

To Know God

Reviving Our Lost Passion for Him



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Lesson One - To Know God

Sometimes, during the busy-ness of our days, in the midst of our distractions, we hear an inner voice - thoughts about God that come, perhaps, when we notice a particularly striking sunset, hear a piece of music, watch a certain movie, or witness someone suffering. Perhaps at such times God is calling us to a “romance” with him, to think about him, to give thoughts to his ways, to admire him, the way a couple would admire each other while dating. When you feel this inner longing trying to come to the surface, think of it as God’s romantic love language. What do we do with these thoughts? Do we dismiss them, brushing them aside as immature, weak and impractical? Do we “wake ourselves up” during those moments and tell ourselves to get on with “real life” with all its problems and demands? Do such thoughts even get swept away in the midst of our own version of “commitment” to God? Try to remember the time when this romance first called on you? When was it? What was the geographical setting (where were you when you first felt it)?

Some of us see God as a “concept”. We try to analyse him, like animals in a biology laboratory and afterwards we walk out of our time with Him not being amazed at all, since everything can be “explained”, the way a scientist looks at a beautiful rainbow and only sees the process of refraction. Since we are discussing romance, try thinking about a kiss in a logical way. What is “the truth” of a kiss? Two sets of lips just pressing together? Can you really reduce it to icy cold facts? Have you ever kissed a boyfriend/girlfriend? Do you still remember your first kiss? There was nothing “scientific” about it!

Perhaps, at other times, we think about all the “arrows” of our lives - the painful moments and feelings, from our childhood right up to the present. The illness, our parents’ divorce, the fights with our siblings, the collapsed business, the falling away of a loved one - and then we question whether God really cares. Who gets the last word? The arrows or the romance? The groan or the sense of awe? We can resurrect this romance if it has been lost along the way.

Jeremiah 2: 2-5

"Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:
'I remember the devotion of your youth,
how as a bride you loved me
and followed me through the desert,
through a land not sown.

Israel was holy to the LORD,
the firstfruits of his harvest;
all who devoured her were held guilty,
and disaster overtook them,"
declares the LORD.

Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob,
all you clans of the house of Israel.

This is what the LORD says:

"What fault did your fathers find in me,
that they strayed so far from me?
They followed worthless idols
and became worthless themselves.

Isaiah 62:4-5.

"Forsaken" shall no longer be your name,
your land shall no more be called "Desolate"
you shall be "my delight," your land shall be
"My wedded wife," for the Eternal takes delight
in you, and your land shall again be married.
As a young man weds a maiden, so your Founder
marries you, and as a bridegroom thrills to his bride,
so shall your God thrill to you

-A New Translation (James Moffatt)

Mal 3: 7

"Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees
and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD
Almighty.

"But you ask, 'How are we to return?' "

The Romance and love can be resurrected!!!!

1. God Wants A Romance With Us

We do many things out of duty on a typical day - think about this and make a list.
(Egs: Getting up, having QT, breakfast with family, reading newspaper, going to
work, at work, facing boss, facing colleagues, lunch times, finishing work, coming
home, dinner with family, watching TV, getting with a disciples, getting with a non
disciple, e-mails, calling others in BT, putting children to bed, telling them stories,
winding down with wife.)

Many of us do not see our relationship with our God as such. We see it as only in one
of the following perspective:

- a. Clay and the Potter
- b. Sheep and the Shepherd
- c. Servants and Master
- d. Children and Father
- e. Friendship

- f. Lovers – Husband and Wife. Many scriptures in Song of Songs depict this type of relationship S of S

2: 3-4,

“Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest
is my lover among the young men.
I delight to sit in his shade,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
He has taken me to the banquet hall,
and his banner over me is love.”

4: 1-4,

“How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes behind your veil are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
descending from Mount Gilead.

Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just
shorn, coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin;
not one of them is alone.

Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;
your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.

Your neck is like the tower of
David, built with elegance;
on it hang a thousand shields,
all of them shields of warriors.”

5: 6-8,

“I opened for my lover,
but my lover had left; he was gone.
My heart sank at his departure. ^[a]
I looked for him but did not find him.
I called him but he did not answer.

The watchmen found me
as they made their rounds in the city.
They beat me, they bruised me;
they took away my cloak,
those watchmen of the walls!

O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—
if you find my lover,
what will you tell him?
Tell him I am faint with love.”

6: 3,

“I am my lover's and my lover is mine;
he browses among the lilies”

7:10,

“I belong to my lover,
and his desire is for me.”

Which metaphor best describes how you operate with God? What is your real view of God and You together?

There are times when we *should* operate with God based the different metaphors, given the context, but what is the *underlying* metaphor? Do we respond to God's calling of romance? Picture this dialogue between an engaged couple:

He: I'm so looking forward to our wedding day. I do love you so much. I really wish I could see more of you. There's so much about you I want to know better.

She: Yes, I know, dear. I'm going to send you a book that describes more about my life. I am sure that you'll get a lot out of it.

He: I will be glad to read it. But I just want to hold your hand. I just want to kiss you.

She: I'm sure you do, beloved. Let me send you a tape describing the role of physical affection at different stages of courtship. You will find it worthwhile, I'm sure.

He: That's wonderful, darling. It's just that I so look forward to our wedding day. I want to be with you so badly. I think of us being together, you know, day and night.

She: Yes, intimacy is important. I'd like to send you a weekend seminar that really should be quite helpful.

Matt 24: 12

“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,”

For many of us, our picture of God has been significantly affected by our relationship with our earthly dad. We think that the characteristics of our heavenly father are the same as those of our earthly father.

In 2 Kings 2: 11-12

“As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart.”

Elisha cried out as he watched his father in the faith disappear into heaven. It seemed that he cried with great anguish, while ripping his clothes. Perhaps his voice seems to echo your own as you see/saw your own father's success, work, jail, divorce and death be taken away from you with little notice. That voice is still perhaps in you. The pain is still real. The distance was never bridged.

This longing for connection is so real that you have not been able to reconcile that separation. Perhaps now, there is still a desire to find the role model, the older man who knows the road ahead of you, who is there to advise you on marriage, bringing up children and other issues. We wanted that attention but never got enough of it. Years went by, then suddenly...

Take out a picture of your dad, look at it and think if you have encountered the following while growing up:

- Playing alone with your own toys.
- Spending time with other fatherless boys.
- Seeing him only on rare occasions, but when you do, even though he has a lot of weaknesses, you felt great, simply because he was around.
- Having an empty chair at the table during dinner with the family, as dad was not there, still working or maybe even out with others.
- Feeling that the few words from his mouth were generally words that rebuked you or corrected you.
- Hearing mostly expectations from him, rather than encouraging words.
- Witnessing him mistreat your mother and other siblings.
- Seeing him worry about the finances.
- Missing your dad at big occasions which were only attended by your mother or grandmother, since Dad was too busy.
- Knowing that he fought hard and worked hard, but that his marriage was drifting.

(While it is true that the above statements do not apply to ALL families and ALL dads, unfortunately, it is also true that the majority have more negative than positive memories of their fathers.)

Write out the following:

-Happiest memory involving your father.

-Saddest memory involving your father.

-The way you feel about Father's Day.

-A description of your last (or most recent) conversation between you and your dad.

Do you see your dad as a tired person, sitting on the couch with the newspaper, not talking to anyone? Sure, you can get annoyed, but have you ever thought about the fact that he may be a man who still has many storms in his own heart? He may be hurting with his own issues. You have grown up, and are now repeating this cycle, perhaps making some modifications on it. You rationalize that you are a victim of that dysfunctional relationship, yet God has this to say to us:

Ezekiel 18: 1- 4

“The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel:

"The fathers eat sour grapes,
and the children's teeth are set on edge'?"

"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die."

We use the example of our earthly father and project this onto our heavenly father, thinking that he is the same. We feel an invincible wall separating us from God and dare not draw close to him. *Yet, we must break the chain.* We can and should. We should identify the unhealthy example that we are imitating, many times unconsciously. We must realize that our heavenly father is the perfect, loving, unblemished father, who is also the father of your own imperfect father. Go to God. Let's study out a man who saw this and overcame. His name is David.

2. God Wants to Be Our Refuge

One way of looking at the story of Samuel finding David is to view the situation as David not being held in high regard by his own father, Jesse. He was the eighth son, the baby of the family, yet he was not treated like Joseph, who had been his father's favourite. Instead, David seemed to be the one that was used as a servant to attend to the daily chores of the household.

1 Sam 16: 1,

"The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

1 Sam 16: 4 -13.

"Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"

Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen

these." So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?"
"There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep."
Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down ^[a] until he arrives."

So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah."

How did being the boy who attended to everyone else's needs make David feel? Jesse's seven other sons were held in greater honour by their dad. Surely, growing up David must have sensed it. The father had high hopes for the other sons, but not particularly for David. His brothers didn't help. In 1 Sam 17: 28, Eliab, David's oldest brother, abused him in front of other people. Still, that did not make David bitter and wallow in self pity. In the midst of his hurt, while spending many hours on the hillside, he drew close to his heavenly father. His many psalms were likely written out of loneliness as he prayed and sang while guarding the sheep. He must have danced under the Bethlehem sky before his father who was moved by his desire to seek him. In Psalms 27: 10-11,

"Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me. Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors."

As events would unfold, David then had an opportunity to develop a relationship with Saul. Perhaps David thought that Saul would take him in, be the father that he had always wanted, but had never had. In 1 Sam 16: 19-23

"Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep." So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul. David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him." Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him."

They began on a good enough note. Then the tables turned against David, in 1 Sam 18: 5-11

"Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well.

When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. As they danced, they sang:

"Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands."

Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice."

Saul was overcome by evil. David's relationship with him went downhill from that time onward. His only true father was God himself. Even though his earthly father and fatherly figures had had their flaws, he never took this out on God. He viewed God differently. God was his true refuge and would faithfully take care of him.

3. God Wants Us to Wrestle With Him

In Gen 32: 24-31

"So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, ^[a] because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip."

For many of us, the temptation is to run away from all the hurts when life gets difficult. Let's look at a man by the name of Jacob. As a young man, Jacob was a deceiver. He cheated his older brother out of his birthright and then manipulated his father to get his blessings. His children inherited his sins - like father, like son. Two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Reuben, cheated the tribe of Shechem. Gen 34: 18-29

"Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen. "These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and

trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us."

All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.

Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses."

They tricked the tribe into getting circumcised and then attacked them when they were too sore to fight. Jacob, after a life of much deceit, finally faced an angel. This time he couldn't trick, manipulate and or deceive. He went on ahead and dealt with the encounter until he was permanently hurt. He got a new name, clean slate, new identity. This came with a price - a limp.

When we decide to confront our past, our hurts and wounds, these may come with a price. For Jacob, the new identity was worth the limp he inherited. For many of us, it may cost us and we may have to "limp" around for a while, but this fight is well worth it. The limp may help us inherit salvation. Do you have a new name? Are you the same old struggler, who refuses to break out? Has God changed you yet? He will if you dare to face him, with a pure heart and with a willingness to make right the past. Let's fight the good fight - it is well worth it.

Conclusion

The Dance of the Bride

Said the Bridegroom to the Bride
You are my Lover, my joy and Pride
We'll be together side by side.
So come away from dawn through the night in the dance

Said the Bridegroom to the Bride
I have loved you everyday of your life
And it was destiny, not by chance
That I'm Lord of your heart and
Lord of your dance.

-Julie Meyer

How do we keep our heart thrilled about this romance?

a) *Take advantage of daily reminders.* The devil steals this from us daily. We can get it and then lose it, if we are not careful. The people of God in Deuteronomy 6 were told to bind the word of God onto their foreheads. Why? To constantly remind them.

b) *Reduce the constant noise in your life.* Turn off everything, mobile phones, TV, etc. Go somewhere where you can *enjoy* your time with God. (If you are married now, chances are you didn't "rush" your dates!) A serene place would do wonders. If not, even a dark room will do that for you. Meditate and wonder about God's amazement.

c) *Make a journal of your prayers and thoughts about God.* Write it all down! Make a list of things you are grateful for (perhaps 100, perhaps 1000!). Make a list of what is burdening you. Compare the two.

d) *Read a book that will help you enrich your walk with God.* Take notes. Share with your spouse or some close friends constantly. Embark on a journey together.

Journaling

LESSON ONE, DAY ONE

Psalm 63: 1,

“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you,
my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

Psalm 7 - 8,

“Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.

My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.”

John 7: 1 - 44

On a scale 1- 10, how free is your heart? (10 being the most free)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Finish this sentence;

“My Christian life is _____

Describe a time in your life when your experience of God seemed more intimate.

Are you enjoying your relationship with God right now?

Why did Jesus get up on the last day of the feast to say what he said in Jn 7: 37-38?
What did they do in the feast of the Tabernacles? (Jn 7: 2)

How is God drawing you through your thirst now?

LESSON ONE, DAY TWO

What was your favourite movie growing up and why?

Who was your best friend growing up and why?

What was your favourite event, tradition and/or holiday growing up and why?

What was your favourite adventure as a child (or even more recently) and why?

What was your favourite memory as a child?

Why was it your favourite?

The Connection

All these things, the cherished moments then and even now, are part of God moving your heart. Your heart was able to be moved then; it can be moved now – you have not reached your “expiry date” in God’s books. The events that happened in your life have a way of moving you toward God. They have a message to tell you. Looking back, what was the message? Make the connection. What is God trying to say?

LESSON ONE, DAY THREE

If your life could be better next year, what would it look like?

Is there anything about someone else's life that really looks good to you right now?

Think of a good moment recently (even if it's very simple). Why is it good?

Pick one of the best moments in the last year, followed by the last few years. Why were they good?

Are you living from your heart now? Are you closer to doing so now than you were five/three years ago?

How did you wind up at this church? Is this what you really want in your relationship with God?

Overall, think about how the hours of your days are spent? Is your life right now a reflection of *your* desires, or everyone else's? Is 10% yours and 90% a reflection of others' pressures and demands? What is your %?

If your life never changes from this point, if this is the way you have to live for the rest of your life – how would you feel about that?

What type of life would you like to be living in the next five years? What would you like to be doing? With whom?

What is your heart really yearning for? Can you relate to David in Ps 63 and 84?

What do you want to see happen in the next five years in your relationship with God?

How does the bible appear to you when you read it? (The Yellow Pages, an exciting story book or a love story?)

Are you presently exercising any of the spiritual disciplines in your life (journaling, getting up in the mornings, reading the bible before bed at night, praying with your wife every day)? How are things now? Is your heart alive? Is communion with God getting deeper?

Can you hear these messages playing in your life today?

How are you dealing with these arrows of life? An annoying habit, an addiction, an unhealthy self dialogue – are you brushing these types of things aside? Sometimes as children we make vows – at the time we think they are for self-protection, and they may serve that purpose for a while – but eventually they become as bad as that from which they were originally protecting us. Have you made any negative resolutions or vows in your heart? Childhood vows can be dangerous.

It is time to renounce these vows. It is also time to grieve our losses. Make an inventory of your losses.

- People you no longer have in your life
- Relationships that have ended
- Dreams unfulfilled
- So much of life not lived

The true message that should replace all untrue messages as a result of the arrows of your life: *You are loved. You are not alone. There are people who care for you. And most importantly, God loves you.*

Read Heb 13: 5,

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.””

Jer 31: 3,

“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

Rom 5: 8

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

If you live within driving distance of the places that were significant to you as a child, you may want to visit them again (old home, school, flat, neighbourhood) and use these places as a springboard for meditation.

LESSON ONE, DAY FIVE

Read Job 1: 1 - 5.

“In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.”

Why did Job operate like this? What was he afraid of? What was his view about grace at that time? What was his motivation?

Job lived even before Moses. He had very little to go by, unlike us today. Perhaps we operate like that - that God is waiting to smite us when we mess up or that God has given up on us.

Try and think of your deep apprehension. Do you sense it even now? Fill in the blank.

If I really trust him, maybe I will _____

(look like a fool, be let down, suffer, get bitter, be in too much pain)....

To which script are you emotionally connected - God is love or God is indifferent (doesn't care)? Why?

What is your picture of God? Is God “safe” to you?

Job operated under this formula:

$A + B = C$ (If I perform my rituals daily only then I will be safe, else something bad will happen).

Do you think of God as being disappointed with you? Or do you feel that he is crazy about you?

Think of the people in your life with whom you really want to spend time, perhaps going on a vacation together. Why? Is it because they are smart? Efficient? More likely it is their heart, their personality. That's right. Do you enjoy the personality of God? Has the thought ever occurred to you that he *has* a personality?

What if someone gave you a card saying, “Thinking of you”. How would you feel?

What is God saying in Eph 1:1ff. What is it like to know that God has been thinking of you for a very long time?

How has life turned out differently than the way you thought it would?

What if I had told you that your current passion for God would go on the same way for many years? How would that make you feel?

Lesson Two - Digging the Wrong Wells

There are two questions that haunt many people today:

1. Is it possible for us to experience real change?
2. Is it possible for us to eliminate all the pressures of life?

The thirst to find answers to these two questions has driven people to dig wells in many different areas of their lives. For some, they think the answer lies in separating the spiritual from the real world that they live in. They think that the spiritual world of heaven and forgiveness of sins is the work of the bible and the Holy Spirit but that the real change that they need requires more professional help, like therapy. *While there are people who have chemical imbalances who very much need help from qualified mental health professionals*, (and almost all people can benefit from the self-awareness generated by counselling at one time or another), there are others who use psychology as a way of avoiding facing themselves. They actually want to get “diagnosed”. One could say that psychology has come up with terms to describe our sins very articulately.

- A man who holds a grudge over a thoughtless remark for a long time may be diagnosed with Paranoid Personality Disorder.
- A person with fits of rage may be diagnosed with Explosive Disorder.
- A housewife who can no longer handle the pain of her marriage and screams for attention through behaviour like drinking and over-spending may be diagnosed with Histrionic Personality Disorder.

Treatment of the disorder may just be on the surface, but what is underneath? Are people really suffering from disorders or are they believing lies about what must be theirs in order to experience fulfilment? When goals are blocked we get mad. When we are uncertain we get worried, which may lead to anger, fear and self-hatred. “Modern Christianity” gives false hopes to people today. People are taught that Christ’s power will actually eradicate all worries, pain and pressure. All we have to do is trust, obey, surrender and persevere. The famous prosperity gospel is getting more and more popular these days - if believers have the right type of faith, their lives “should” become more and more comfortable through the working of the Spirit. On the other hand, some swing to the other extreme and think that more bible knowledge, more commitment and more prayer is the answer. People then fill their schedule with lots of “spiritual” activity, which they think will somehow move God to remove their deep core worries and problems of life. Perhaps, by getting into the word and on their knees they will have no time for personal pain. So what is the right path? We know that God and his word have the answers, but are we digging the wrong wells; the wells of the “Spirit” or the well of “Mindless Surrender”? Which well will give us the “water” we need to quench this thirst? It is important to take a deep look. What, then, is the path to real change? What is God’s expectation in the bible of the way we should handle our daily pressures and worries? Where do we dig for the answers to these troubling issues of our day? Let’s look into God’s word to find the answers and to know what wells to dig in order to find the “living water” that Jesus promises which will quench our thirst.

Jeremiah 2: 13 says:

“My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

In Isaiah 55: 1-2, the bible reveals:

“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”

Here we see that people in Isaiah’s day were thirsty, no question about it. However, the people were moving in the wrong direction in response to their thirst. Jesus then says effectively the same thing about the people living in New Testament times:

In John 4: 10

“Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.””

and John 7: 37,

“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”

Every person is created to enjoy God. We need God not just for salvation. He is also able to quench our thirst on earth. This thirst is placed into the soul of every living person. Like the people of Jesus’ time, many people are unaware of their thirst. Jesus did not tell them to deny their thirst. It is okay to thirst. By coming to him, he will give us the “water” to respond well to life’s challenges.

Our thirst is made clear by our involvement in compulsive sins. Enjoyable sex with our spouse, eating delicious food and feeling respected by others for a job well done are all God-given pleasures. On the other hand, illicit sexual involvement (either in reality or in the mind), continually compulsively over-eating and demanding/craving respect from others are but some of the examples of the wrong wells we dig to quench our thirst. For the Christian who is out of touch with his thirst, the answer to avoiding these sins would likely be more discipline, self control and a busy “spiritual” schedule. Yet is that all? Will these provide lasting change? In order to quench the thirst, like Jesus says, we need to recognize and deal with our thirst.

1. The Problem of Not Recognizing Our Thirst

When we do not know what we thirst for, we will inevitably dig the wrong well. We need to take time and develop some awareness of what longings were not fulfilled in the past.

There are mainly two types of thirst.

- a) The thirst from unfulfilled longing stemming from the past.
- b) The thirst from a shallow romantic relationship with God.

Growing up, there is a good chance that our lives and our longings were not fulfilled. We may have been disappointed with the people in our lives. There were hurts and disappointments. How do we recognize this type of thirst? Firstly, let's ask the tough questions, questions that will produce confusion. There must be an awareness of past hurts and disappointments. Think back in your life. Ask the following questions:

- a. Have you been let down by your father? Did he spend enough time with you? Do you remember having heart to heart talks with him? Did you have enough of them? Did you feel he was behind you? Was he harsh? Were there physical beatings? What did that do to you? Did that drive you to associate with something else, like other friends, academic excellence, relationships with opposite sex? Likewise, what about your mother?
- b. Have you been struck by a tragedy in life? An illness with a member in your family that changed things?
- c. The harmony between your parents – did they or do they fight regularly? What did/does that do to you?
- d. Were you made to feel stupid or useless? Did your parents pass a comment(s) that humiliated you?
- e. Did they teach you any values that you found out later were morally wrong?
- f. Were you bullied growing up? Were you constantly compared with others? Who was your early rival? A sibling? A friend?
- g. Have you been sexually molested? Did you take advantage of anyone yourself? Did anyone stand by you?
- h. Did your parents have good qualities that left a deep impression on you? Do you feel that you haven't thanked them enough for it?
- i. What were some of these good qualities?
- j. Do you feel pity for them? Do you feel sad for them? Do you feel happy for them? Do you not have any feelings for them?

Some of the above questions will produce confusion and disappointment. Some of these questions will create gratitude. The purpose here is to identify the hurts and the thirst in our lives. That's the point. Confusion and disappointment will create a thirst that only faith can satisfy. For many people, the most difficult thing is to admit that they have been let down by their parents. Most people would more easily admit their own failures than admit feeling disappointed by their parents. Although this path is painful it is unbelievably crucial. Firstly, these feelings of confusion and disappointments will help you get in touch with your soul. This awareness is invaluable in helping you to identify your own thirst. Then the cross and the promises of God will make much more sense to you emotionally. It will cease to just be an academic exercise.

Secondly, accepting your disappointments will cause you to treat them differently. There will not be any self protecting style coming out when you relate to them. You will feel free to love them. This will then make you turn to God knowing that only his promises of heaven and his unfailing love will be sufficient to keep you going. It will make you look to the cross. The cross will help you realize that God absolutely understands you. He can relate to you. He empathises with you. He is also with you. This will help you to forgive whoever has hurt you. This will help you to feel for them. This will give you the energy to be real with them, not defensive or attacking. *When we do not admit these disappointments in our heart, we will behave in a manner that will prevent us from getting hurt again, using defence mechanisms, such as an attacking and defensive communicating style.*

Look in Matt 23: 23.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

What were the qualities in which Jesus wanted them to excel? Justice, mercy and faithfulness.

When we love, something good develops inside. We feel clean, rich and whole. Even better, we become less concerned with the lives of others. Bitterness produces the opposite. Bitterness comes when people don't respond to our demands.

The second type of thirst comes as a result of a shallow, romantic relationship with God. When we do not have this depth with God, Christianity will be reduced to just being a nice person. Our greatest virtue would be to not offend anyone. Apathy takes place and we become very lukewarm. In all that we do in the name of God and or for God, it becomes void of passion. We become indifferent. Look in 2 Kings 13: 18-20

“Then he said, "Take the arrows," and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground." He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times." Elisha died and was buried. ... ”

Why was the prophet disappointed? It was because the king was passionless, nonchalant, apathetic and indifferent. He gave the ground a whack or two. In response, God says: “If that is how little you care about the future of your people, that that is all the help you will get. Since your heart is not in it, neither will mine be.”

Our relationship with God has been described by others as a beautiful dance with a lover. For some this has been reduced to a duty, which then reduces the dance to a drill. We must examine how we are approaching our times with God.

Desire gives fervour to prayer. The soul cannot be listless when some great desire fixes and inflames it...Strong desires make strong prayers...The neglect of prayer is

the fearful token of dead spiritual desires... There can be no true praying without desire. (E. M. Bounds: Man of Prayer)

What are we learning? Deep down, what is our desire?

For many our desire is making this earth our heaven! We try ever so hard to achieve the life we want on earth. The world bombards us with this daily. Only buy this product, see this movie, drive this car, take this vacation, join this gym try this restaurant... (fill in the blank) and you'll be happy.

Look at what God says about this in Isaiah 44: 16-20

"Half of the wood he burns in the fire;
over it he prepares his meal,
he roasts his meat and eats his fill.
He also warms himself and says,
Ah! I am warm; I see the fire."

From the rest he makes a god, his idol;
he bows down to it and worships.
He prays to it and says,
"Save me; you are my god."

"No one stops to think,
no one has the knowledge or understanding to say,
"Half of it I used for fuel;
I even baked bread over its coals,
I roasted meat and I ate.
Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left?
Shall I bow down to a block of wood?"

He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him;
he cannot save himself, or say,
"Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"

Look at yourselves, deeply. Are you an addict? Has the father of lies tricked you? Has he made you feel that the church and/or God is one of your worst enemies, stopping you from the pursuit of these worldly desires? In what do you boast? In Jer 9:23-24, God has strong words for what some people rely on to feel good about themselves:

"This is what the LORD says:
"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
or the strong man boast of his strength
or the rich man boast of his riches,

but let him who boasts boast about this:
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,

for in these I delight,"
declares the LORD."

When we do not rely on God's water supply to fill us up, we end up depending on our own water supply and digging our own wells. We don't realize that our wells are not quenching us. We carry on digging, get frustrated, and then we make demands.

We are a demanding people. We demand that:

- a. Our children produce excellent academic results,
- b. Our church be sensitive to us,
- c. Our spouse be responsive to our needs,
- d. Our friends and family never hurt us again, NOT TO MENTION
- e. Our lanes be free of all slow and obnoxious drivers,
- f. Our pleasures be ours to enjoy.

2. The Problem of "Demandingness"

When we do not know the source of our true thirst, we may also fall into the trap of what we could call "demandingness" - thinking that the wells that we demand from provide for us the water that will quench our thirst. ("Demandingness" is not a real word, but it is descriptive!)

Let's look at Job and study out this issue.

In Job chapter 1, he experiences a series of very deep blows. He loses his business, his workforce, his animals. He then hears news that he lost his family and on top of that experiences severe illness. By now, he is a diseased man, penniless, and has just buried all ten children. Add to that a bit of marital tension. Job's wife has had enough and she encourages him to curse God. Job replies with unusual maturity in Job 2: 10:

"He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said."

Then three of Job's friends come to offer comfort. For one week they sit quietly in supportive silence. His first friend, Eliphaz, suggests him to take his case to God,

Job 5: 8.

"But if it were I, I would appeal to God;
I would lay my cause before him."

He plants a thought in Job's mind that eventually develops into a demand.
Job was open to that strategy, in Job 6: 8

"Oh, that I might have my request,
that God would grant what I hope for"

Bildad, Job's second friend, continues on the same theme, that if Job pleads from a pure heart, God will respond, Job 8: 5-6

“But if you will look to God
and plead with the Almighty,

if you are pure and upright,
even now he will rouse himself on your behalf
and restore you to your rightful place.”

Zophar, his third friend, accuses Job of harbouring some evil in his life and assures him that if he'll get rid of his sin and recommit his life to God, the Lord will surely remove his shame, Job 11: 11-15

“Surely he recognizes deceitful men;
and when he sees evil, does he not take note?

But a witless man can no more become wise
than a wild donkey's colt can be born a man.

"Yet if you devote your heart to him
and stretch out your hands to him,

if you put away the sin that is in your hand
and allow no evil to dwell in your tent,

then you will lift up your face without shame;
you will stand firm and without fear.”

Although there is some rationale to what his three friends were saying, none of them were sensitive to the problem of “demandingness”. However, Job's responses up to this point still seem to be righteous. Look in Job 9: 3.

“Though one wished to dispute with him,
he could not answer him one time out of a thousand.”

However, Job's pain continues. As hopes fade, patient trust erodes into “demandingness”. So as Job's sorrow increases, look what happens in Job 10: 1-2.

“I loathe my very life;
therefore I will give free rein to my complaint
and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.

I will say to God: Do not condemn me,
but tell me what charges you have against me.”

The longer he remains in his misery, the more unfair his situation seems. Finally his demanding spirit comes into full bloom, in Job 13: 3

“But I desire to speak to the Almighty
and to argue my case with God.”

The line between legitimate desiring and illegitimate demanding is thin and easily crossed. This causes him to become over-confident with his case, Job 13: 18-19,

“Now that I have prepared my case,
I know I will be vindicated.

Can anyone bring charges against me?
If so, I will be silent and die.”

16: 7-9.

“Surely, O God, you have worn me out;
you have devastated my entire household.

You have bound me—and it has become a witness;
my gauntness rises up and testifies against me.

God assails me and tears me in his anger
and gnashes his teeth at me;
my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes.”

So many disciples struggle to believe that God really loves them. The reason they have this irrational thought is because certain demands are not being met, it is “proof” that God doesn’t love them. Although it is okay to desire relief and satisfaction, when we begin to demand a certain lifestyle and refuse to surrender to God’s will in gratitude, we get into trouble. Job fell into this, Job 23: 1-7.

“Then Job replied:

“Even today my complaint is bitter;
his hand ^[a] is heavy in spite of ^[b] my groaning.

If only I knew where to find him;
if only I could go to his dwelling!

I would state my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.

I would find out what he would answer me,
and consider what he would say.

Would he oppose me with great power?
No, he would not press charges against me.

There an upright man could present his case before him,
and I would be delivered forever from my judge.”

Look at God's response to a demanding spirit, in Job 38: 1.

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said:”

God answers from a storm, not from a quiet gentle wind. He is not too pleased. God then gives out a challenge in Job 23: 3.

“If only I knew where to find him;
if only I could go to his dwelling!”

God even uses sarcasm to make his point more clear, in Job 38: 4-5.

“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?”

God then challenges him, Job 40: 8

“Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself?”

Finally, Job gets the point, Job 42: 3,

“You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?'
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.”

Job 42: 5 - 6.

“My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.”

Three Sources of Light that help us to gain awareness of ourselves :

- a. The Spirit of God
- b. The Word of God
- c. The People of God.

The Spirit of God

We need to let the spirit of God speak to us. When our soul is still, the spirit of God can search us best. Are you still? Do set aside regular time to pray to God? Do you ever sit still and listen?

The word of God and the people of God are crucial to help us to see our sin. We need to listen, be humble and get these valuable feedback.

Journaling

LESSON TWO, DAY SIX

How much of your so-called free time is really just an attempt to numb yourself from feeling anything? Is TV really enriching your soul? Is shopping, either for the next hot gadget or trendy outfit, really going to make you feel better? Will making all A's be fulfilling long term? Is overeating really touching your heart's deepest longing? Could it be that you are going to the wrong well?

Think of an advertisement that fooled you - what did they "know" about you? What advertisements have tempted you to be worldly, that you look forward to thinking about in your heart?

Of the people that you know personally, whose life do you really admire? Why?

What might you be squirreling away to make sure you get? Are you afraid that God will take it away?

Do you see yourself as an addict? Do you know what your addictions are these days? Do you just describe them as "nuisances" or "slip-ups", or "struggles"?

And on a deeper level, what would cause your heart to sink if God told you to give it up? (Something that would make you feel like "death" if you had to give it up).

LESSON TWO, DAY SEVEN

What were some of your recent failures in life? How did you handle them?

Look in Hebrew 5: 7.

“During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”

How did Jesus offer his prayers?

Were his prayers demanding in nature? Compare with his prayers in the garden of Gethsemane? Were they demanding?

LESSON TWO, DAY EIGHT

1) Do you see yourself struggling with “Demandingness”. If so, which of the following are you most likely to struggle with?

- a. Our children produce excellent academic results,
- b. Our church be sensitive to us,
- c. Our spouse be responsive to our needs,
- d. Our friends and family never hurt us again,
- e. Our lanes be free of all slow and obnoxious drivers,
- f. Our pleasures be ours to enjoy.

2) Who can help you work on overcoming these thoughts?

Lesson Three - Going Home

When we tell stories, read a book or see a movie, we like the ending to be, “And they lived happily ever after.” Even though this may not happen on earth, it is actually a true description of what will happen for us as Christians - we will eventually go home, go to heaven and be with God forever! On earth many things do not last. Every holiday comes to an end, friends move away, careers don’t quite work out. With heaven there is *meaning* in the phrase “happily ever after” that we literally now know nothing about. How does it feel when someone saves you a place, for instance, in a meeting or at an event? Jesus says that he will prepare a place for us in John 14: 2!

1. Our Eternal Dwelling

Look at the metaphors God uses to describe heaven:

- A wedding feast (Matt 9: 15)
- A wedding (Matt 25: 1-13)
- A white stone with a new name (Rev 2: 17)
- The Tree of Life (Rev 2: 70)
- Hidden manna (Rev 2: 17)
- The Morning Star (Rev 2: 28)
- Being dressed in white (Rev 3: 5)
- A Crown (Rev 3: 11)
- A Throne (Rev 3: 21)
- The New Jerusalem (Rev 21: 15ff)

Heaven is not an eternal church service singing the same songs again and again. The beauty of heaven cannot be captured, only compared to the most beautiful things on earth. Will it be good where we are going? *We really will* live happily ever after.

Be honest - do you sometimes entertain the possibility that you can be happy without God and/or his church?

What is your idea of heaven? It is eternally being with God. What does that mean to you? A never ending church service? When you make your life on earth so significant then heaven is just tucked away to the side, it becomes a fact, a given, nothing more. Can you get excited emotionally by heaven anymore?

In Matt 9: 15,

“Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.”

Jesus announces himself as the Bridegroom. In John 14: 2-3,

“In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

He says he will go and prepare a place for us. In the culture of that day, these are the very words that a young man would say to his fiancée. Once the suitor secured the hand of the bride, he would return to this father's house and build an additional room which would be their bridal suite. This is the meaning of “preparing a place for her”.

In John 3: 20,

“Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the bridegroom. We are in the time of waiting for the Bridegroom to return. By the end of the love story in Revelations 22: 17,

“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” 20, “He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” the church is practically **PANTING FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST.**

Compare this with Song of Songs 7: 11-12

“Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside,
let us spend the night in the villages.

Let us go early to the vineyards
to see if the vines have budded,
if their blossoms have opened,
and if the pomegranates are in bloom—
there I will give you my love.”

That is how it should be. Lovers can't wait to be together...

2. Our Relentless Adversary

In the book of Ezekiel, we read a prophecy of the King of Tyre. This was also a description of Satan. (Double meanings in prophecy are common in the bible.)

Ezekiel 28: 12-17.

“Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: " 'You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

You were in Eden,
the garden of God;
every precious stone adorned you:
ruby, topaz and emerald,
chrysolite, onyx and jasper,
sapphire, turquoise and beryl.
Your settings and mountings were made of gold;
on the day you were created they were prepared.

You were anointed as a guardian cherub,
for so I ordained you.
You were on the holy mount of God;
you walked among the fiery stones.

You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created
till wickedness was found in you.

Through your widespread trade
you were filled with violence,
and you sinned.
So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God,
and I expelled you, O guardian cherub,
from among the fiery stones.

Your heart became proud
on account of your beauty,
and you corrupted your wisdom
because of your splendor.
So I threw you to the earth;
I made a spectacle of you before kings.”

Here our enemy Lucifer, son of the morning,

Isa 14:12

“How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!”

was one of the first and highest angels God ever created. He was given a great place of honour. Like with humans, he was given a certain amount of freedom. However, his pride got the better of him.

In 1 Tim 3: 6, Paul clearly gives the reason for his fall. “And then there was war in heaven,” in Rev 12: 7-9.

Having lost his place in heaven, he is now furious. Unable to defeat God, he decides to wound God's people as much as possible by stealing the love of his beloved. God wants to possess our heart through love rather power. So, he pleads with us.

Have you ever been shocked to find one day that the one you loved so deeply and who you thought loved you just as passionately had been dating other guys/girls and moreover was spending more and more time with your worst enemy? That she/he was believing in lies? Have you ever watched your sweetheart fade away in materialism, sex, so much so that you send even your own son to talk to her, only for her to kill him? Satan's desire: Kill the desire that would eventually lead us back to the one who loves us, that is God, by using all kinds of weapons available to him. God is willing to take the chance as he really believes in the good.

Satan uses many tools and the two he probably uses most are:

a. Indulgence – Addiction. Look in Jer 2: 23-25.

“How can you say, 'I am not defiled;
I have not run after the Baals'?
See how you behaved in the valley;
consider what you have done.
You are a swift she-camel
running here and there,

a wild donkey accustomed to the desert,
sniffing the wind in her craving—
in her heat who can restrain her?
Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves;
at mating time they will find her.

Do not run until your feet are bare
and your throat is dry.
But you said, 'It's no use!
I love foreign gods,
and I must go after them.'”

Lust, greed, power, an affair.

b. Competence - What are you good at? He will lure into doing more and more of it, until you eventually forsake your relationship with him.

3. Our Journey to Desire

Therefore, run to God, out of your desire. Heb 12: 2-3

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Run to love him, not out of duty, but out of desire. There hasn't been a beautiful song written, nor a mountain climbed, an injustice fought, or a love sustained without someone first having *desire*.

Jesus did what he did because of the joy set before him. That desire made Jesus

- Passionately *clean* the temple during the last week before his death
- Emotionally *stand* looking and weeping at the city of Jerusalem (Matt 23: 37)
- Eagerly *dine* with his disciples for the last meal
- Willingly *go* to the garden of Gethsemane
- Fervently *pray* until his heart was ready
- Resolutely *meet* with his betrayer

Desire gives you the strength you need to go forward. The hope of heaven is what will help us to respond to disappointments with love, not with resentments and self pity. Feeling our disappointment helps to put us in touch with a part of our soul that longs for much more than anyone in this life will provide. As we ache over the reality of wanting what we do not have, we begin to understand Paul's eager anticipation of the Lord Jesus' return. Deeply felt disappointments in the present supply the energy for passionate hope for the future. This longing will also purify us, as in 1 John 3: 3, which says:

"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

With this hope deeply in our minds, we will learn to live without demanding anything now. With such a hope we are free to love, to risk more disappointment and frustration. In other words, feeling disappointment leaves us with a thirst that only the hope of heaven can satisfy.

What does heaven mean to you? Is heaven just a back-up plan? Heaven for many is like an insurance plan or treasury bonds that we purchase and we keep for a very long time without thinking much about it. However, life on earth is like a stock market that we indulge in daily with all of our energy. As a result, so much of our disappointment with God comes actually from the stocks falling down in a tailspin. We get so distressed by these hurts that a relationship with God gets sidelined. These temporary pleasures only look good on the outside. They have long lasting hurts and disappointments, similar to the way that eating junk food makes us feel better temporarily while really hurting us but eating good healthy food nourishes and sustains us (and eventually tastes better anyway!!).

Romans 8:22-25

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

We need to look at our lives on earth as living in a fallen world where we will endure pain, hurt, misery and disappointments. When we look at our lives in this fallen world as "heaven" then we will run into the problem of being demanding. However, if we understand and expect that life in this fallen world comes with all its troubles then we will look forward to heaven and will have the energy and heart to love people rather than dwell in our disappointments and hurts.

Conclusion:

The Grand Love Affair

In the old times, wedding vows would contain these amazing words:

“With my body, I thee worship.”

Worship is understood to mean “to give ourselves passionately, to adore that person body, soul and spirit, guided by a whole hearted devotion.”

No wonder God uses explicit sexual language to describe unfaithfulness to him. (See Ezek 16.) When we are unfaithful to him, God regards it as the worship of something else other than him. That something has our whole hearted devotion, heart, soul and spirit.

What then awaits us in heaven? Jesus the Bridegroom will take us, His Bride, into an eternal romance that no words can describe. The reunion between a newlywed groom and bride is only a shadow of what is to come. It is a total mystery, no metaphor on earth could possibly describe the joy we will all experience when the party begins, as Paul writes in Eph 5: 32,

“This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

An eternal GRAND LOVE AFFAIR of the Bride and Bridegroom. Wow! Can’t wait...God will pop the champagne on that day, in the words of Jesus in Luke 22: 18

“For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

This is in much the same way that other Old Testament things were shadows of what we enjoy in the New Testament:

Blood of the animals

Holy of holies in the Tabernacle

High Priest

Finally, in 1 Pet 1: 13, God says:

Blood of Jesus

Heaven

Jesus

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

AMEN!!

LESSON THREE, DAY NINE

Honestly, now- how often do you think about heaven?

Is heaven just a better alternative to hell? Where did you get that idea?

In John 16: 33 it says “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” What’s your first-pass reaction to reading this passage?

How many conversations about heaven have you had with close friends?

Meditate on heaven for 10 minutes.

LESSON THREE, DAY TEN

What are you looking forward to in the next few months?

What are you looking forward to over the next few years?

What are you looking forward to in your retirement?

After death, what would you like to be remembered for?

Do you find it hard to turn to God – to have a special time devoting yourself to him, maybe for a weekend away, or for a day or even for a few hours?

God used sex as a metaphor for true worship, for our union and communion with him. How do you feel about this? Before marriage there is courtship. What is courtship with God mean to you? Beauty? Sunset? Solitude? What has it been for you? What could it be for you?

What if life does not turn out the way you expect it to turn out?

Read and meditate Romans 8:22-25.

How do you feel about the following verses:

Phil 1:21

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

1 John 2:15-17

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

Psalms 73:25-28

“Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds.”

Close out with a meditation of John 17:3.

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

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3. Eldredge, John (2000). *The journey of desire*. Nashville: Nelson
4. Jakes, T. D. (2004). *He-motions*. NY: Putnam

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