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## Exploring Intimacy with God: Lessons from Jeremiah, Judah, and a Spoiled Loincloth

“Talk about strange.”

Jeremiah easily earns the title of one of the most unusual prophets God ever called. Among the many uncomfortable and symbolic acts God required of him, none

sounds stranger to modern ears than the story of Jeremiah’s ’ezor—his loincloth. In Western culture, intimacy and underwear do not belong in the same sentence, much less in a sermon illustration. But in the ancient Middle East, the image carried a powerful meaning.

The Hebrew word ’ezor (sometimes transliterated ’izar) refers to a cloth worn tightly around the waist. It was an undergarment, yes—but also work clothing, swimwear, and daily attire for fishermen and laborers. In many parts of the world today, similar garments are still worn. Anyone who has traveled in India, for example, has likely seen the lungi, a loose cloth wrapped around the waist that functions much the same way.

There was nothing immoral, improper, or crude about the ’ezor. Quite the opposite. It symbolized closeness. Nothing came between the cloth and the skin.

An old Middle Eastern saying captures this intimacy well: “Your friend is your ’ezor.” It conveyed loyalty, closeness, and constant presence.

That background brings clarity to God’s words in Jeremiah 13:11 (CSB): “Just as underwear (’ezor) clings to one’s waist, so I fastened the whole house of Israel and of Judah to me”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“so that they might be my people for my fame, praise, and glory, but they would not obey.”

The image is startling—but it is meant to be. God is describing the kind of closeness He desired with His people. An intimacy so near that nothing separated them from Him.

God builds intimate relationships with those who spend time with Him.

REVELATION 3:20

## **Jeremiah: A Prophet Shaped by Pain and Faithfulness**

To understand this metaphor, we must first understand the man who delivered it. Jeremiah was born into a priestly family in Anathoth, a small town about five miles northeast of Jerusalem, in the territory of Benjamin. It was one of the cities of refuge. Like many sons of priests, Jeremiah was likely being trained for temple service. Instead, God interrupted his plans. Most scholars believe Jeremiah was called to be a prophet sometime between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. By Jewish standards, he was incredibly young. Yet God told him plainly that his calling began long before his education or preparation:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.” (Jer. 1:5)

Jeremiah’s ministry began around 627 BC, during the reign of King Josiah, and lasted through the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. His was not an easy ministry. He preached repentance to people who refused to listen. He warned of judgment that no one believed would come. He wept openly over the stubbornness of God’s people, earning the title “the weeping prophet.”

Politically, his message was confusing to many. Assyria had long been the dominant power to the north. Egypt loomed to the south. Yet Jeremiah warned of a rising threat few took seriously—Babylon and its future king, Nebuchadnezzar. History would prove Jeremiah right.

### **Josiah, Reform, and a Tragic Failure**

Jeremiah ministered during one of Judah’s most hopeful periods. King Josiah ascended the throne at just eight years old after the assassination of his wicked father, Amon. Raised under priestly care, Josiah eventually led one of the greatest religious reforms in Judah’s history. He repaired the temple, restored proper worship, and led the nation in cov-

enant renewal. On the surface, it seemed like the perfect time for revival.

But God saw deeper.

Despite reforms, Judah’s heart remained divided. Idol worship never fully ceased. Faithfulness remained superficial. Outward obedience masked inward compromise.

Josiah himself provides a tragic illustration. In 609 BC, Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt marched north along the ancient trade route known as the Via Maris—the “Route 66” of the ancient world—to aid the weakening Assyrian empire against Babylon. Necho sent word to Josiah that he meant no harm and even claimed God had sent him.

Jeremiah’s writings remind us that God is active in the affairs of all nations—not just Israel. Yet Josiah ignored the warning. Disguising himself, he engaged the Egyptian army at Megiddo and was fatally wounded. Judah soon became a vassal state. The slow unraveling had begun.

### **The Loincloth: A Living Parable of Lost Intimacy**

Against this backdrop, God commanded Jeremiah to perform one of his strangest acts. Jeremiah was told to buy a new ’ezor and wear it—but not wash it. He wore it for many days. Then God instructed him to travel to the Euphrates River, a journey of roughly 700 miles, and hide the garment in a crevice among the rocks.

We are not told how long Jeremiah wore the cloth, how long the journey took, or how long it remained hidden. But when God later sent him back to retrieve it, the outcome was predictable. The ’ezor was ruined. Decayed. Useless.

God did not leave the meaning open to interpretation. Just as the loincloth was meant to cling tightly to the waist, Israel and Judah were meant to cling to Him. They were created for closeness—

for intimacy—for obedience born out of love. Instead, they allowed themselves to be shaped by the surrounding culture, polluted by compromise, and separated by disobedience. The tragedy was not merely judgment—it was distance.

### **God’s Heart for Intimacy**

From the beginning, God’s desire has always been closeness with His people. At Mount Sinai, He told Israel:

“If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession.” (Exod. 19:5)

Treasured possessions are guarded, cherished, and kept near. God longed for Israel to remain close—like the ’ezor around the waist. Yet intimacy cannot survive divided devotion. Judah never stopped worshiping God—but they never stopped worshiping idols either.

That tension still exists today. Years ago, during a mission trip to India, I witnessed this struggle firsthand. During a communion service, a man was quietly refused the Lord’s Supper. He left embarrassed and saddened. Later, I learned the reason. He had not come to surrender his many Hindu gods. He had come hoping to add Jesus to them. The Indian preacher had gently explained that God is jealous—not insecure, but exclusive. You cannot serve God and idols. Like the rich young ruler, the man walked away unwilling to let go. Intimacy with God requires singular devotion.

### **Rebuilding Intimacy with God**

The ancient proverb quoted in the Pulpit Commentary on Jeremiah says, “He is to me in place of an ’izar.” In other words, “He is closer to me than my most intimate garment.” That is the kind of relationship God desires. How, then, do we cultivate such intimacy?

**First, through intentional communication.**

Prayer is not meant to be scripted performance. It is honest conversation. Intimacy grows when we speak vulnerably and learn to sit quietly before God, allowing Him to speak through His Spirit.

**Second, by immersing ourselves in Scripture.**

The Bible is not merely information—it is revelation. Reading Scripture to know God’s heart, meditating on His Word, and allowing it to shape our daily lives draws us closer to Him.

**Third, through trust-filled obedience.**

Jesus made it clear: love and obedience are inseparable. Obedience nurtures intimacy, while unconfessed sin creates distance. Quick repentance keeps the relationship close and unhindered.

### **The Warning and the Invitation**

Jeremiah’s ruined ’ezor stands as both a warning and an invitation. Intimacy neglected will decay. Devotion divided will distance us from God. But intimacy restored begins with repentance, surrender, and renewed closeness.

God still longs to draw His people near. The question remains: How close are you willing to be to God?

...Bill Adcox

Bethany, OK

## GROUP DISCUSSION

(Read the article along with Jeremiah 1-13)

Scott, I ran my article through ChatGPT to clean it up and it offered to make group and personal study questions. I thought this BC article might be a solo group discussion starter or a personal meditation time for BC readers. So consider these as extras. I take no claim on them beyond the nod to ChatGPT to produce them.

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1. Jeremiah's use of the *'ezor* feels uncomfortable to modern readers. Why do you think God sometimes uses shocking or intimate imagery to communicate spiritual truth?
2. How does understanding the cultural meaning of the *'ezor* deepen our understanding of God's desire for intimacy with Israel?
3. Jeremiah ministered during a time of outward reform but inward compromise. Where do you see similar patterns in religious life today?
4. King Josiah was sincere and faithful, yet still failed at a critical moment. What does this teach us about discernment and listening to God's voice?
5. Why do you think Judah was able to worship God while still holding on to idols? What made divided devotion seem acceptable?
6. The article describes intimacy with God as "closeness with nothing in between." What are some modern equivalents of things that come *between* us and God?
7. Jeremiah obeyed God even when the message made him unpopular and uncomfortable. What does his example teach us about faithfulness?
8. How does the story of the ruined *'ezor* illustrate the consequences of spiritual neglect over time rather than sudden rebellion?
9. Discuss the idea that judgment is not only punishment but *distance from God*. How does that reshape how we understand sin?
10. The mission story from India highlights God's jealousy. How should we understand divine jealousy in a healthy, biblical way?

11. What role does obedience play in intimacy with God? Can intimacy exist without obedience?

12. If God were to give the church today a “living parable” like Jeremiah’s, what might it look like?

Notes

## Personal Study Questions

1. How would you honestly describe your current level of closeness with God—distant, steady, growing, or intimate?
2. Are there areas of your life where you are outwardly faithful but inwardly divided?
3. What practices or habits once kept you close to God that you may have neglected over time?
4. Is there anything you are trying to *add* to God rather than surrender *for* God?
5. When was the last time you spoke to God with complete honesty—without rehearsed words or guarded emotions?
6. Do you create intentional space for silence and listening in your relationship with God? If not, what crowds it out?
7. How do you typically respond when obedience becomes uncomfortable or costly?
8. Are there sins or patterns you delay confessing, allowing distance to quietly grow?
9. What does “clinging to God” practically look like in your daily routine?
10. If intimacy with God requires exclusivity, what loyalties or attachments compete for your devotion?
11. How does remembering God’s long history of faithfulness deepen your desire to stay close to Him today?
12. If God were to describe your relationship with Him using a metaphor, what might it be—and what would you want it to become?

Notes

## Were They Ashamed?

*“Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,” says the Lord. Thus says the Lord: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”*  
*Jeremiah 6:13-16*

I ran across a Newsbreak article titled “People Who Grew Up Religious — What Are Things You Still Feel Guilty About Even Though You No Longer Believe?” It is alarming to contemplate the ideas advocated in this article. The author, Jake Farrington, bemoans the fact that “A lot of people who grow up in a religious household end up leaving their faith behind, but that doesn't mean remnants from the teachings they struggled with aren't still left behind.” Farrington encourages readers to share how they have been able to lay aside religious teachings. Some things he mentions like learning to feel self-esteem and self-worth are understandable. However, the Bible teaches us to have a good image of self, even though some of the teachers of the Bible may not have understood this truth. But Farrington goes on to advocate for immorality when he writes, “Or, perhaps you learned that you needed to maintain your purity, and having sex outside of marriage would dishonor God, so you still feel guilty after sleeping with someone.” We need to understand that we should feel ashamed for sleeping with people outside of marriage. This basic truth is fundamental to the welfare and health of our society. When we advocate for “free sex” outside of marriage with no commitment whatsoever, we wind up also having to advocate for abortion on demand because there is no commitment between the individuals having sex for the children that result from their indulging their sexual appetites.

Here is what I found with just a very cursory look into statistics for childbirth outside of marriage:  
“In 1970, most OECD countries saw less than 10%

of children born outside of marriage, with the average rate across the 30 OECD countries with available data just 7%. By 1995, this OECD-30 average had grown to 23%, and by 2020 to above 40%.” (OECD – Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) When television and entertainment use their influence to promote sex outside of marriage, a culture follows along blindly following their lead. When our own government institutes programs that encourage people to have children outside of marriage, and in essence punishes those who are married, what do we expect the results to be for our society? I have known of several couples over the years who chose to live together unmarried because if they married their government assistance would be cut off.

Jeremiah spoke for God at a time when Judah had thumbed their noses at the moral precepts of God's Law. They acted immorally and they were not ashamed. Their immoral lifestyles were leading the country to ruin. Jeremiah advocated for them to “stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it.” Judah responded, “We will not walk in it.” How will we respond? Will we blush at our sin?

L Scott Gage  
*Vita E – 03-19-2026*

## Where Do You Place Your Hope?

*“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Rom. 15:13*

Too often, this world feels full of chaos, confusion, disappointment, and struggle. During tough times, are we placing our hope in the wrong things? Are we depending on a loved one, a friend, or another person? Are we trusting the government to “fix” our problems? Are we turning to addictions like food, alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, or sex? Or are we putting our hope in our job or money? While some of these are necessary, and some even good, they are ultimately sources of false hope. All of them will eventually let us down.

In the first part of Romans 15, Paul reminds believers that the Scriptures were written to teach us so we might have hope. He concludes by saying, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Paul is telling us that God is the true source of hope, and His hope fills us with both joy and peace. But how do we obtain this hope? First, we must obey the Gospel of Christ. Then, we must immerse ourselves in the Scriptures, which are authored by God. The Bible is full of hope and promises from a God who is unchanging and eternal—a God who will never fail us. Even though we face storms in life, His Word offers comfort, patience, and the hope of better things ahead. The Scriptures equip us with the strength to endure even the hardest challenges

this world can throw at us. Without them, we are left with only false hope and no peace.

...Michelle Franklin

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