not to expand more *Journey Groups*, but to make more disciples by helping other ministry leaders. Any discipleship effort they make will be effective if the goal is to move the people they lead to close proximity with Christ, and this book is written to help them see this.

I wrote *Proximity* with the distinct purpose to help ministry leaders discover what is missing in their ministry so that their work for our King can become fruitful. In this book, I am sharing the most important things God has taught me the last 35 years about making disciples. Therefore, in the same way that the man who asks those who have been helped by his work and his secret to cure their cancer and get the word out to help others, I ask the same of you. Will you help us share the truths about discipleship that God has given to Influencers by giving this book to your pastors and ministry leaders? Will you buy a book for yourself and for them? I believe they will thank you for it, as it might be what they are praying for. You can purchase the

book online at: <http://www.influencers.org/products-page/study-materials/proximity/>.

Thank you for your help.

*Rocky*