

John Henry Alan

WAIT!!! Don't go away!

O.K. The cover picture may seem a little bit steamy in the context of a relationship with God. But we all have very deeply affectionate relationships apart from our most significant other. If you will read the INTRODUCTION I think you will decide to read on.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

The first book in a trilogy about intimacy in relationship. John describes how we can be the happiest and most satisfied in relationship through awareness, acceptance and affirmation. Fall in, Fallout, Fall Up! Watch for more powerfully transforming writings from this author.

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Let's Fall in Love — with God !

DEDICATED:

To **Beth Moore** for inviting me into Buddy Walter's legacy of passionately intimate relationship with God (the presence of the living Christ was so full in her when we embraced in the reception line after The Patriarchs teaching in Baltimore, that I begged God to give me what she had) and for praying a blessing over our home on video tape for its dedication to God's ministry.

To **Fawaz Fanek** who mentored me in the ways of the "Authority of Christ," led a Bible Study in our home, led in the dedication of our home for ministry, engaged me in missions, and pushed me out of the nest when it was time.

To **Gary & Karolyn Chapman** for decades of friendship, encouragement and pastoring my family, always there to support us in our most trying times, always greeting with a joyous smile and pleasant word, and for leading in the dedication of our home to God's ministries.

To **my double siblings, my older bother and sister** for their introduction to some of the authors listed as additional resources, whose works transformed my heart by renewing my mind with correct understandings of God.

To **my spouse of 20+ years** for her patience with me and steadfast commitment to our marriage, understanding my commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and enduring many cancellations of our personal plans in order to be readily available to God at all times, and for reading this manuscript several times with nods and shakes of her head until it was finished.

To **Jay Helvey, Jim Lane, James Anderson** and all of the **Brothers of New Canaan Society (NCS)** for constant acceptance, understanding, encouragement, grace and friendship in Jesus.

To my brothers **Steve, Steve and my other brother Steve** for participating in a "*deep dive*" into the great writings of men and women of God who not only experienced deep intimacy with God, but also knew how *to pass it on*.

To my **Wednesday Breakfast Buddies** who engaged with me for several hours each week exploring the enormous grace of God and the depths of close relationships; those who helped me cook (as the '*baconator*') year after year with an ever growing thankfulness to God for and in all things!

To **myriad significant others from the far corners of the earth** for their contributions (wittingly or not) to my life, and ultimately to this treatise, for their inspirations, affirmations and critiques which helped me remain focused and centered on my own personal journey toward intimacy with God.

To **God Himself** for bringing me out of my personal wilderness through a burning bush, and on into the most amazingly fruitful life in God!

Thank you all ! or if you live in the South, "**Thank Y'all**"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | CHAPTER THEME | PAGE |
|----------------------|--|--------|
| Introduction | Developing Intimacy with God | iv |
| Forward | Our Hearts Were Made for Love - Let's Take A Chance | x |
| Chapter 1 | Relationship NOT Religion | 1 |
| Chapter 2 | After the First Step - Navigating the Journey | 10 |
| Chapter 3 | Abandon to Intimacy with God | 17 |
| Chapter 4 | Critical Understandings about Intimacy | 24 |
| Chapter 5 | Setting the Record Straight | 32 |
| Chapter 6 | Breaking Old Habits - Forming New Ones | 41 |
| Chapter 7 | The Great Obstacle to Intimacy | 48 |
| Chapter 8 | The Currency of the Exchanged Life | 61 |
| Chapter 9 | Veils That Obscure God's Face | 70 |
| Chapter 10 | Dynamics of Intimate Relationship | 73 |
| Chapter 11 | How We Are Made "In the Image of God" | 78 |
| Chapter 12 | Spiritual Growth Inhibitors | 87 |
| Chapter 13 | Individuality of Intimate Relationship | 95 |
| Chapter 14 | Pathway to Intimacy - What to Expect | 99 |
| Chapter 15 | Spiritual Guides for the Journey | 104 |
| Chapter 16 | Success Through Failure | 110 |
| Chapter 17 | Emotionally Intelligent Design | 116 |
| Spiritual Teaser #1 | Prayer - Spontaneous Dialog NOT Begging | I |
| Spiritual Teaser #2 | Intimate Writings of Brother Lawrence | IX |
| Spiritual Teaser #3 | Intimate Writings of Frank Laubach | XIV |
| Spiritual Teaser #4 | Intimate Writings of Madame Jeanne Guyon | XVI |
| Spiritual Teaser #5 | Intimate Writings of Hudson Taylor | XIX |
| Spiritual Teaser #6 | Intimate Writings of Oswald Chambers | XXVII |
| Spiritual Teaser #7 | What's in Your Wallet - Braggables | XXX |
| Spiritual Teaser #8 | Passion for God - Is He On Your Passion Hit List at All? | XXXI |
| Spiritual Teaser #9 | Mirrors and Litmus Tests of Motives | XXXII |
| Spiritual Teaser #10 | Advisory Admonitions - Surprises of the Journey | XXXIII |
| Spiritual Delight #1 | Simple Spontaneous Prayers | XXXIV |
| | | |
| | | |

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

INTRODUCTION

This book by John Henry Alan has in its inspirational foundation selections from the writings of Graham Cooke, J. H. Alan, Brennan Manning, A. W. Tozer, Frank Laubach, Oswald Chambers, Jeanne Guyon, Francois Fenelon, Brother Lawrence and other men and women who were deeply intimate with God and whose ministries focused on helping others to develop a passionate love affair with God. The work is compiled and edited by J. H. Alan.

A Personal Word from the Author { 1 }

Although this book focuses on relationship with God, the same dynamics of good relationship apply to both the theist and the atheist. The same things that hinder us from developing a deeply affectionate relationship with God come between us and deeply affectionate feelings for others. Although few realize it, we are our own greatest obstacle to good relationships with other people. Since every relationship is a two person choice, I dramatically improve my chances of enlarging my circle of friends by always choosing affection for the other person even if we disagree on many points of fact or opinion. “The greater the measure of affection which I offer to others, the greater the measure of affection I will receive.” -- J H Alan

So whether you are religious or not, I encourage you to look for the nuggets of relationship gold which will improve your sensations in life and experience of life as you read this book. I don't expect you to embrace every truth expressed in this book, but I am confident that the time it takes you to read it from cover to cover will produce enough improvement in your understanding and acceptance of others to make the time spent worthwhile. And if you have given up on God, hopefully you will give him a second chance, as an intimate relationship with Him could enormously improve your experience of life. As your emotions reach new heights of pleasure and you experience less anxiety worry and fear it will become easier and more intuitive for you to embrace those in your life who are the most difficult to accept. The best news is this. Your measure of personal peace and happiness can improve even if your circumstances and experiences do not. The key to all of this is choice, your choice. And it is less about the choices of your activities than it is the choices about what you believe. Let yourself believe different things and it will change how you feel. **You may prefer to use this book as a source of daily inspiration: { 250 }.**

My hope is that you find one or more insights about relationship

which will improve your life

and bring you much peace,

especially peace with yourself, peace with those around you and with God.

INTRODUCTION - Developing Intimacy with God

History { 2 }

Maybe it is time for exploring the possibilities in our relationship with God. For most Christians the world around, there is a far less **intimate relationship** between themselves and God than what God has offered them. Although, any human being can live a life quite successfully without being religious or even a theist, there is a much better way contained within the Holy Bible. The Bible is HIS story (history of God). It is an articulation of a God paradigm that, when fully understood, staggers the imagination. The history of the God who calls Himself "I AM", is rife with opportunity to live happy and fully contented lives. The story is laced with unconditional love for His created beings which is demonstrated by His unfailing grace toward them. His grace, which is the *undeserved* favor God has for us is the very proof that His love is perfect toward us. His love never ceases to flow to us. And His love, can and will transform us, if we will simply receive it and love Him in return.

Grace-Full NOT Gracious { 3 }

Unfortunately, grace may be one of the most ambiguous terms in the English language. However the definition of grace, when drawn from the Holy Bible, screams loudly that Divine Love generates a Divine Grace. Both of them are unconditional and unfailing. Grace is the essence of inexhaustible "second chances." Grace is often considered the same thing as gracious.

However, a closer examination of these two terms will clearly indicate that they are *not* the same. So for the clarity not to be lost by contradiction, we will refer to God in this book as '*grace full*' and never as *gracious*. Other ambiguities of definition have prevented many from becoming deeply and passionately intimate with God! You will see these as you read further on.

Grace in Action

This great God is the epitome of relationship in every possible relational experience. That is, God is the best Father, Mother, Sister, Brother, Friend and Mate anyone could ever have. Jesus proclaimed in His preaching, that even though we look out for the best interests of our children, God is far better at parenting than we could ever be. He

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

actually knows the motives of every human expression. And like the “best Dad ever”, His love never fails toward His children. His desire for them is that they become the best adults possible and reach their greatest potential. And His grace (**underserved favor**) toward His children never puts a limit on second chances. He will patiently pour everything He can into them.

The best definition of *grace* includes the fact that *grace* is a by-product of *love that will never cease to flow toward the object of that love*, that is favor for the undeserving. When love is present, it will always offer to help one up who is down. So, like a mother who sits in the courtroom with her erring child, even if her child deserved to be punished, pleads for the shortest possible sentence. So, God as both Father and Mother has every intention of both helping the children become their best possible selves and of minimizing the emotional pain they must endure in life. The introduction of God Himself into the physical realm of man in the person of His Only Begotten Son, is the strongest evidence of God's desire for an up close and personal relationship with mankind.

No Untold Stories { 4 }

God's written history, every story in the Bible, includes every kind of good and bad scenario possible in human experience. The whole story has been told, so that we could see that relationship is the most important thing to both God and His creation, mankind. When one looks closely at each story, the unfailing love of God can be seen and with it the enormity of grace both in size and frequency which God expresses to us, His children. If there is any meaning at all, in the story of Jesus, His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection and His return to the Father, it is this. “Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.”

Forgiveness Is Not An Option - Punishment Is A Choice { 5 }

The whole object of the Cross being the final event in Jesus' life, when He deserved the best end, was that God even made provision in Himself, to provide an innocent man who offered to take the penalty of another man's criminality, (that is yours and mine), so that justice was served on behalf of the victims of our crimes while we ourselves

INTRODUCTION - Developing Intimacy with God

were released from that punishment. [The ultimate irony of all time was that a violent offender, Barabbas, was set free at the same time and in the same pronouncement of judgment when a completely innocent man, Jesus of Nazareth, was condemned to death.] What enormous love God must have in order to watch His Son take the most inhumane of all punishments devised by human kind!

Freedom to Love God { 6 }

The purpose of this book is not to convert anyone to Christianity. It is assumed that whoever reads this book is searching to know God in a deeply meaningful way. *The desire of the author is that Christians who seem to live in constant guilt, shame and fear will be able to surrender even those feelings to the God of the Cross.* After all, Jesus died, not only for the crimes themselves, but also for the guilt and shame associated with them. And in God's eyes, Jesus suffered enough of our shame so that we did not have to suffer either guilt or shame again. When we succumb to the temptation of Satan to wallow in either our guilt or shame, he silences us and robs us of the very love, joy and peace God offered to us through this most kind of all acts on our behalf.

Suffice it to say, all of the contributors to this treatise strongly desire to set the reader free from both guilt and shame. The chapters which follow articulate clearly what it means to "live fully loved" by God and "enjoy His favor always". They will also reveal the misrepresentations and misinterpretations of key passages of scripture which have come between them and a joyous laughter, not only at themselves, but also those around them. God is the author of love, joy, peace and all other positive emotions and has created a way for every man, woman, and child to experience them in abundance.

Freedom to Unbelieve

There is FREEDOM just around the corner, hopefully by the time you finish reading the last chapter. But, be advised that this book will be as useless to you as pulp fiction, if you will not allow yourself to "rethink" truth. So far as we know, no one has been persuaded to leave their community of worship over the things expressed in this book.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

But many have experienced a much more joyful and peaceful life than before, and a much closer relationship to the object of their faith.

Find Yourself { 7 }

We will include several resources for further reading which may expand on what we have shared here. We ask you to ponder how each story in the Bible may have *you* in it. We suggest that you cast yourself into every part in each story to discover what God might want you to know about yourself. You see, your life will likely never be changed significantly by seeing others in the parables. But, if you use the stories as mirrors of your own tendencies and motives, you may make huge leaps in the direction of a better experience of life. Rather than hanging out the shingle, "This world is not my home," consider treating it as though it is and opening your current home to any and all who might be blessed by your love and hospitality.

Truth — Relative or Absolute { 8 }

It is also very important to realize how much we order our lives by relative truth rather than God's truth. I resisted this thought largely for most of my life. But after a long flight and deep interrogation by a seat-mate, the conversation ended with this question to me, "It seems to me that you believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth and that you have found it." I had very little time to respond, certainly not enough time to discuss apologetics. I sought the Holy Spirit's guidance in what was about to come across my lips.

"Well, James, I do believe in absolute truth and that I have found it. So, James, if you believe that all truth is relative, answer this question. "If you could embrace a body of relative truth that leaves you twisted, frustrated, angry and generally miserable, or you could choose relative truth that made you happy, pleasant, peaceful and generous to everyone, which would you choose?" There was no time for an answer, nor was one needed.

A few weeks later, I was awakened by the Spirit to these words from Him, "James was right." "About what?" I asked. To which He replied, "All of you have and embrace relative truth because most of what you believe came to you from your relatives and their inner circle of influ-

INTRODUCTION - Developing Intimacy with God

ence.” As I have pondered this ever since, I realize time and again that whenever I abandoned a relative truth in favor of God's truth on that particular issue, my heart changed in a very positive way. After several years of doing this, I realized that I had adjusted over 400 perceptions (beliefs) about God, myself, and others. All of these have accrued to enormous benefit and relational intimacy with more people than I had ever imagined possible. They are all quite different. But each one adds richness to my experience of life.

So, "Be not afraid. You believe in God." Trust God to reveal His absolute truth to you when you approach Him with a loving heart and an open mind. God will help you discover the partial truths, half truths, or outright falsehoods of what very well-meaning people have taught you to believe. Just because someone else whom I trust believes something, does not make it true. After a few years in this pursuit, God showed me that Jesus statement, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." applied mostly to the truth about myself. As God revealed truth about me to me, and I was willing to accept it, I was released from the misbelief and selfishness of those revelations. So, please approach this treatise with a loving heart and an open mind so that God can use it to help you find a deeper love for God, others and even yourself.

A Heart On Fire { 9 }

We hope that you realize our dream for you and God's as well. We trust that your heart will become aflame with the message of this book. We also hope that you will read the other resources included later on and let each one reveal more of the love of God to you than you have ever felt. And to be sure, love is a feeling (which will always show itself in action).

Love Is A Feeling (the purest emotion)

Don't be fooled into thinking that love is action itself. Myriad atrocities against man have been committed in strong faith, but misguided faith. Also know that Jesus Christ would not have suffered the Cross out of duty or obligation. Jesus died because His love for me, His love for you, was so immense that He "... died for His friends." This love in action presents a quality of life that is far above anything that is natural. "Love always produces good works. However, good works do not produce love."

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

FORWARD

Go Back to the Beginning and Do It Again *as if for the 1st time* { 10 }

It is essential in this journey to look at everything you have believed with fresh eyes. When you reread the scriptures now, push away any teaching you have received from others on the passages you read. Let the Holy Spirit give you fresh revelation in light of the single context of the unconditional love of God for you! When Paul said, "that, I may know Him," Philippians 3:10, he did not mean intellectually, but experientially, emotionally. This means that to know God personally, our spirits must touch and our hearts must touch. Then I will experience conscious intimacy with God.

“Let's fall in love. Why shouldn't we fall in love? Our hearts were made for it. Let's take a chance. Let's fall in love.”

Why would we think... { 11 }

Why would we think that God is so awesome, majestic, powerful, intelligent, all-knowing, superlative and pure that He is untouchable? Why would we think that the most creative being in the universe would create human beings, in His image, just to treat them like mere animals and beat them whenever they behaved badly? Why would we think that a *good* Father would abuse us just because we might wander into the wrong places or simply balk at His commands?

Would we have children to treat them in that way? I believe that God must be the kindest person and the most loving parent in the universe. He did, after all, give us each a personal example of who He is, how He thinks and how much He loves, by the very act of procreation. As we multiply and replenish the earth, we establish families to develop and nurture loving relationships with one another. And then we gather into communities to extend those loving relationships to a larger circle. If anyone can think of a better plan, let him step forward and tell us all what that plan is.

HOLINESS IS
everything in right
RELATIONSHIP
like in the garden

Forward — Why Shouldn't We ?

To be sure, the quest to know God and to be in a wholesome relationship with Him has been around since the beginning of the human race. Some abandon this quest and become atheists. Others search with many doubts that He exists and call themselves agnostics. Still others decide to follow another supernatural being, Lucifer, and actually sacrifice their own children to this “god” whom they serve in exchange for riches and power. Then there are others who manufacture their own god or idols and are very religious, hoping to reach God by moral integrity or worship of these idols. And there are some who respond to the Gospel of Jesus, commit their lives to Him and become Christians. It is this last group for whom this book is written.

The question posed to everyone, especially Christians, is this, “How can we develop a deeply passionate and intimate relationship, like husband and wife, with God?” Or to put it in other terms, *Can we live in commitment to God and His desires in the same manner as true lovers treat their most significant others on earth?* I think that many Christians, possibly even the majority of them, *want* to relate to God more as lovers than slaves to a master or subjects to their sovereign king. So, what is the problem? I suggest that there is something wrong with our system of beliefs. There must be misperceptions about who God is, what He expects of us, and what He wants from us. There is something standing between us and God. And He desperately wants that obstacle to be removed.

Apprehending God — (an article by A. W. Tozer) { 12 }

To most people God is an inference, not a reality. He is a deduction from the evidence which they consider adequate; but He remains personally unknown to the individual. They know of Him only by hearsay. To many others God is but an ideal, another name for goodness, or beauty, or truth; or He is law, or life, or the creative impulse back of the phenomena of existence. The possibility of intimate acquaintance with Him has not entered their minds.

Christians, to be sure, go further than this, at least in theory. Their creed requires them to believe in the personality of God and the

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

possibility of personal acquaintance. This is admitted, I say, in theory, but for millions of Christians, nevertheless, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle.

Over against all this cloudy vagueness stands the clear scriptural doctrine that God can be known in personal experience. A loving Personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living Person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself whenever and wherever His people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation. Let us examine our current beliefs. Let us discover which of them may be keeping us from this intimate love for God which we strongly desire. And let's have the courage to change what we believe. To do this we must reject some beliefs which we adopted from very trusted sources in our lives. This is not a rejection of those people, it is simply a course correction of faith which God desires for us to pursue. God wants us to be in a passionate love affair with Him!

Special Considerations: Keep these things in mind as you read.

Be honest with yourself and authentic with God. { 13 }

Cast yourself into every character mentioned in this book, in order to make the teaching practical and memorable. Imagine yourself setting each thing in this book in the context of a holiday meal with your family and God.

Leave Your Comfort Zone

Don't put the book down if it makes you feel uncomfortable. No one ever broadens their horizons of life if they do not leave their personal comfort zone. Don't be afraid that these insights will lead you astray. You know scripture too well for that to happen.

Confirm It to Be True

Be like the Bereans, mentioned in Acts 17:11, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that *they received the word with all readiness*

Forward — Why Shouldn't We ?

of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” What Paul was teaching was radically different from everyone's former understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Bereans tried to confirm these *new* truths Paul was expressing to them, not to disprove them.

A Heart Like Jesus

Let Jesus' Gospel prevail in your heart and mind. Develop a heart like Jesus' heart and you will act in the same loving manner as He did. He promoted an up close and personal relationship in worship as opposed to a formal, stuffy, rigid set of rules in set places at set times.

Don't Rush Through It { 14 }

This is a book of spiritual understanding, not fiction or fantasy. You cannot come to this book as you would come to another type of literature. Too many people in their rush to finish the reading, miss out on the quiet of **experiencing the presence of the Spirit** while reading it. This book is sure to challenge many things you have believed.

The first thing to keep in mind when reading on, is read with a **strong desire to learn**. Come with a strong desire to know God in an intimate way. Be open to **receive something new** and helpful for your life journey. Since it is hard to find time for reading, **set reading and mining goals** for yourself. (For example to read a certain number of paragraphs or pages and list a certain number of new things you have learned. **Shake off all distractions and noise**.)

Thought and Concentration

Meditate long and hard on each and every chapter, paragraph sentence, and yes, even word. This book is to be **studied, meditated on, marked up, prayed over and read again and again** as long as it continues to minister to your soul. If you want to do *light* reading, or *thriller* reading or *adventure* reading or *curiosity* reading, please put this book back on your night stand and read something else. But when you have a hunger or thirst to know God better than ever before in your life, read on.

Ultimately We Believe What We Choose to Believe { 15 }

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Most of us fail to realize that the majority of what we believe has been fed to us by others. However, we also fail to consider why we have accepted what was spoon fed to us from our infancy and continuing until this very day. We have believed some things in order not to disappoint some person whom we love or respect. Other things have been adopted into our belief system out of a sense that there is safety in numbers. Still other beliefs have arisen from the lack of due diligence regarding particular issues. And our beliefs have become concrete in our souls by way of repetition or natural curing over time. The good news is that since we get to choose what we believe, we can change it at will for any reason. Here's how we derive every belief we hold.



Instead of letting your culture (that which was given to you by your family, friends and other people) and desire (that which satisfies the way you want to live) determine your truth, let God's truth (truth about yourself, others and God) change your desires such that your culture will be transformed by your expressions of love and acceptance to others!

Relationship NOT Religion

Chapter 1: Relationship Not Religion Take it slow and easy! { 16 }

S T O P! Please do not read any further *if you have not read the Introduction and Forward. They create a framework for understanding.*

An old Chinese proverb says "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." *Tozer writes:*

If that first step is not taken, nothing else really matters. If you are not on the journey, talking about it does not matter. Many Christians talk about living in intimate relationship with God, but nothing in their lives indicates they have even begun the journey. There's much joy that they have been saved, but no anticipation of continuing on the journey towards spiritual perfection. They are so happy that they are not what they used to be, that they cannot see what God wants them to be. Christianity has a glorious and victorious side, that few Christians experience.

My recommendation to the church of Christ and all others in the world is "*Live abandoned to intimacy with God.*" Our tragic loss is that very few are going on to know Christ in enriched intimacy and familiarity. Worse yet, we're not even talking about it. We rarely hear about it. And it does not find its way into our literature or media ministries. And it is not found in our churches. What I'm talking about is this yearning, this longing to know God in increasing measure. This yearning should push us forward to spiritual perfection (intimacy with God).

What Questions Are Important? { 17 }

What questions matter in the grand scheme of things? We all have more of them than we can count. It is also certain that most of them will not be answered to our satisfaction. Yet, objectively, we could, if we so chose, eliminate most of them. Most of our questions are irrelevant. Either they have already been answered and we are not satisfied with the answer, or they are irrelevant because any answer will suffice since their answer does not provide any added value to our experience of life.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

So whether you have questions about religion, faith, spirituality and so forth, it would be advisable to eliminate any of the questions that produce nothing of value. This would apply to non spiritual questions as well. Why waste time pondering essentially useless curiosities? To that end, let us try to boil down spiritual questions to the most commonly effective and useful ones.

The Same Ending

Asking which religion is the best one, provides very little more than the realization that nearly all of them have the same ways and means to the same common end. For example, all religions of the world, including Christianity, promote teachings that aspire to a final connection and end in the presence of their particular *god*. The common teachings of all are somewhat moralistic and hold cultural morality as the highest order of importance. Again, even Christianity holds high this same banner. Furthermore, all religions, except one, worship icons of their faith who are dead and buried but with a great spiritual legacy left behind. Even, Jesus Christ, is held by nearly every religion to be the greatest teacher or prophet of all time. So what question could have any *value-add* associated with it?

Only Two Questions { 18 }

As I see it, there is only one question, maybe two, that are worth pondering for any length of time which have both temporal and eternal consequences at stake. For the moment, let's consider two. The first is, "Who is Jesus Christ, whose followers claim to be alive and well over 2 millennia after His crucifixion?" The second is, "How does my opinion of Jesus Christ affect my life?" The reason I believe these two questions ought to be answered, is because the answers will determine the eternal destiny of every human life.

Many Ways to God

"Now that's preposterous," you say. "There are as many ways to God as there are religions in the world," you insist. Well, I must admit, your argument seems logical at first glance. However, there are myriad stories of men and women who would have been vastly rich, had they known that their land possessed a gold mine beneath its surface. Yet, just because they did not ask the question, "Is there anything of value under my yard that might make me rich?" they remained poor. Since

Relationship NOT Religion

they did not ask the first question, they had no reason to ask the second one. If they had asked the first question and the answer to it was *yes*, then the second question, “What do I need to do to harvest it?”

Again you raise your hand and with permission to speak, you say, “That’s foolish! The chances are so slim that there would be a gold mine under anyone’s property, the world would go mad if everyone began digging in their yard!” This seems logical as well. However, there is a distinct difference between the questions about highly improbable wealth in the yard and the questions about Jesus Christ. The difference is that there is a treasure map that has been published more widely than any other in the history of man. The treasure map is about this very Jesus Christ aforementioned. Further the author of the map has clearly stated that if you will follow the map, He will insure that you will find the treasure.

There Is A Map, Use It { 19 }

So, whether you like it or not, there is a treasure and a map. So, whether you believe it or not, there is a treasure and a map, the Bible. My knowledge or lack thereof does not change the facts. My ignorance is assured unless I choose to pursue knowledge. We are all innocently ignorant until we have been informed. However, once informed, we are just plain stupid if we continue to shout in contradiction to irrefutable evidence, “I still don’t believe it!” And, to be sure, to ignore the evidence or not even seek such evidence is your option, always. However, with not only life but also eternity at stake, to simply ignore the evidence would border on insanity. Just pretending that something does not matter does not affect its significance

No Answer is a ‘No’ Answer

The answer to the first question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” has already been answered with prolific evidence and a plethora of personal experiential testimonies. But if you will not ponder the evidence, the second question is already rendered irrelevant. However, if you consider all of the evidence revealing the facts about Jesus Christ, it is nothing short of arrogance or insolence to refuse to answer the second one. But, be advised, the second question is always answered and it is answered by every human being. No answer, is a “No!” answer. Just as

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

in the example of the gold mine. The absence of an answer is an answer of, “No” which is the default for all of us.

No Action Required { 20 }

Another significant difference between Christianity and all other world religions is this: the gods out there, that is all of the gods except the God of Abraham, require actions and attitudes consistent with recognition of the extreme superiority of the *god-being*. Only the God of Abraham offers human beings the opportunity to be in a genuinely affectionate relationship with Himself! Herein is the rub. Herein is the truth as well. Every relationship is a *two person* choice. Both parties must accept the other's invitation to be together and to care for each other.

God Can't Be Trusted

So, it befuddles me to notice the extremely high measure of resistance to God's offer to every person an up-close-and-personal relationship with Himself. I see nothing to lose and everything to gain. Who, in their right mind, would not want God to be at least a BFF (best friend forever)? But then this gives rise to the question that is foundational to every affectionate relationship. “Can my significant other be trusted?” And this seems to be the primary reason most humans do not engage God in a personal relationship. They have been convinced, wrongly I might add, that God wants perfect behaviors and attitudes. They have mostly believed that the treasure map will lead them to destruction in the hands of an angry *pirate*, God.

Better to Be Safe Than Sorry { 21 }

Unfortunately this is a very widely accepted view of God. Fortunately, there is an enormous amount of evidence to prove just the opposite. But, unless you are first willing to ask the two most important questions in human experience, you will be saying *no* to a proposition you never evaluated. That, my friend, is an irretrievable mistake. I would suggest that “It is better to be safe than sorry.” One religious teacher said frequently, “If my faith in Jesus Christ proves to have been unnecessary on an eternal landscape, I have lost nothing. However, if what I believe about Jesus Christ is true, and you refuse to believe it yourself, you will suffer separation from God, forever!”

Relationship NOT Religion

Jesus' Teaching {22 }

The vast majority of teaching is based on the *informational philosophy*. Jesus' teaching was based on the *transformational philosophy*. Even the methods of delivery of the messages of Jesus were intended to promote *life change*, not information accumulation. Jesus' entire focus was on relationship. And for very good reason. Humans were created for relationships. Relationship can only be established between humans. Relationships are at the core of our engineering *in the image of God*. Everything external to relationship, the human expression of personality, simply provides an environment in which relationship can be expressed.

Pursuit of Power

It is no mystery that the informational philosophy is so predominant. We have all heard the saying, *knowledge is power*. Since one of the three basic desires of humans is to obtain *power*, we are driven to become powerful. Yet, most of the carnage in human history is evidence of this axiom, *power corrupts*. The *power* pursuit of man binds people in relationship to one another. At the same time, this same pursuit can be the greatest hindrance or destroyer of relationship. In other words, relationship's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. Another expression of *power* is *worship*. *Power* seeking people are in effect garnering the *worship* of others.

Manipulation { 23 }

I have spent incredible amounts of time and energy trying to convince, coerce or manipulate others to *worship* me. And so have you. This actually drives many away from us. But, when I truly fall in love with another, my *worship* of them is evidence that I love them. I *worship* that which I value. Therefore the *worship* of my most significant other is natural. So is the *worship* of my heroes, even if they might be villains to others. (Hitler was a hero for many but a villain to others.)

I Wannabe Rich

External things, such as the accumulation of resources (*prosperity*) may provide ways and means to express our feelings toward one another. For example, giving a lover flowers expresses affection for them. At the same time, an obsession with the accumulation of *prosperity* can be

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

the very thing that destroys relationship. This obsession can distract us from meeting the emotional needs of the ones we love.

I Wannabe Popular

Another significant pursuit of all people is *popularity*. This can be a hurdle over which two people must leap in order to be in relationship with each other. Since we all want to be applauded or recognized for the good things we do, our pursuit of such shifts our attention from the one we love to ourselves. The extreme of this is narcissism.

Self Inflicted Loneliness { 24 }

So, the very things that are the greatest impetus for our every expression (word or deed), can also be the demise of any particular relationship. Those who are the loneliest are those whose focus is most introverted and selfish. Obsession with self and a desperate need to be prosperous, popular or worshipped leads to depression, despair and possibly even personal termination (suicide) when they are not attained. Therefore, healthy relationships which supply these needs, are the solution to addictive behaviors of all kinds. The world would be a much better place if all of us were more other-caring and less self-indulgent.

Transformational { 25 }

Jesus' teachings are not only *relational* but also *transformational*. His message ran contrary to all religious teaching in His day. He and His message were rejected summarily by any and all who were more interested in themselves (their own prosperity, popularity and power) than in wholesome mutually other-caring relationships. All religions, including the Christian religion, place more value in the selfish pursuits of the *worshippers*, attempting to appease their gods, than developing genuine, affectionate relationships with others. Christianity, when actually practiced, is relationship and not religion. Most relationships then and now were (and are) mutual accommodation of self-need. That explains the phenomena of falling in

FLESH is

self-indulgent

self-promoting

self-sovereign

**Seize every
opportunity
to give up
your opinion
in exchange
for God's truth.**

— J.H. Alan

Relationship NOT Religion

love and then falling **out** of love.

Not About Morality { 26 }

Jesus did not teach morality. Jesus did not teach justice and equity. Jesus did not teach responsible living. Jesus did not teach behavior management. Jesus did not teach social activism. All expressions of any of these are at best futile attempts to be *self-righteous*, or a *good person*. Even the Old Testament was grossly misunderstood as a behavioral approach to *rightness*. A more accurate understanding is that all of the rules and regulations of the Commandments of God were simply the revelation of the symptoms of the disease of selfishness (the antithesis of love). Anyone can see the natural consequences, relational carnage, that violation of the rules would produce. Actions do speak louder than words!

Recognizing What I Want { 27 }

Believe it or not, worship is not a religious activity. Worship is the natural activity of the human soul. It is the basis for all relationships. It is the impetus for individuality, partnership and relational bonding. Every person on earth today is a great worshipper. We all worship many things or people. Unfortunately, worship of objects which cannot return worship in kind, are all too common in every generation. It is equally unfortunate that most objects of worship which have the capacity to return our worship, do not do so. I have worshipped many people who never even knew my name. However, the highest object of worship, and the only one who is guaranteed to return my worship is the Creator, who gave me life and breath in the first place.

The Best Worshipers

The bottom line for all of us is not to become better worshippers. We are all exceptionally good at it. The best option is to improve the objects of our worship. In this case, I suggest that God would be the ultimate object of worship. And who better to be in marital union with than God, Himself. Like it or not, we are all in the same boat. And we must all face the fact that the only assured love of our life is the one who created us in the first place. You might liken it to Father and Mother love. Good parents have children in order to have loving relationships with them. And God is the ultimate, good parent!

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Can't Feel It { 28 }

Now to be sure, we must first feel God's love for us in order to respond to it. If we have misperceptions as to the measure of God's love for us or misgivings about it, we cannot respond to a love we do not feel. It is usually the case, that when we do not believe that God actually does love us, just the way we are, we have been misinformed by well-meaning but misguided informants. These informants are parents, pastors, peers, politicians, professors, and professionals of all kinds. However, the good news of the Gospel is this. The Holy Spirit of God Himself will come to us and convince us that God desires to be in relationship with us.

You Will Know When

But, if we do not say "yes" to His overtures of love, we remain apart from Him. The good news is that God will express His affectionate intentions toward every man and woman some time in his or her life. He wants every one to be up close and personal with Him. But that could not be possible if ever God forced anyone in that regard. This is the very essence of faith in God. **Faith is essentially my affectionate response to God's love for me.** It is in the moment when my heart is pierced by His love, that I have the opportunity to establish a personal relationship with Him. It cannot and will not happen at any other time. And He may only ask you one time. I strongly suggest that you just say *yes!*

Who I Am in Christ { 29 }

Once having been overwhelmed by God's love and responding to His invitation of a deeply personal relationship with Him, my expressions about Him will reflect my affection for Him. My identity is not defined by my abilities, talents, intelligence, vocation or my personal successes. My identity is a matter of relationship. I am defined by my heritage, my relationship and my personality. Identity is a matter of being not doing. Unfortunately the predominant answer to the question, "Who are you?" is a recitation of my accomplishments and abilities. Relationship, which is the ultimate in human experience is based rather on pure emotional and spiritual connection with another being. My identity then, is in my identification with another in relationship. Birth and marriage are two primary examples of this.

Relationship NOT Religion

Christ-In by Marriage

In Christ, that is in having responded to God's invitation to be joined to Him in a deeply personal way, my identity takes on a much higher value than with any other relationship. As a Christ-In, I am identified with God as a member of His family, by marriage, with all of its inherent benefits and pleasures. Thus the term "Christian" in its purest meaning is in this marital union with God in all three of His manifestations, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Living in relational unity and harmony with God, enables me to demonstrate the selfless, other-caring Spirit of God to all those around me. And in that Spirit, I will have genuine affection for all others around me. From this place of identity **everything I do will be motivated by who I am.**

The Good News and the Bad News { 30 }

The good news is that God offers His love and relationship to everyone. The bad news is that most refuse to accept His offer of relationship and remain alone in the world and estranged from God. So when God comes courting, just say yes. You can rest assured that He will be the most faithful of anyone with whom you will ever share relationship! His love for you will be deeper and stronger than anyone else in the universe. He is and will always be the *perfect* Father, Mother, Sister, Brother, Friend and Mate for you.

Do I hear a, "Yes?"

"Evil is not an external force. Evil is to live backward."

{ EVIL - LIVE }

"Evil is conflict between any two relational beings which harms one or the other." — J.H. Alan

•The measure of my loneliness and insecurity is in reverse proportion to my awareness of the presence of God. — J.H. Alan

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Chapter 2: Navigating the Journey {Soak in this! Ponder it!} { 31 }

"If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead. And your life is hid with Christ in God," Colossians 3:1-3. You cannot take this journey unless you have been raised to new life in Jesus. Once committed to this relationship with God, personal resolve to step into the journey to intimacy with Him is essential. It is the first step in the most delightful journey you will ever take. And the good news is that there need not be any particular destination. This journey is about how you journey not where. The best part is that your travel mate is God!

Travel Mates

Travel is more enjoyable when you have someone to share the journey with you. Like any other journey there will be bumps in the road and obstacles to work around. Yet, when viewed as a challenge, each obstacle adds interest and uniqueness to the trip. Falling in love is only the first step in the journey to intimacy with any other. The journey is the very bonding which occurs when two persons grow toward unity. A garden requires the loving touch of a *tender*, whether it is a garden of plants or a garden of relationship.

What We Value Most { 32 }

Relationship treasurers, whether we admit it or not, are the most valuable of all treasures. And, as opposed to material things and heroes which do not respond to our affections, relationships always produce a return on investment. The more you love, the more you are loved. Another way to view this journey to intimacy is to *live loved and live loving*. "He who would have friends must show himself friendly." And to be sure, he or she who would be loved, must be loving toward others. It is a simple matter of investment and return or planting and harvesting. This is life.

It Is Not Automatic

Becoming intimate with God for the Christian is far from being automatic. The soul, the seat of our emotions, must be cultivated like a

Navigating the Journey

garden. And the will, the seat of our sovereign choices, must be congruent, that is equal in every way, with the Will of God. This would be living as the committed members of God's great family. When our commitment is to family, our desires and motives must be consistent with Father's desires. When we have reached that end, it will be demonstrated by our peace in the middle of carnage and devastation as we rely on Dad to handle the situation with our cooperation.

God's Purpose, Not Ours {33 }

Joseph and Job are the best examples of this in the Bible. And we must look for the purpose of God in everything instead of trying to logically deduce the meaning of things. This has been clearly stated in the New Testament. Far too many are satisfied with following the crowd and never press on to deeper faith. Relatively few go on to greater love and greater *Christ-likeness*. Our objective is to finish the marathon. Many begin, but few cross the finish line. What is the secret to pressing on? Where is the strength to be found to endure the race until the very end?

The Reason

Christ's payment for our sin, (the separation from God—death) and His subsequent resurrection to a new life captivated the hearts of the first believers. This irrefutable evidence of God's unconditional love and receiving it by faith provided complete release and freedom from guilt, shame and fear. So compelling was this freedom, that thousands of Christians were willing to face martyrdom for the cause of Christ. The first Christians not only fell in love with God, but also persisted in the journey, abandoned to intimacy with God. They lived and died knowing that Christ had risen from the dead and they had risen with Him. "If ye then be risen with Christ." That word, *if*, is not an if of uncertainty. The intent of the word is "*since* you are then risen with Christ." Paul declared in Romans 6:4, Ephesians 2:6-7 and elsewhere that Christ's resurrection applied to every believer as well.

Consider Your Valuables { 34 }

Make a list of everything you consider valuable. Then separate them into temporary and eternal, that is those which cannot go with you when you die and those that can. You will likely notice that the prima-

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

ry difference between the lists is that the eternal valuables are relationships, things of the spirit. Everything else, health, wealth and physical pleasures will cease upon one's death. Notice also that only relationships cannot be stolen or corrupted by thieves and villains. Think of it like your distant relatives and the affections you have for them even while they are hundreds or thousands of miles away. We may actually include people in our earthly list, but when they pass into eternity they then move to the eternal list. Notice also that most of the items in your earth list are things we can physically handle. The quest before us is to develop an even greater affection for God than for our most significant other on earth. God can be our treasure in life and after death!

Genuine Affection { 35 }

As Christians we are very different from those who are not. We are to be so completely different that everyone notices that we are. And as Jesus put it, "By this will everyone know that you are My disciples, that you have love for one another." So the distinction of Christianity is

"The strongest deterrent to *wrong-full* behavior is a genuine affection for the one I might *wrong*."

— J. H. Alan

unconditional love for each other. That means that people know that we actually have affection for them and are not just going through the motions. We have emotions not just motions toward them.

Everybody Wants It { 36 }

Every man, woman and child alive today wants to be loved by someone. Christians should be the most loving people on earth. As a matter of fact, if we were, our churches would be bursting at the seams. The one earthly treasure which hinders us the most is the strong desire for a good reputation among men (applause). Another lesser treasure here is comfort and pleasure (indulgence). The third significant thing that is valuable to us here is to be worshipped (in control of) our own personal kingdom, me. It is ever, only and always deep affection for God that causes one to delight in Him and those who are in Him (whether they be down here or up there).

Navigating the Journey

I believe that my **treasures in heaven** are relationships with those whom I loved enough to introduce to a personal relationship with God for themselves. Seeing them again will be my greatest joy. (And, just so you know, no one lives in a mansion in heaven. The correct term is efficiency apartment.) Simply follow God's revelation. Live for the soul, developing relationships that last into eternity, and let the love of God flow so strongly through you that you are asked why you are so peaceful in all circumstances.

A Christian Culture { 37 }

Christians, although we should know better, consistently superimpose our standards onto those who do not share our beliefs. The church often tries to get non-believers to do what we fail to do ourselves. Actually the demands of the church are impossible to achieve. Moral purity is beyond the grasp of the natural man or even the Christian who is not deeply intimate with God. We are often preaching sermons, writing articles, and singing hymns, trying to equate our country and our culture with Christianity. It cannot be done.

Other-Preferring Nature

The Christian Church is something that is supposed to be set apart. It is not the color of our skin, our ethnicity or our social standing that matters. The Christian Church is a new creation born of the Holy Spirit, out of the suffering of Christ. It is another culture altogether. It is a culture where loving others more than ourselves is the norm. We are to be different from the natural man. We are to be other-caring rather than self-indulging, because we are risen with Christ. "Seek those things that are above and set your will (heart), emotions (soul) and thoughts (mind) on the things that are above where Christ sits on the right hand of God."

Affection — Not Tradition { 38 }

The biggest problem with our churches is that we get so engrossed in the mundane routine traditional format, that God and the people get very little personal time together. We meet and greet on the way in and the way out of the building. Wouldn't it be refreshing if church was more like a family gathering at home on a holiday, where we were

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

spontaneously engaged with one another, and God had a chair at the table and was enjoying the meal and conversation with us as though He were there in the flesh?

Certain imperatives are set before us because Christ is risen. The scriptures say, “seek and set your affections on things above and cease to engage in selfish pursuits.” Forgive everybody who has offended you as Jesus forgave those who nailed Him on the cross. Abandon yourself to Him by dedicating your time to Him.

Time is, after all is said and done, the only currency of genuine affection. Most of us give God only the *left-*

EXPECTATIONS / MY RIGHTS

- Bars that separate me from you
- Bars that I created
- Bars fabricated of my opinions
- Bars as strong as I choose
- Bars you cannot remove
- Bars you may not know exist
- Bars that are based on culture
- Bars which keep me from what I want most in life
- Bars of relationship separation
- Bars that GOD HATES

I've created my own prison !

overs of our time. If Jesus Christ had given us only His spare time, we would all be forever lost. We can, if we desire to see things as God sees them, give Him our attentions and affections at all times. We can include Him in our thoughts no matter what we are doing. But it takes practice to break our old habits of ignoring Him in order to develop new ones that keep Him constantly in our thoughts.

Exchanged Mind { 39 }

For conscience' sake we tend to separate our experiences into two separate categories. Some things to us are spiritual and others are secular. Things that relate to church, God, religion, and so forth are considered our spiritual lives. All other necessary pursuits are treated as unspiritual or secular. This enables us to disconnect our spiritual principles from most of our life experiences. Unfortunately this tends to sup-

Navigating the Journey

port hypocrisy in all of us. It also enables us to, somehow in good conscience, operate quite selfishly while perceiving ourselves as selfless and maybe even generous people. Mostly our spiritual expressions are given much less time and attention than everything else.



CHURCH

FAITH

WORK

Undivided

Little, if any, thought has been devoted to the blending of these two into one. To be sure, we must pay attention to the duties of work, play, education, community service and so forth. But there is no valid reason for leaving God out of these seemingly mundane activities. Just as we often think of our significant others as we go about our routines, we could include God in them as well. Certainly God is as worthy as any person to be included in our thoughts round the clock.

Exchanged Spirit { 40 }

Living abandoned to intimacy with God precludes a divided life. To God and to the ancient Hebrews everything is spiritual. And in reality, that is true for every man. Craving to be loved, respected, indulged and served are deeply spiritual stimuli. “God is a Spirit and those who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Therefore it is only what is spiritual that can be an offering to God. And our spirit is always actively involved in everything we do. It is our spirit that makes every decision we face.

Exchanged Emotions { 41 }

As Christians, we can turn some of the most mundane jobs into wonderful spiritual prayer meetings. By including God in our awareness while making every choice in our day, we can make every moment a spiritual encounter. Brother Lawrence, was just a kitchen worker in the

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

monastery where he lived. He washed the dishes for the glory of God. When he was through with his humble work, he would fall down, flat on the floor and worship God. Whatever he was told to do, he did it for the glory of God. He testified, "I am so resigned that I would not take up a straw from the ground against His order or from any motive but that of pure love for Him."

Knowing What to Expect { 42 }

Every time I leave my house, I look to God expecting Him to bless me and keep me on my way. Every time I'm traveling, I expect Him to keep me safe. If He wants me in heaven more than He wants me on earth, I will not get home. There is no need to pray for God's protection. I already have it. When God is finished with me here, He will take me home. In the meantime, I will thank Him day in and day out for everything. Let's stop being distracted from our love of God by anything that promotes our prosperity, popularity or power on earth. Let us be constantly aware of the Presence of God within us. God sanctified us, that is, He declared us to be holy and set us apart. We must do our jobs, but if we do them *with* God, they are no longer mundane. They become opportunities to build relationships with each other and spread the love of God Himself!

Hidden { 43 }

Your faith is strengthened by assurance. And here is the cure of all cures. **Your life is hid with Christ in God.** Nothing can harm us unless it is God's will. No one can kill us, unless it is God's appointed time for our departure from this life. No malady or adversity should cause us to complain. When we see every difficult person or trying circumstance as a learning lab or endurance training, we can rejoice instead of grouse. The more you love God the more you will trust Him and want to be with Him and do things that please Him. The only way to attract any one to the Kingdom of God is to compel them with unconditional love, God's and yours in the Holy Spirit.

Abandon to Intimacy with God

Chapter 3: Abandon to Intimacy with God { Read Slowly } { 44 }

David was known as a man after God's own heart. He seemed to have few lapses in his focus on God. Yet his life was filled with trouble, heartache and relational carnage. It is recorded in the story of Job that he prayed daily for himself and his family. He was a true as true can be with respect to his allegiance to God. Yet, in one fell swoop, Job lost all of his grandchildren, his children, and everything they had was reduced to rubble. Job was even inflicted with extreme medical malady. Another faithful man, Joseph, had tremendous faith and intimacy with God, but suffered incredible injustice at the hand of his own brothers. So just because one finds God to be very dear to himself, does not mean that life will be any easier than it is for an irreligious man. In fact, there is significant evidence that life is often more difficult for God's best servants than for most others.

Passionate Desire { 45 }

Many believers through the ages from Jesus until now had a similar yet uncommonly deep affection for God. To be sure, their source of love and ours is the same rushing river of God. Anything positive in relationship flowing from us is simply the overflowing of our banks by the rising river of God's love. Left to ourselves our human nature will selfishly extract love from others rather than to lavish it upon them. To become channels of God's love to others is the very purpose for which we were apprehended by God. Paul stated in Philippians 2:13, "... but I follow after so that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Jesus Christ."

Legacy of Intimacy

This produced people like Madame Guyon, Francis Fenelon, Brother Lawrence, Oswald Chambers and Frank Laubach. These names may be unfamiliar to you, but they all possessed a deep longing for God. All who have cultivated the same desire for God as King David, pursue intimacy with Him incessantly. Tragically, many churches teach faith in Jesus, but little more. Relationships will ultimately fail unless the parties continue in hot pursuit of their mutual desire for each other. The primary objective for us and the purpose of God in creation is to develop an up close and personal experience with Him.

Let's Fall in Love — with God

Love Is Pleasing { 46 }

We have all been in love at some time in our lives. And those of us who have been madly in love with another person, know what it means to be madly in love. When you are overwhelmed with that kind of love, you will do anything your lover desires. And usually, when you know what they desire, you are already trying to fulfill their desire before they even ask. Ultimately, we come to be able to finish one another's sentences. Many times we are already thinking a thought which they express, before they even open their mouth to say it. And, so it goes. When you love someone deeply, you always want to please them. And the love story of the Bible is to show us how intimacy with God is the objective and romancing Him is essential.

Emotion Not Thought { 47 }

Relationship is not a thinking proposition. It is an emotional proposition. We cannot love with our heads. We can only love with our hearts. The inclusion of human philosophy and science in our religious practice and teaching has caused us to drift as a Christian culture far from the *Christ-In* culture which existed in the wake of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. *Christ-Ins* were overwhelmed by the love of God. When we fall in love, our spirit connects intimately with another. No amount of intellectual study of my lover will endear me to them. Only a mutual attraction to each other's collective emotional gallery will draw us into a deep desire for each other. And nurturing of relationship is only facilitated by consistent pursuit of greater caring for the one we love.

Love Is Emotion { 48 }

Love **is**, after all, an **emotion**. We know the distinct difference between emotion and logic as it is common knowledge that emotional decisions are generally more risky than logical ones. Just as we thrive on emotions, so does God. So He used His rational mind to engineer the universe and us. He did this to facilitate His ultimate purpose, that is to establish a love affair with any who would respond to His overtures toward them. But we cannot have affection for God with our mind. We can only know God in relationship through our emotional connection with Him, and a deeply affectionate one at that.

Abandon to Intimacy with God

A Passionate Love Affair { 49 }

It seems that generation after generation drifts farther and farther from God. Some of this is purely the tendency of the natural man to cater to his own whims. But tragically, much of the drift is caused by the incorrect doctrines and practices of the *Christian* way. As we make idols out of the scriptures and altars out of Biblical artifacts, we replace the love of God with a form of godliness that saps the power out of the Gospel. Beware of your own propensity to *stand on the Bible* making it an idol to be worshipped above all else. This relegates the God of the Bible to a lesser place. And, if in reflection on your life, you discover that the Bible has not produced a lifestyle which closely resembles the unconditional love that Jesus lived, consider the only other viable option you have. That is to abandon to intimacy with God, which alone conforms us to the likeness of Christ. Experiencing the enormously powerful Presence of the Holy Spirit, radically changes our relationship with God. And our life exudes an adoring, passionate love affair with God.

Experience: Irrefutable Evidence { 50 }

There is a radical difference between reading about someone or something and experiencing them. We all know facts about many people, but only those with whom we share a close relationship can we thoroughly enjoy! Experience always trumps logical conclusions. Love itself is extremely illogical, but once smitten by love, one cannot dismiss or forget the euphoria of that love! The deep affection of God can only be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit at the moment we are smitten. Thus a personal deeply intimate relationship with God is infinitely more valuable and satisfying than the Bible could ever be. The Bible was written to convey the story of God's love and grace from beginning to end. It was also intended to be a proof-text by which we can test our motives and complicity with the love of God.

The Bible — Idol or Compass { 51 }

"God said it. I believe it. And that settles it." This trite and useless phrase is often spoken in church. It is senseless for two reasons. 1) What you *believe it* means may be very inaccurate. Consider the opposing views of brilliant theologians who agree on very few interpreta-

Let's Fall in Love — with God

tions. 2) *That settles it* presumes that you have all the right answers already which precludes any further pursuit of revelation (stagnation)! *Whenever the use of scripture denigrates relationship, its purpose is no longer being served and its message is abused by way of misinterpretation. Devoid of Jesus' love, the Bible is not God's Word.* — J. H. Alan

Intensity

Many have talked about the Bible, studied it avidly and striven to comply with its very literal interpretation, but have missed the point altogether. If the scripture has only made points in your life, but no appreciable difference, it has surely become an idol before which you may bow, but through which you have produced no fruit on your branch of the vine.

Do It Yourself { 52 }

There are countless self-help resources (books, videos, audio tracks and so forth) to which we can turn to find out *how to* be better Christians. We think it is our duty to become more like God. It is evident that most Christians bury themselves under tomes of these resources or religious activities in an attempt to do it themselves. That is, to *get it right*. Yet, the more helps we explore, the farther from intimacy we get. This applies to relationships in general and also to relationships with either God or man. Unfortunately we fail to consider that we are doing the exact same thing as the original couple in the Garden of Eden, partaking of the fruit of self effort in an attempt to be more like God!

Education is a wonderful thing. However, one must desire to be educated in order to appropriate and use the information presented. No student learns anything unless they are motivated to do so. Motivation can come from within or without. But without it, the student fails to fully absorb that which is being taught. Most of us want to help others learn what we know whether they want it or not. When we share our pearls of knowledge with totally deaf or disinterested ears, we simply babble to ourselves!

It's Your Fault { 53 }

So, if you are stuck in a shallow relationship with God, it is completely your own fault. God has placed His Holy Spirit within you to teach

Abandon to Intimacy with God

you God's ways and affections. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher of time and eternity. But, unless and until you desire to learn from Him, you will remain ignorant and dissatisfied spiritually. It is your choice. No one else can decide for you.

Road Less Traveled

The journey of living abandoned to intimacy with God can at times seem lonely. This is because so few even take the first step. Or if they do begin, they quit too soon to find the love, joy and peace it can bring. But as the proverbial saying goes, "It sometimes takes one step backward in order to take two steps forward." But the important thing is that there is no hurry or need to take the journey at high speed. As a matter of fact, the faster we go, the more beauty and scenery we miss.

Teaching Moments { 54 }

Every experience in your life has the potential to teach you or others some valuable lesson. If you will search for the revelation each trial or difficulty may bring, you will be amazed at how much more God can teach you. Seize each moment (decision point), ponder its meaning with God, discover His purpose in it, and do what His Spirit directs you to do about it. "Seek and you will find." applies to every event in your life. Look for God in each one and you will see Him right there with you in it.

Casting Myself Into the Story { 55 }

Although we may have many companions as we live abandoned to intimacy with God, nobody can live our experiences for us. Nor can we experience anybody else's life. When we come into God's Presence, we come by ourselves. It boils down to simply this, God and us. It is God's intention that I cast myself into each role in each parable of Jesus. By doing this, I can discover the truth about me and become more authentic. The better I understand myself, the better my chances are of dealing with reality. The more I accept who I am, as opposed to who I wish I was, the greater my freedom to express myself. Since intimacy requires complete trust that my lover will never abandon me, in this state with God, my complete honesty sets me free. Perfect love casts out fear. And it is only fearless relationships that satisfy the soul.

Let's Fall in Love — with God

Don't Let Others Do Your Thinking { 56 }

Most religious people, even Christians, accept the doctrines of others rather than making up their own minds about God. We tend to become faithful to the religion of our parents. If we were treated badly by our parents, we may adopt anything other than their particular brand of religion. We seem to choose the *safety in numbers* over the narrow lonely road to life. The Bible is clear that the road to destruction is wide and heavily travelled. I suggest you abandon the *safety in numbers* theory in favor of the safety of God and His truth.

You and God Alone

There is only safety and security in the love of God. So, until you seek God alone as your trustworthy life partner, you will be in danger for most of your life's journey! The great news is that when you become intimate with God, not only *will you know* it, but also *others will testify* that they see the intimacy in you. There is no limit to intimacy. Keep on seeking deeper and richer affection for God. Let me qualify the limitless nature of God's intimacy. His offer and supply is unlimited. However, we can and do limit the measure of His intimacy which we receive by crowding it out with selfish indulgences, applause and self worship!

Pitch the Pulpit { 57 }

Many Christians think that they would be better Christians if only they had better pastors and teachers. Likely the opposite would be true. Most of us tend to follow charismatic or influential people rather than blazing new trails. So, a more appealing pastor might actually become a crutch for you to lean on. The truth is this. The more you depend on another person for knowledge of God, the less you will *know* God for yourself.

A great orator may get your attention and affection. But no inspirational speaker can compare with the author of the Bible. And since we are given the presence of God's Holy Spirit, who inspired all of the writers of the Bible, we can learn far more and more accurately what God wants us to learn from His Word by His Spirit. Meditation is the practice which will bring us to stillness such that the Holy Spirit can guide us into all truth. You can trust Him! *Just be still.*

Abandon to Intimacy with God

Release Control { 58 }

Having been born to be control freaks, we have great difficulty letting God be in control, or anyone else, for that matter. Yet, control issues are the predominant ones leading to stress and unbecoming behaviors. One of my own pastors once said, “The comfort of God is wrapped in my release of my control over my life.” Later God added to this, “*and the lives of others.*” So a major element of a life abandoned to intimacy with God is the release of all control to God.

The comfort
of God
is wrapped
in my release
of my control
over my life
& the lives
of others!

As long as I tried to maintain control over this or that, I lived with a pretty great measure of stress. This stress turned my concern for matters into worry, anxiety, guilt, shame and fear. So I began to equate *comfort* with *peace* and reworded my pastor’s statement. “The peace of God is wrapped in my release of my control over my life and the lives of others.” This one phrase has been a daily practice ever since.

Sick and Tired { 59 }

When you get sick and tired of being sick and tired, of a less than satisfactory experience of God, is the very moment when God is most likely to begin revealing Himself in the most intimate ways! God is always madly in love with us. He is simply waiting for any who will join with Him in a passionate love affair. Intimacy cannot be achieved by thought or imagination. Intimacy only ever occurs by way of desperate desire to be intimate in any relationship. If you are serious about this journey of abandon to intimacy with God, you *will*, at times, experience a sense of loneliness for people. But when complete intimacy with God becomes a reality for you, there will never be a lonely moment for you again! I speak from personal experience. I have not experienced a single moment of loneliness in over 10 years!

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Chapter 4: Critical Understandings { Read deliberately! } { 60 }

Dynamics of a passionate love affair with God, “All You Need Is Love” (How to become intimately abandoned to God). “Why shouldn't we fall in love with God?”

Going On In

Regeneration (rebirth) makes the natural man a Christian, which deposits within him the very Spirit of God. God brings us out of bondage, not so that we may be out, but so that we may be brought in. God saves a criminal, not so that he can brag about it for the next 40 years, but so that he might become mature in his relationship with God. God takes him out of his bondage to selfishness so that he might lead that person into a life of relational wholeness and freedom. And the farther in the man goes, the less he will want to talk about where he used to be.

It is not the mark of spirituality when I talk at length about what I used to be. Today, we magnify what we used to be and write books to tell the world about it. Paul said, “those things ought not even to be mentioned among the people of God.” Ephesians 5:12 God brought you out, but He does not leave you in limbo. He brought you out so that he might bring you in. And that is the will of God.

Three Kinds of Man { 61 }

If you are a natural man, no matter how well educated, how talented, how handsome or how desirable you are, you do not know a thing about the heart and affections of God. And you do not know a thing about the spiritual life. You do not have the faculties to know it. If a man who is stone deaf sits reading while a Mozart symphony is playing, you would not blame him because he would rather read than listen to the music. He does not have the ability to enjoy the music. The ability you have in you to listen to the symphony is dead in him.

Or if you were in an art gallery, looking at paintings, and there was a man completely blind sitting on the bench, you would not ask, “Why is

Critical Understandings

that dim wit just sitting there? Why doesn't he get up and look at the paintings?" He does not have the ability to look at paintings. The ability you have to look at paintings is dead in him. No matter who you are or how educated or religious you are, if you have not been regenerated, renewed, made over, brought to the light by the quickening revelation of the Holy Spirit, you cannot be intimate with God. You cannot know spiritual things at all. You can only know the history of spiritual things. Any enthusiasm you have for religion is in vain for it is only an illusion.

Spiritual Man

Paul says that we Christians who are quickened to life, are no longer estranged from God. We have been released from the bondage of our past. We are free to move on into a passionately intimate relationship with God. There is nothing hindering us now.

Carnal Man

The carnal man is the immature Christian who does not go on or advance. He has slowed in his spiritual development or stopped altogether and is not controlled by the Holy Spirit, but rather by his own spirit. He continues without progress year after year, wandering spiritually. He swings on a pendulum back and forth or just wanders in circles, occasionally looking over his shoulder and remembering that he used to be a slave to evil. Then he goes to a prayer meeting or some revival, puts out his arms and moves so close to God that he can almost touch Him. But he is not going to push on into intimate relationship with God. To continue without progress year after year is to develop a sort of chronic heart disease. Your heart becomes harder and harder as time passes. That is, your heart becomes closed to any new things!

An Intense Christian { 62 }

I was actually one of those very *intense* Christians, who avidly and faithfully served God and His church. Yet for decades I was wandering around in circles, hoping that each time I circled around, I would be a little bit closer to God. Then one day I was shocked out of my pew by the Spirit of God and realized that I needed to change my approach to God if ever I was to become the man of God I so desper-

Let's Fall in Love — with God

ately desired to be. All of my former training proved to be useful in my journey and still is. But I wanted to see some grapes on my branch of the Vine.

Extensive Training { 63 }

When after several months God revealed what was missing and how I could achieve this desire for God, I complained, “Why, God, did I have to waste 40 years of my life to get to this point?” He quickly quipped, “Are you better than Moses?” “No!” I replied. He revealed to me that day that Moses’ forty years in the desert of Midian were necessary preparation for the work God had for him to do. Then I remembered as well. Jesus spent thirty years in preparation for a three year ministry, while we spend three years in preparation for a thirty year ministry. So if you are thinking it is too late or you are too old, think again.

Better Late Than Never { 64 }

Wouldn't it be a great pleasure to you if you could give what is left of your life completely to God for His use? Is anyone too old to fall passionately in love? And to be sure there is a very misleading message floating around out there. “Give to God your best years, your youth.” I have discovered that my best years are my older and wiser ones. How much better to be wise and available than to be immature and to be available! Jump in! Start now! If you sincerely tell God you want to surrender your all to Him, He will, if you let Him, walk you through the course and bring you to an intimacy with Him that staggers your imagination. “God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to His power which works within us.” Ephesians 3:20

Just Do It — Let God { 65 }

So, if you have wasted many years or even decades, consider jumping in right now. But in order to do this, even your spouse must take second place behind God! The Israelites wandered for forty years until those children were grown to middle age and those women were dead. 40 years of it because the men had whimpered and said, “We can't go. It would cost us too much. We can't mistreat our families.” Today we

Critical Understandings

say, “We have to be with our families on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights and all during the missionary convention. We have to be with our families. We can't take a chance of our children becoming juvenile delinquents or wandering from the path of the church we attend.”

Diffuse It Or Obey { 66 }

Actually, in reality, the best way for a husband to save his family from a dull and fruitless religious experience is to show them an example of a man who loves God uncompromisingly. This is a man who remains intimate and true to God even though it costs his most significant others, his spouse, family and dear friends some consternation or aggravation. Every man who stands in the shadows and slanders those who pursue and live the deeper spiritual life, is slandering the very essence of the new birth. Even if you never choose to pursue a life abandoned to intimacy with God, He will be with you. He will not destroy you. Rather, He will simply let you die as you are.

Aged Spiritual Infants — Tozer writes: { 67 }

I refuse to be discouraged about anything. But it gives me a heavy heart to walk among Christians who have wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. Not going back to sin, but not going on into passionate intimacy with God, wandering in an aimless circle. Sometimes a little warmer, sometimes a little colder, sometimes a little holier and sometime is very unholy, but never going on.

Well-meaning But Misinformed { 68 }

Beliefs, which were passed on to them from well-meaning and trusted people, have been acquired and embraced. These beliefs have unwittingly kept myriad Christians from living their best life in faith and love. They have not been taught that intimacy with God is even possible. Further they have been pushed away from God by their own guilt, shame and fear for not living the *holy* lives their parents taught them.

No, Not Even One

But, the absolute truth is, that there is no righteousness in them, except the perfect righteousness of Jesus, given to them with Salvation.

Let's Fall in Love — with God

Jesus paid it all. But as long as one believes that a sinless life must precede intimacy with God, they can never become intimate. Guilt, shame and fear are the very emotions which keep us distant from anyone we love. This is especially true with God. *Intimacy* is the only thing that will produce a more and more holy life. When one becomes intimate with God, sin actually becomes repulsive. So until you deal with your guilt, shame and fear, it is almost certain that you will live and die a spiritual failure. This is a terrible waste.

Behavior Management { 69 }

Behavior management requires control, either self control or other control. In rehab centers the world over are those who mandate behavior management. We are effective in getting the patient sober, but shortly after they are released, the stresses of life cause them to relapse. An experiment in Portugal in recent years has shown results that far exceed our rehabilitation centers in terms of sustained sobriety. Their statistics exceed all institutions of rehabilitation combined by 900 percent! Their experiment lays as its foundation the fact that it is loneliness that drives most people to their addictive substance, or sexual obsessions. The cure is not in one developing self-control. If that were true they never would have been addicted in the first place. The cure lies in developing healthy relationships.

Relationship — The Best Medicine { 70 }

Instead of abandoning the released rehab patients, they are plugged into the community and given emotional support and a way to make a respectable living. They are motivated by healthy relationships to live productive lives in community. This is what Christianity should look like. In the Christian way, salvation is the beginning point of the journey. At that moment God places the organs within which can “love” Him. But the pursuit of intimacy with God, must at some point cease to be striving to achieve it and begin to be relaxing in it. Even Christians who feel the loneliness of rejection in their community, fall prey to addictions of all sorts. The solution to addictive behaviors (sex, substance or service) is in the embrace of unconditional and supportive love. Tozer writes:

Critical Understandings

I'm glad God is good and kind. Failures can crawl into God's arms, relax and say, "Father, I made a mess of it. I'm a spiritual failure. I haven't been out doing evil things exactly, but here I am Father, and I'm old and near the end of life and I'm a failure."

Grace-Full { 71 }

Our kind and *grace full* heavenly Father will not say to that person things like, "I don't want to talk to you!" Or "I'm disappointed with you!" or "I am tired of your messy life!" As Graham Cooke put it so succinctly, "God is never disillusioned with me, because He never had any illusions about me in the first place. He knows that I am weak and foolish and have a history of messing up." The individual has simply failed to reach his potential, at least spiritually. Even if thus far we have failed to reach our potential, our destiny and our greatest success will be to develop a passionate intimacy with God. Paul, the man of God, wrote, "No other foundation can any man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." That foundation is His unconditional love! John 3:16-17

Inflammable { 72 }

If you step back from your religion (bondage to its creeds) and consider the teachings of Jesus, it makes sense that virtually everything of substance can and will be burned up. However, the one thing you cannot burn is the spirit (relationships). Even when our loved ones die, we are still in relationship with them. So when we become intimate with God, His Spirit enables us to develop relationships with virtually anyone and everyone. As we love others like Jesus does, there is a strong chance that some will respond to His loving call to them into relationship with Him for themselves. And these relationships are the only thing that won't burn up. And spirit that has been redeemed by faith in the blood of Jesus, will never be burned up. And this is how we store up treasures in heaven.

Love Is A Choice { 73 }

However, keep in mind that Jesus did not ever, nor did God ever, force anyone to believe in themselves let alone to be forced into a rela-

Let's Fall in Love — with God

relationship with them. Actually, we cannot force relationship either. Unfortunately some Christians become so possessed with saving people from hell, that they try to force everyone around them to become Christians. My own mother alienated herself and our entire family from her brother and sisters and their families by trying to force them to *get saved*. She even criticized their religions because she was so convinced of the way of her Christian denomination. Fortunately for me, God revealed Jesus' way of unconditional love so that I did not make that same mistake. To draw anyone to someone you love, in this case God, you must love them enough that they want to know and love the people you do, again in this case, God.

Blameless and Shameless { 74 }

Thank God you are going to make it. But do you want to make it with God distant from you or would you rather be up close and intimately personal with Him? Are you tired of carrying guilt, shame and possibly fear? Are you tired of confusing sermons and lectures that keep you away from the love, joy and peace Jesus promised. It is the will of God that you should enter into the very Presence of God, commune constantly with His Holy Spirit, and do your business with His constant companionship. God relationships are never tiring. Actually the heart of man, in Christ, becomes the *temple (dwelling place) of the Holy Spirit*, like the ancient Holy of Holies in Israel.

In the Image of God { 75 }

The *image of God* is like this. You can consider that our body is like the walls of the worship place, its structure. The mind is the outer court where we contemplate God with our thoughts. The soul is the inner court or Holy Place, the seat of our emotions, where we develop affection for God and desire to have His presence within us. And the heart is the Holy of Holies of our being, into which we invite God, and surrender our wills to His. Our heart, *not our head*, makes emotional choices which create relationships.

Heart — Soul — Mind — Body

In *the image of God*, we have a *heart, soul, mind* and *body*. With the *heart* we make *choices*, our *will*. With the *soul* we feel and have love and all

Critical Understandings

other *emotions*, our *compassion*. With the *mind*, we *think* of how to express our feelings toward, God, others and ourselves, our *rationale*. And with our *body*, we use our voice, body language and senses to *communicate* with other beings, our *expression*. So when we invite God into our *heart*, or *Holy of Holies*, and let Him make the choices for us, His compassion, His thoughts and His expressions (words or deeds) handle each situation we face. The beauty of this similitude to the creator is that, in union with Him, there is a meshing of our fabrics (spirits) into a *new creation*.

Fused Together with God { 76 }

This understanding helped me realize that *new* does not mean that the *old* has to be gone. But take God's image (me) and mesh it with God Himself and the being becomes *new* when every aspect of my personhood is fully bonded to the God fabric to which it has been meshed. Fiberglass becomes a *new* creation when liquid resin is meshed with soft but strong fabric. Both of the original substances are still present, but together they make a material from which myriad things can be fabricated, which could not have been made from either one by itself.

A New Purpose { 77 }

Once we have been transformed into a *new creature* we are automatically *set apart* for a new purpose. And God has declared that we are as Holy as His Son and therefore fit to continue Jesus' work on earth. That is, we can now unconditionally love all people, and by that love, His love, compel them to want to be *made new* as well! This is the good news of the Gospel. This is not about religion. It is about relationship. (An interesting fact is that every religion has as its highest level, some kind of union with their creator. It is not about religion (bondage to creeds and traditions). It is about living loved by God and loving Him!

The point is not to fully comprehend God, but to fully enjoy what I do comprehend about Him. — J H Alan

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Chapter 5: Setting the Record Straight { Breathe it in! } { 78 }

"For who ever will save his life, shall lose it, but who ever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it. And what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whoever, therefore shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the son of man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the Holy angels." Mark 8:35-38.

Although, some like David, Job and Joseph did draw near to God in friendship and trust, they never felt the presence of the Spirit of God. They never had an opportunity to *be in a personal relationship* with God. And just like them, we have in a very short time, almost forgotten all God has done for us! We continue, as they did, to live by the habits formed before God appeared to us.

The Fire of Desire { 79 }

Just as in the times before Christ appeared there was a distinctly widespread indifference to God, so it is with the vast majority of Christians. But what happened to the fire of desire that came upon us when we offered our lives to God? What happened to the euphoric honeymoon love of those first days? Rather than nurturing the love affair, we are content to read books about God (including the Bible) or to talk about Him as a distant object or to beg His gifts in prayer. Even our stories of God's miracles in our own lives soon become almost commonplace for us. We settle into a rhythm of chants and prayers and songs and meetings and readings and story telling. But few remain in *hot pursuit* of Jesus as they would for an earthly significant other.

Internal Affairs { 80 }

Love affairs have very little to do with things which are external to the spirit of the lovers. Everything around and outside of them pales into insignificance while they are *in the moment* with each other. Even in the face of clarions of God's dissatisfaction with distant and hollow relationships, we trudge on down the road as though we had never met Him. I fear that most of us are, at times, guilty of denying Jesus as

Setting the Record Straight

glibly and vehemently as Peter did the night before the crucifixion. Most Christians say quite often, “I love God!” emphatically. But their lifestyles and selfish pursuits betray them. Intimacy with Christ is something far deeper than the average Christian today experiences. Yet being abandoned to intimacy with God should be the norm.

Revival Is Simply A By-product { 81 }

What I am talking about here is not going to lead to a treatise about revival. That, too, is so *not* relational, that we might as well *deep six* (bury) the entire concept. Revivals do not spawn or nurture love affairs, or any other kind of relationship. Revivals are simply the cacophony (random inspired hearts energizing raised voices with great resonance but no semblance of harmony) of the mass of individual voices worshipping God passionately. So, let us leave revivals to their rightful place (the increase of volume of the accumulation of the individual praises of passionate lovers of God).

Not A Corporate Event { 82 }

One problem with praying for, and hoping to create, a revival is that unless we personally respond to the moving of God’s Holy Spirit the instant He pricks our hearts, nothing happens. If the first step is not taken, neither are all the rest. The substitution of forms and traditions for genuine affection is the culprit. Mostly our gatherings with their rigid formats have replaced the personal exchanges of hearts and minds that occur nearly everywhere else but the religious meeting place. We meet, greet, bump, ignore each other while the ceremony cruises the aisles, bump, bid farewell and scatter to the winds. So what was that all about? Certainly there is very little pleasure in that for me any more. I long for the small gathering around my dinner table with my dearest family and friends where we simply live out our relationships with one another!

God in a Box { 83 }

So long as you are satisfied with the whirring machinery of the religious system of your particular choosing, you will not find God. He has no interest in the token worship of such an infinitesimally small portion of our lives. He is just as disinterested in the early morning,

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

quiet times of most believers. Few are loving on Him. Mostly we are reading the Bible, praying (selfishly I might add), and maybe singing a song or two, attempting to muster up the strength to face the lions of our day. Yet, putting God in a box, either the Sunday morning box or the daily closet (some call a war room), is not really possible. God refuses to be boxed in, except in the Holy of Holies. And there have only ever been two places God has called the Holy of Holies. With Israel it was in the center of the worship center where only the high priest was allowed to go. With us, however and praise God, the center of our person (heart) where only we individually can go.



Soil Samples { 84 }

You have likely read the story of the sower and the four different soils. Maybe you have read it many times and even taught lessons about it. However, you may not have imagined this. The soils may not be people or people groups. The soils may be the condition of your heart which changes frequently, maybe even many times in a single day. When I applied this imagination to the soils of my life, I began to realize that when I am the **hard soil** by the side of the road, *new revelations are quickly snatched away* by the birds (words of others) *and are not even remembered*. When I am the **stony soil**, my *ecstatic revelations from God soon wither away*, like the flowers wither for lack of water and nutritious soil. When I am the **thorny soil**, *new revelations are quickly choked out by the weeds of my own distractions* and the fruit of the seeds does me little

Setting the Record Straight

good. But when I am the fertile, **rich soil**, *I embrace all new revelations, learning from them and producing their fruit.* I watch them grow and eat them when they are harvested. So my measure of apathy or intimacy coincides with my attitudes toward God, the soil of my soul as it were.

Receptivity { 85 }

I found it quite fascinating as I crafted the inspirations of God into this volume that the only hindrance to my abandon to intimacy with God was myself and the condition of my heart. The more my heart was receptive to God's overtures of love, the more my love for Him increased. And vice versa. The other factor for me was that, in the moment of new revelation about my lover, my desire was like a super hot fire. But it cooled down way too fast to provide lasting warmth for my romance with God.

Hot Pursuers of God { 86 }

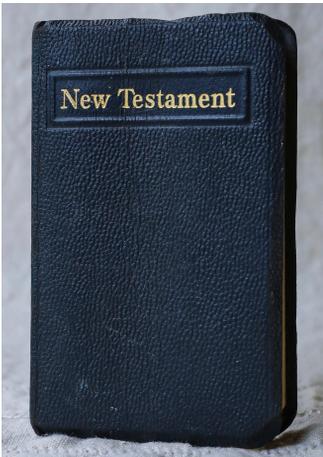
Brother Lawrence, a little known crippled man, not considered a prophet, found a passionate relationship with God in the 17th century. His experiences of elation with God and his total surrender to God are written about in *The Practice of the Presence of God*. In the same time period, both Madame Jean Guyon and Francis Fenelon were mystics who wrote about *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* and *The Seeking Heart*, respectively. In more recent times, such clarions of intimacy with God were Oswald Chambers and Frank Laubach. Their books, *My Utmost for His Highest* and *Practicing His Presence* respectively, have been enormously effective in helping many to become Abandoned to Intimacy with God. Another great read is *Abandoned to God*, the biography of Oswald Chambers. These men and women avidly sought a life that was real. God has always had some men and women in every generation who have earnestly desired that they might become intimate lovers of God. Whether Israelite, Roman Catholic or Protestant, the drift away from God has been the same for centuries.

New Contract { 87 }

There are those who want nothing apart from the New Testament. This is not a viable position to hold. The Old Testament is equally important. Granted, the way of life expressed in the New Testament is full of love and grace. Even Jesus showed mercy, where the Old Tes-

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

tament Law sentenced death. But the history of the Old Testament (contract) is essential to understanding and appreciating fully what Jesus Christ did. He gave a New Command to His disciples. Although the summary of the Old Law, which Jesus expressed to the Pharisees, was to "Love the Lord your God with all your *heart*, all your *soul*, all your *mind* and all your *strength* (body) and your neighbor as yourself," it was not Jesus' command. That was God's command. The Law is perfect but it condemns every man. Grace, on the other hand, is the *un-merited* favor of God which can be obtained through faith in Jesus. Jesus' commands are different in every respect. Actually Jesus gave *only one* command.



New Command { 88 }

The only command of Jesus was given to His disciples at the last supper. It is even more impossible to live up Jesus' command than God's original ten. But that was Jesus' intent. His command can only be realized in a believer through the work of the Holy Spirit. Our natural, carnal, selfish spirit will always serve self. And according to scripture, no one can fulfill God's commands. We may come close, but our motives will betray us time and again.

Jesus also indicated that the testimony of the Christian is not moral purity. Evangelical churches in particular actually drive people away from God by their *pharisee-like*, *self-righteous* superior attitudes and hypocrisy. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, "A new command, I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By *this* will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."

Do Good, Get Good! — Do Bad, Get Bad! { 89 }

In the Old Testament, God made it clear to Israel, and all the world by extension, that, "If you do good, you will get the blessing of God. If you do bad, you will get the curse of God." But in the New Testament we hear about the unconditional love of God, revealed in Jesus, whose

Setting the Record Straight

grace saves us from the ultimate bad end, even though we truly deserve that bad end. And as Paul says to the Colossians, "As you therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." What this clearly means is that since we receive Jesus by grace through faith, **we are to live now, as Christians, by grace through faith.**

Our Own Reflection

The Old Testament provides a mirror of the selfishness of every man. The New Testament provides a comforter, the Holy Spirit, to enable us to Love Like Jesus Loves. Notice it is the Holy Spirit with which our spirit is joined (meshed) that can fulfill Jesus' command.



Old and New Have Value { 90 }

The entire Word of God, the Holy Bible, is about the love of God dispensed in creation and specifically for and to mankind. This love was rejected by mankind as he walked away from God in rebellion. This rejection of God was recorded for millennia in the atrocities of men against each other. So great is the love of God, that He provided a substitute to take the penalty of all those evil acts of man against man. Everything that was necessary to reestablish the broken relationship with God was contained in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *the substitute*. All that was, and still is, required of man in order to return to God is this. 1 - admission of personal guilt; 2 - recognition of Jesus innocence; 3 - agreeing to let Jesus make restitution for your evil. Let Jesus serve your sentence of death to satisfy the justice of God and walk away a free man. It is God Who restores the love of God to the human heart. Scripture declares, "The Law is perfect and will never be done away." The Law reflects to us our guilt of our evil ways and deeds. But once redeemed from death row we have a new life to live. And the story line ends with Jesus "new" command. Jesus said, "Love one another as deeply and unconditionally as I have loved you!"

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

The New Norm { 91 }

We now live by the New Testament (rules), and the Gospel of Jesus, which is the only means of salvation. We must therefore, stop striving to obey the 10 Commandments, since it is impossible anyway. We must let (*release control to*) the Holy Spirit within us love every person we meet as God loves them. In this way, we will actually fulfill the original Laws of God brought down the mountain by Moses as well as Jesus' only command. Instead of the *old way, we get what we deserve*, we live the *new way, we get what we do not deserve* (grace). Return the love of God. Let Jesus suffer your just penalty because *He loves you*. Pass on the great news that the love of God is truly **unconditional!** In other words, "*Live loved!*"

Christ Alone { 92 }

Those who are abandoned to intimacy with God have only one source of riches. All of those riches are in Christ for them. Jesus Christ is more than enough. It is not, Christ plus something else. Jesus Christ is their life, all of it. The love of Jesus is completely satisfying. He is sufficient in every task. Those who seek the deeper Christian life and those who want the riches that are in Christ Jesus the Lord, seek no place, no wealth and no things, only Christ.

Fashionable Religion { 93 }

Many people use their religion to promote their own wealth, fame or influence. In a very real sense they are *using God's name in vain!* They're using religion as a means to achieve selfish ends. They take advantage of current trends, riding the wave of popular nuances. They cash in on them. Many Christians are guilty of this very thing. But the intimate Christian, speaks proudly about his lover, Jesus Christ, even if he is rejected for it!

The desire to have a following, to be famous, to have a good reputation is not a consideration at all for those who are abandoned to intimacy with God. Those who walk and live in intimacy with God have no desire for these things and are willing to lose their precious reputations, if they must, in order to love God and others as Jesus did!

God Seekers { 94 }

Setting the Record Straight

Satisfying the natural desires for prosperity, popularity, and power are the very things which prevent any Christian from abandoning themselves to intimacy with God. Intimate believers want to know God and to be where Jesus is. That is all. Paul said, "I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." Philippians 3:8. The seekers after God are deeply dissatisfied with mere form. They want content, that is, real intimacy with God Himself.

Far Superior to Religious Traditions { 95 }

It matters not what religion or denomination you identify with. God has people everywhere, who hate mere form. Even though they may participate in it, there is something within them that is much larger and demands much more than all of that. Brother Lawrence, born Nicholas Herman, written about in *The Practice of the Presence of God*, was in a monastery. He said, "I learned to pray to God all by myself. I just talked to God all the time. Everything I was doing, washing dishes, traveling, whatever I was doing, I was talking to my heavenly Father. I developed such a sense of God's presence around about me that I never lost it for 40 years.

I did not need their forms. They told me to set times to pray. And I did it. I was obedient. I prayed at set times, but it did not mean a thing any more than it did at any other time. I had learned the inner secret of fellowship with God, myself. I'd already found God. And I was in communion with God all the time." Brother Lawrence did what he was told and smiled. But he said it did not mean anything.

Tozer addresses inadequate progress of the average Christian.

Little Progress { 96 }

The average Christian today does not make much spiritual progress at all. He is converted, joins the church, and five years later, he's right back where he started. Ten years later, he's still where he was or he has even slipped back a little. That is not satisfactory to those who seek and thirst and hunger after God. This is the testimony of a seeker after God.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

He's not going to let somebody else's slow snail's progress keep him back.

Not Very Impressed

What have we come to, that the people of God are not shocked enough by Calvary, a man dying on a cross, on a hill outside of Jerusalem? And not just a man, but the God-man, dying for the sins of the world? Why does this leave them dull and unmoved? Some even read with great eagerness the lives of Holy men in the devotional books from centuries past. But where is the doing?

One and Done { 97 }

Are you satisfied with the once-on-Sunday sort of religion? God has given you the wind, the rain, and a body to contain your wonderful soul. He has given you an amazing mind and many fine abilities. He sustains you, keeps your heart beating and waits to receive you into heaven. But do you toss Him a crumb so God gets what is left behind? Does God get only the tattered bits of your time, yet you say you are a follower of the Lamb? Do not fool yourself. You are not, if you don't go deeper into intimacy with God.

Go Ahead — Revolt

Are you weary of religion and do you long after God? I long after God. The only gratifying thing I have apart from my communion with God is the knowledge that I'm not alone in my journey. God has his people everywhere who are in revolt against pretense, textualism, externalism and tradition. They want to seek God for Himself, as He is in the scriptures, as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

God has his people, but there aren't many of them.

Are you one?

Why do it right,
when you can do it
fast?

Breaking Old Habits

Chapter 6: Breaking Old Habits { Slow and easy! }

The Christian Habit { 98 }

The largest percentage of Christians in the first generation of believers were abandoned to intimacy with God. If this were not so, they would not have continued to profess their faith in Jesus knowing that it would likely cost them their lives. The greatest problem the church faces now is the habitual Christian, just *doing the same things over and over and hoping for a different result*. Albert Einstein called this *insanity*. The great challenge is how do we get such Christians interested in becoming more than the average run of the mill believers we see everywhere? Most Christians have relaxed into a religious routine and are satisfied to remain in their comfort zone.

Falling in Love { 99 }

The Apostle Paul said, "You did run well at first. Who hindered you?" Galatians 5:7. The absolute truth of the matter is that we have each stunted our own growth. We have extinguished the flames of our first love. That love drew us to God and overwhelmed us when we felt the love of Jesus and responded to His offer of intimate relationship with Him. Let us determine to find that first love, which came to us at re-birth. Purpose to pursue your first love, that honeymoon-like passion that overwhelmed you when you accepted Jesus by faith. If you have just recently been born again of the Spirit of God in Christ, purpose to remain on honeymoon with Him for the rest of your life.

Abandoned to Intimacy { 100 }

There are two important aspects of the life abandoned to intimacy with God. These two things will go a long way in helping you break out of your lethargy.

First living abandoned to intimacy with God involves a *shift in our affections* away from self indulgent, self-promoting or self worshipping things. Even to put the love of your spouse before the love of God is a choice of earthly motive. The concern for your own reputation is a selfish motive. Someone once said, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Well, so is the road to heaven. It is the same road.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

What determines your destination is the direction in which you are raveling. Actually, the road to hell, (your direction away from God) is the gold of your own reputation. "Jesus made Himself of no reputation..." If you care more about your reputation among men than your reputation with God, be advised that your direction is determined by such *popularity* gold. Jesus said, "He that loves his family more than me is not worthy of me" Matthew 10:37. Are you willing to do whatever God asks of you even if it means that your family will be upset with you?

The *second* aspect of the life abandoned to intimacy with God requires *abandoning yourself to Him as in a marriage* and letting Him be your groom. Now to you men I say quite bluntly, "That you are the *bride* of Christ." You are not His groom. Unless and until you can learn how to be surrendered to Jesus as a bride, you will not find intimacy with Him. As long as you treat Him as though you are the groom, there will be constant conflict between your spirit and His Spirit. Don't think of it in terms of gender. Think of it in terms of roles and responsibilities. Let Him take the lead. And when there is disagreement between you and Him, always let Him make the final decision!

Until you love Him with passionate desire, enough to trust Him with your very life, and the lives of your entire family, you will *not* surrender your will to His and let Him manage all the events of your life. This is the message that has come down to us since Jesus finished His work on earth. There is no formula for intimacy, just as there is no formula for *falling in love*.

No Exposure or No Interest { 101 }

It is likely that your lack of exposure to, or lack of interest in, the passion of many believers through the centuries, explains why your Christian experience is far less gripping and satisfying than theirs. Their passions were expressed clearly in hymns, books, teachings and personal expression. We keep a significant distance between ourselves and God. This may be caused by our spiritual confusion or purposeful intention to be in control. However, the truth still remains that the distance we maintain is a choice we have made. You must repent

Breaking Old Habits

(change your mind about who is in charge of your life, yourself or God). To make no choice at all in the matter will insure that you will never find intimacy with God in this life.

Agree to Disagree Amicably { 102 }

Many Christian books, devotionals and Bible commentaries are laced with misrepresentations and misperceptions of God. And the contradictions and confusions taught by religious leaders everywhere account for much of the crowd's discouragement in their personal pursuit of the love of God. These misrepresentations of God and His ways are caused by relative truth, which was either passed to us by our relatives or which we logically deduced. Faith is illogical and always will be. Faith is emotional. Faith and fact are not the same. Fact is certain. Faith is hoped. Be open to letting God change what you believe. Be in agreement with God, even if it is in disagreement with every other person you know.

Live Loved and Live Loving { 103 }

Essentially we must do an "about face" with respect to our deepest affections. These two things are necessary for a Christian who wants to abandon himself to an intimate love affair with God. In other words, one must *forsake the love of self* and *embrace the love of God*. This love exchange will parlay into loving others as much as one loves self! It is entirely possible to be religious, go to weekly worship gatherings and yet not to have forsaken the world (self) at all. Many who are very religious will *not* spend eternity with God. The proof is that you will find professed Christians wherever you will find non-Christians.

On the other hand, because of the enormous grace of God, even some violent criminals, who have cried out in desperation, "God be merciful to me, a violent sinner," may be far more intimate with God than most Christians! It is not about the state in which we were at the time of our new birth. It is only about a choice to love God more than any other object in the universe day after day. It is being aware of His presence and letting Him be in control of your life. The irrefutable evidence of intimacy is the motive to do everything to please one's lover.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Motives { 104 }

There seems to be very little distinction between Christians and non-Christians in general. Nearly all religions focus on morality. Some do not bend to the changes in culture, such as Islam. But many change the definition of morality to coincide with the cultural norms. Christians should be the most loving of all people and also the most merciful and forgiving. But the moral standards of the church should remain true to the scriptures.

Sin Is Not

Unfortunately, many Christians today will do almost anything that anybody else will do. Now I am not saying that we can rely on what the church has held as a moral standard historically. Many things formerly labeled as sin were not sin according to the Bible. The best way to determine what expression (word or deed) is sin and what is not, is to assess its affect on relationship. Historically there was often too much focus on behavior and too little on relationship. God's Ten Commandments are all about relationship. The first 4 are about breaking relationship with God. The last six are about breaking relationship with man. I think it is save to say that sin **is anything that** denigrates or destroys relationship. Sin is not expression. Sin is motive. One can sin in motive, while appearing to be righteous in their expression

Forgive Without Apology { 105 }

As Christians, we must forgive like Jesus did. This is *not* to forgive someone because you are guilty of the same things, and therefore you have no right to judge. Forgiveness never requires an apology. Christ spoke forgiveness of His murderers from the cross. But to forgive never means to condone the evil done. This one thought might help you.

Condone or Condemn

"Silence gives consent" is a phrase from hell. It is absolutely not true. Further, God has not given any of us, Christians or otherwise, the authority to condone anything. Nor has He given any man the authority to condemn. Tread lightly if you think you can judge anyone. *Bear in*

Breaking Old Habits

mind that discernment and judgment may appear to be the same thing. But they absolutely are not.

Wrong never becomes right based on culture. But demonstrating love toward the unlovable, even criminals, *is* the way of the Cross. The only cure for criminality is the saving faith in the one who offered salvation to all mankind. Unconditional love is the only thing that compels a man to surrender his life to Christ. Remember this as well. Forgiveness does *not* mean that there will be no consequences for the crimes. Forgiveness in God's hall of justice, is that someone will suffer the consequences of every crime. It will be either yourself or Jesus Christ. It is your choice. An *I can do it myself* attitude here is an *irretrievably poor choice*.

Strange but Wonderful { 106 }

Christians who are abandoned to intimacy with God will be looked on as being *strange* and out of touch with reality. To be sure, we are *out of touch* with their reality. Ours has changed to that of another kingdom. We are in this world with a very specific commission and a very specific command. Neither of these are *normal* but both of them are absolute. The objective of the church, or at least *Christ-Ins* is to *be the Presence of the love of Jesus* in His stead. He deposited the Holy Spirit within each of us to connect us to God at all times. That is a really terrific kind of *strange!*

Changed Desires { 107 }

When we talk about being “in the world but not of it,” we are talking about desires of the heart. When we fall in love, our desires change radically. Our desires now include and envelope the one we love. God's desires become our desires when He becomes the object of our affection. When our spirit becomes joined to God's Holy Spirit, our desires follow. The natural man cannot help himself. He is selfish, myopic, somewhat narcissistic, and consumed by pride. It is when one's pride is wounded that all sorts of bad things happen. It spawns crimes. It causes relationships to break. It causes people to do almost insane things.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Let Go of Your Pride { 108 }

The way of Jesus was, and still is, humility which is quite repulsive to the natural spirit. And you will never become truly intimate with God so long as you have not surrendered your reputation (pride) to God. So, yes, that is a very strange thing, likely even repulsive, to the natural man. It was for us as well. Repentance is a humbling through which we surrender our sovereignty (free will) to God. But the humbling cannot stop there. The deeper the humility the greater God's grace. The Bible says, "God resists the proud and but gives grace to the humble."

Present but Not Present { 109 }

God means what He said, "Love not the world," specifically the things that are in the natural world ("self indulgence" "seeking applause" and "desiring to be worshipped or to be in control of others"). 1 John 2:15-16 puts it this way "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh ("give me!"), the lust of the eyes ("see me!") and the pride of life ("worship me") is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Clearly the natural man and the spiritual man are radically different. You need to work and live and drink and sleep and bathe and grow and procreate and bring your children up in the world God made. That is not the world to which I am referring. The world we are to forsake is the one that organizes and fills itself with unbelief. The world that is possessed with pleasure, prosperity, popularity and power builds itself upon doubts, worry, anxiety and fear.

A father may be in the room with his children while his mind is wandered far from them. He may be thinking about appointments, emails, phone calls and other business things. So even though he may be physically in his children's presence, his presence is a long way off. In like manner, when we fall in love with God, our minds are constantly wandering to His Presence, as opposed to concentrating on our physi-

Breaking Old Habits

cal situations. When our thoughts and affections are with God, we are in the right state of mind.

Forsake Self-righteousness { 110 }

Jesus was in the world, but not of the world. He was here, but His Heart was somewhere else. There is no contradiction here in what I'm saying. There's a distinction between the part of the world that is divinely given where Christians plant, reap, sew, work and live in the world by following God's commandments. God meant it to be so. And that is not worldliness. Worldliness is the pride of life and the desire for what the eye sees and the longing of the ambitious soul for position. So get over your bad self! When you cease every effort to stop doing evil things and devote all of your attentions and affections toward God, you will find that the evil subsides. God's Holy Spirit can then express Himself prolifically, because you stop interrupting His activities with your *self-righteous* efforts. So, stop trying and start trusting! You can certainly trust the Spirit of God within you.

Selfish to Selfless { 111 }

These two acts can be done simultaneously. Turn *from* the world of selfish desire. Turn *to* desire for Christ. All the natural things like eating, drinking, buying, selling, marrying, all the things that God created to be done that are not of the spiritual world but of the natural world, will become spiritual. When intimacy with God is achieved, everything takes on spiritual meaning. Everything and every experience in your life becomes a part of your spiritual pursuit of God. All things are holy that create or nurture right relationships. So the common things, things that we call secular will no longer be secular to us. The mundane things will be mundane no more. The most common thing can be done for the glory of God, when we have turned from the world and the world's ways. Simply gaze with adoration at the face of the Son of God.

Will you turn from the world and turn fully to Christ?

Will you abandon yourself to intimacy with God?

Let's Fall in Love — with God

Chapter 7: The Great Obstacle to Intimacy { Slow, now ! }

Who Do You Trust { 112 }

"Trust in the Lord with all thine, heart and lean, not unto thine own understanding in all thy ways, acknowledge Him. And He shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 Notice that this verse indicates that we trust God with our entire being, while we refuse to even lean in the direction of our own wisdom.

Tozer writes: The Apostle Paul was a man who knew what he believed and where he stood. He knew God and was confident with a great cosmic confidence. Yet that same man was the most distrustful of himself. As great as Paul was, he did not trust himself. Before man Paul was as bold as a lion. But before God, Paul could not say too much against himself. When he was in front of God, Paul actually had no confidence in himself at all. His confidence in God was in reverse proportion to his confidence in himself. The amount of trust Paul had in himself, was as little, as the trust he had in God, was great.

What do I mean by self-trust? Simply it is the respectability and self-assurance that comes through education. It is what you learn about yourself and what your friends tell you about yourself and all the best that you may give yourself. *Self-trust* is the last great obstacle to living abandoned to intimacy with God.

On the one hand we want to be intimate with God, but on the other we feel unworthy of any such relationship. We never quite get there because we seem to be continually fighting against our egoistic longings. The one who conquers his own ego, trusting not in his own strength, but in God's power, triumphs, and will be the happiest he has ever been on earth.

Resisting God { 113 }

Acting against God is the cause of all that is bad. All good comes from God whose goodness is limitless. Self-distrust is so necessary in this quest, that without it, you will be unable to achieve the intimacy

The Great Obstacle to Intimacy

desired. This will leave you the victim of the very least of your passions. Our corrupt, selfish nature too easily inclines us to a false estimate of ourselves. It continuously leads us back to dependence upon our own strength. God desires to see in us, a frank and true recognition of this most certain truth. All the virtue and grace, which is within us, is derived from God alone. Nothing good can be initiated by us. Not even a single thought, which would be acceptable to Him, comes from us.

The Sin of Self-Control { 114 }

How on earth can self-control be considered sin?, you ask. After all we teach this as a virtue. We raise our children to become responsible adults. “You need to control yourself.” Yet in so teaching, we often leave out an essential aspect of wholesome relationship which requires us to release control to others, so as to show them respect or give them honor. Unfortunately, we often take self-control to the extreme. Tozer writes, “Self (personal sovereignty) judges God and man. It holds God to be less than He is and man to be more than he is.” No matter how much we study and learn about God, we somehow still believe that God is less than He is and we are more than we are. The sin of self control is when we fail to release control to God when we think that we can handle the situation we face better than God could.

What God desires of Christians is that they would simply reflect His glory on earth. So what stands to be gained by abandoning to intimacy with God, is the radiance of God beaming from our lives into the darkness of this world. Whatever good is expressed by us, comes from God Himself. To become this reflection we must completely and radically become distrusting of self.

Dealing with self-trust { 115 }

The very antithesis of trusting God is trusting self. Obviously God is much bigger and smarter and capable than I am. So it seems that my insistence on being in charge, as opposed to letting Him be in charge must border on insanity. Taking this into account, it would make the most sense to expose every event where I refuse to follow God’s lead. Since trusting myself over trusting God is the exact opposite of living abandoned to intimacy with God, He is very intentional about reveal-

Let's Fall in Love — with God

ing it to me. God is the one who will expose my self-trust. Let's consider four ways He does this.

[1] Experience An Intimate Believer { 116 }

I believe that one way to deal with self-trust is to actually *experience another person who has found intimacy with God*. Brother Lawrence was one such person whose story is contained in “The Practice of the Presence of God.” He wrote that “... for 40 years, He was never once out of the conscious Presence of God. When I took the Cross and decided to obey Jesus and walk this Holy way, I gathered that I would have to suffer a lot.” Then he said something rather strange, “For some reason, God never found me worthy of much suffering. He just let me continue to trust him. And I put all my self-trust away and I've been trusting in God, completely.” Brother Lawrence was living abandoned to intimacy with God.

[2] Realizing Sources of Relative Truth Were Self-Trusted { 117 }

In my personal experience I did as everyone does. I found my truth by believing what sources I trusted to teach me about God. My relatives were my primary source. My church leaders were likely the secondary source. And, of course, the Bible (that is my particular interpretation thereof) was a close third. *Realizing that my sources of truth were 'self-trusted'* further exposed my “self-trust.” I was raised in a God fearing home. I attended a church pastored by a Bible College professor in Detroit, Michigan. And I was intent to please my family by committing my life to the church. I lived what looked like a very righteous life.

A Personal Encounter { 118 }

However as an early teenager, I began to notice that I did not like to go to church. I did not want my parents or pastors to know this. I was, after all, the one who quoted large passages of scripture from memory and led in worship on Sundays. I knew something was missing from my relationship with God. Why did I not like church? I discovered that I did not like church, because I was in love with my reputation there, but not with the God who met me there each week. Well, God was about to blow me away.

The Great Obstacle to Intimacy

I Lied

In the fall that year, our church held a revival meeting that lasted four days. I don't know why I attended, but I did enjoy the messages and music. Being rather gregarious, I approached the Speaker and Musician after the last meeting to thank them for coming. My pastor, of our very large church, put his arm around me and asked me in front of the entire church and these two men of God, "And you are going to be a pastor, too, aren't you?" Being uncomfortable with this question, I squirmed my way out of this jam, with these words, "If that is what God wants, Pastor, yes, that's what I will do."

God Came In

Later that night, home alone in my bedroom, I had a unique visitation. I did not hear an audible voice, but in my thoughts God spoke very clearly to me. He asked, "Did you tell your pastor that you would be a pastor also?" I blurted out, "Yes, I did." Then God's Spirit challenged me, "Did you mean that?" It quickly slipped through my lips, "Absolutely not!" "Oops," I thought to myself, "I hope God does not strike me for that."

True Repentance — I Changed My Mind

Much to my surprise, God went silent as I pondered the impact of this dialog. Within a few moments I realized that if the God of the universe cared enough about me, to have this conversation with me, He must have a plan. Next I surprised myself with these words to God, "I did not mean it when I told the pastor that I would be a pastor if You called me to it. But, I am telling You now, that I will do anything You ask, even if it is to become a pastor".

New Direction

Up to that point, I had expectations of becoming an engineer or scientist. But once I uttered those words of commitment to God, my heart flipped as it has only otherwise flipped when I fell in love with an earthly lover. And from that day on, my love for God, compelled me into His service week



Let's Fall in Love — with God

after week for the rest of my days.

New Passion { 119 }

Being *born again* is like falling in love. And being in love changes everything. Being passionately in love, causes one to do things more for the love of others than for the love of self. Since having been *born again* at fourteen, I committed my life to God. At the age of seventeen, I was called by God to the ministry. I followed God to Bible College and subsequent ordination to a pulpit ministry. From that point on, my life was in the orbit of intense service for God. However, I did not realize how *self-trusting* I would become. I also did not realize at that time that *intensity* and *intimacy* are radically different.

Stumbling Blocks { 120 }

Unfortunately, my extensive training in theology and commitment to be obedient to God and His Scriptures, produced in me an *intensity* for God that, once I left the ministry vocationally, compelled me to be one of the most intentional and committed layman in every church I attended. I taught, preached, participated in choirs, orchestras, men's singing groups, traveling musical groups, led in a Boy Scout Troop, drove buses, led handbell choirs and nearly anything else that was presented to me. For all of this history of 40 years, I believed that the great commission was about *converting people to Christianity*. I thought I was a really successful business man, blessed by God with prosperity, popularity and power. All of this proved to be a stumbling block to what God truly wanted to do with and in me.

Transformation Not Information { 121 }

One morning in church, while sitting in my pew, the fourth one from the front, I was staring at the front wall. All of a sudden I was overwhelmed by a sense of failure as a Christian. I had been born again for 40 years, intentional about evangelism, but could not remember the name of a single person that I had personally brought to saving faith in Jesus! I told God "This *fortress* mentality was not working. I am leaving this *fortress* where the *choir* is preaching to the *choir*. Very few are finding Jesus here. I am leaving the church, but I am taking Jesus with me as I am not going to give up my salvation." He told me to

The Great Obstacle to Intimacy

stay in church and He would help me find what I wanted. I did not know what that meant at the time, but I intended to find out.

New Places, New Sources { 122 }

God sent me to several new places and sources. These would inform my soul with new understandings of what I needed to know and to do in order to find true satisfaction in my faith. Several months after this cry for help, God introduced me to an individual whose very presence revealed to me what I was truly seeking. After a women's conference all of the women went through a reception line to meet their speaker. My wife invited me to come along and meet the speaker. So when I stepped up to meet the speaker I thanked her for her teaching and how much it had meant to my wife over the past few years. Then I hugged her. As we embraced these words came out of my mouth, "I feel like I am hugging Jesus here!" I did not say those words to her. But in that moment, I knew where I was going and what I wanted from God.

I Want It! I Want It! I Want it! { 123 }

As I drove home from that conference, I said to God, "I want what that woman has. I wanted to someday be so tender and intimate with Jesus, that someone might be in my arms and feel like they were the arms of Jesus!" This began a quest of 2 years to find out how to become intimate with God. Within 2 months God sent me a mentor. He was a man from Jordan, whose Middle Eastern mindset presented a completely different understanding of God. God told me to submit completely to his authority. I did so. And about 18 months later I was well into a journey of absolute abandon to intimacy with God.

Metamorphosis of Intimacy

This book is a summation of what I learned and how God transformed my experience of Him. My intensity and ecstasies with God turned into a deeply passionate intimacy. I exchanged all relative truth for absolute

A **caterpillar** has the DNA of a **butterfly**, but does not look like one until its **metamorphosis** through darkness and great struggle.

Let's Fall in Love — with God

truth. And my intensities are now laced with the love of God rather than the love of self. My journey introduced me to several new sources of spiritual revelation and inspiration. I began to seek out men and women who were ahead of me in this journey. And my love for God has been on the rise for over fifteen years now. The poem of Madame Guyon, “My Lord, How Full of Sweet Content,” now resonates with my heart.

Not A Prophet, but A True Mystic { 124 }

Brother Lawrence discovered this in the 17th century. He lived moment by moment believing that Christ was in him, around him and near him. He was praying all the time. And his prayers were unlike all others. He never prayed for prosperity or healing or any other selfish things. He simply conversed with God about whatever he was doing. He trusted God completely to help him with whatever tasks he was assigned, even washing pots and pans in the kitchen. In the spirit of Brother Lawrence, I have exchanged my pursuit of God from “carpe diem,” wherein I tried to “seize the day,” to “carpe momentum,” wherein I “seize the moments,” every one of them in my day, and bring God into each of them. I yield control to God in every decision and action. It was this avid pursuit of God and an equally avid determination to lose all interest in my natural selfish pursuits (prosperity, popularity and power) that affected transformation in my soul. I now experience a constant peace and contentment even in my most trying circumstances and experiences of life.

Doctrinal Obstacles { 125 }

Doctrine can be a hindrance to intimacy with God. We can believe the whole counsel of God and our life may still be plagued with pride, to such an extent that it hides the face of God. It is such *pride* that prevents us from experiencing *intimacy* with God. This cannot be corrected by a lecture on correct doctrine. Rather we need the Holy Spirit to reveal someone who actually lives in this intimacy. And we need to ask Him to do whatever it takes to reveal the true condition of our soul. We need Him to help us give up all of our relative truth which we got from our relatives and trusted sources of our childhood and embrace the absolute truth of God on each and every issue of the life of faith.

The Great Obstacle to Intimacy

Goodness of Adversity — Good, Bad or Useful { 126 }

[3] **Physical calamities we encounter and hardships we endure expose our self-trust.** God teaches us the truth about ourselves through the challenges of difficult people and difficult circumstances. Many people have a hard time believing that God would actually bring physical harm to our bodies. Yet the scriptures bear out the fact that physical pain is one of God's most effective means of dealing with an undisciplined self. He uses them to create a teaching moment in our lives. Instead of asking, "Why me, Lord?" or asking "Please take it away.?" We should ask, "What does this mean, Lord?" And "What do you want me to do?"

God Uses Suffering { 127 }

God makes no mistakes in our lives. He is very intentional toward every child He has. His intention is always to draw us into intimate relationship with Himself. Job said, "Yet though God slay me, I will worship Him." If my life was to become a continuous stream of adversity, but through it God was bringing others into intimacy with Himself, I would be fine with that. Actually that has become my greatest desire, not the suffering part, but knowing God's heart and caring more about others finding their way to God than my personal comfort or pleasure or even my reputation.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of physical suffering imposed by God. But probably Job stands out above all the rest. A casual reading of Job's story may not get to the real message of God in it. Certainly he was a good man and the scriptures bear this out. One problem, that God addressed near the end of the story, was that Job was a good man and he knew it. So there was a dialog about God's majesty and supreme sovereignty. But the primary message God wanted to convey to the world is that the glory of God should exceed all other desires. God wanted to show Satan that Job would love and serve Him even if God removed all of the natural blessings from him. God also wanted us to see that God does what He does to bring glory to Himself. That includes what we call bad as well as what we call good.

Let's Fall in Love — with God

Incurable Maladies { 128 }

Dealing with our pride and self trust is essential to being in relationship with any other being and especially God. The suffering God sends will sometimes not be curable by anything. Our suffering can be either physical or emotional. The only cure for such an ailment is accepting it with joy, renouncing all complaining and telling God that we want His glory, not our healing. It is only when we endure, undeserved hardship, with a positive attitude, that God gets glory! Even our personal safety and security can be threatened and cause us consternation and concern.

Travel Mercies or Opportunities { 129 }

I stopped asking God to give me safety in travels. One day I was fully occupied in ministry for God. Near the end of the day, I found myself sailing off the highway at seventy miles an hour. While the car was left in total ruin, I survived the crash with only a few scratches. I reflected quickly on at least seven decisions that day. Any of them made differently would have prevented that accident. As I was transported to the hospital for scans and tests to be sure that I was medically sound, I cracked jokes and shared the love and protection of God with the EMTs. Since that time I have also been able to use the pictures of the wreck to get the attention of students in my public school classrooms. It initiates conversations about the fragility of life, the importance of healthy relationships and pursuing the object of our faith with the intent to make Him our most significant other.



Seized Opportunities { 130 }

I would not have traded that accident for my safety on the highway that day. In reality I am completely safe always, without the selfish

The Great Obstacle to Intimacy

prayer. When God is finished with me, He will take me home. I cannot stop Him. Nor can I force myself into His eternity. I cannot step into eternity and into His Presence until His appointed time for me. Even suicide cannot defy God's timing. Look at the statistics that over 90% of all attempts fail.

Are You A Wannabe ? { 131 }

Do you **wannabe** a *ho hum* Christian? Do you **wannabe** *respected, admired and emulated* by other believers? Do you **wannabe** *large and in charge* in your particular Christian Community? Do you **wannabe** a *prosperous, successful* Christian? Go ahead. I heard the saying many times growing up, "There is none so dumb as them that **wannabe**!" It was used in the sense that if you want to play dumb, you might get away with something. However, I have observed in my life that the very ones who **wannabe** somebody special, are the ones who are the dumbest when it comes to spiritual matters. For example, those who **wannabe** recognized and applauded as great prayer warriors, may speak the most intense and eloquent prayers, but God refuses to listen to the *proud* prayer of anyone.

If you only knew what your are missing. When you get to heaven you will know. Then you will wish that you had given everything you had, including your dearest significant others, in order to be intimate with God Himself. All you have to do is to truly desire to love God. If you do, start the journey to living abandoned to intimacy with God with this simple prayer. "Lord I want all of You and will let You take any thing or person from me in order to have You. I can't do this myself, but You can. So please take me as far down as necessary to empty me of my selfishness and fill me with the fullness of Your love."

[4] Extreme Trials and Temptations { 132 }

Another means which God uses to develop distrust of ourselves is *extreme trials and temptations*. Many have concluded that once a person is born again, that's all there is. We should now have trouble-free lives. Others believe that being filled with the Holy Spirit is the apex of the Christian experience. But if our Master, Jesus faced His greatest temptation after He was filled with the Spirit, why would it be any different for us?

Let's Fall in Love — with God

Just Make It Go Away

Many Christians run from or try to pray away trials and troubles. When they succumb to temptation they try to hide from God until their behavior improves. But we miss the most important point of temptation. It is *not* to make us fall into condemnation. All temptation is the very opportunity to learn how weak we are and to develop strength and endurance in God. How we deal with struggles, are the mirrors of reflection of our progress toward living abandoned to intimacy with God. Every time we succumb to temptation it is because we are still trusting ourselves. We have not yet learned to trust God with everything.

Stop Groveling { 133 }

Many believe that repentance is to be an extended period of self-condemnation after a moral failure. We need to start with repentance. But we need not repent again. Since repentance is a change of mind about who pays for our sins, it is like crucifying Jesus again, when we grovel in condemnation. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1 Intimacy cannot occur until we just turn everything over to God. That is the final repentance in abandoning to intimacy with God! It is the repentance from self-trust. Jesus paid it all! Stop trying to help Him!

Turn It Over { 134 }

If you did something last week, you're ashamed of, feel conviction and condemnation about it, then immediately turn it over to the Lord. Tell him about it. What is the purpose of these severe trials and temptations that sometimes cause you to fall? They are not to show you that you're not a true Christian or that you are a lousy one. These are to show you that your heart hurts for your lover whom you have offended and you are becoming more intimate with God. The Lord is trying to teach you that last lesson so that you rid yourself of self-trust. The closer you are to God, the more tender your conscience is before the Lord, and the more severe your trial and temptation may seem.

The Great Obstacle to Intimacy

God Will Undermine Your Self-Trust { 135 }

God purposes things to happen to you until you recognize and admit what you do not know. Neither your pastors, nor your family, nor your friends will be able to help you. God loves us too much to let anyone but Him reveal the truth about yourselves. He is teaching us to trust Him, not people.

Trusting God in the Closet

You claim to love God and spend time with Him in prayer. But your tendency is to trust yourself with everything outside of your prayer closet. You rarely see the truth of this. And you certainly would not want to ask another brother to reflect to you how he sees you. You would rather hear nothing but affirming words, even if they are not true. Well, unfortunately for you, it is only “the truth about *you* that will set *you* free.”

Trust and Endurance Training { 136 }

God is not in the business of judging us. When He allows or purposes temptation in our lives, it is intended specifically for teaching us endurance and trust. God only wants his children to grow and develop into full fledged Christians. Sometimes in order to accomplish this, God must send us through severe and harsh trials and temptations. But the destination is absolute abandon to intimacy with God. He is enabling us to give our self-trust over to trust in Him such that He gets full control, Lordship, of our lives.

Look Diligently for the Footprints { 137 }



I reflect upon the first and likely the most helpful thing God uses in dealing with our self-trust. It is this one simple thought. *Humble yourself under the authority of one who has already taken that journey or is a long way into it.* Look around for the footprints of those who have abandoned to intimacy, trusting God completely. There are some where you are right now. Only your pride will keep

Let's Fall in Love — with God

you from seeing them. Only your pride will prevent you from following them. Only your pride will keep you from abandoning yourself to intimacy with God.

Humility Is A Must { 138 }

Humble yourself enough to follow the footprints of the man or woman who is intimate with God. You will find all of these footprints going in the same direction. You will also find that they are going in the opposite direction from the average Christian. You will find them to be going against nearly every Christian you currently know. But, you will find that they follow the footprints of Jesus. These are the ones who will treat the adulteress, Samaritan woman, tax collectors, drunkards, irresponsible, socially unacceptable ones with the same compassion, mercy and love as did Jesus Himself.

Rejection of the Church

You will also discover that they get much push back from the church, like Jesus did with the Pharisees, the leaders of God's own religion! They're all going in the same direction. Look carefully, and you'll see some of them backtracking a little occasionally. But you will also see that they find their way at last and go straight back into the place of intimacy with Jesus. Intimacy never requires any particular behaviors. However, *intimacy* will nearly always affect behaviors in a positive way. To be sure, *unconditional love*, is the most compelling word of the Gospel and its most effective means to bring people to salvation.

The Final Answer: Trust God { 139 }

We cannot interpret Philippians 4:13 such that we think God will make us strong so that we can do all things. God either does it for us in our weakness or we blunder on into it and He has no part in it. Either He leads the dance or we step on His toes. Do not try to do anything for God. "I can let God do anything through me." That is a better translation of that verse. But I must let go of all control and let Him be fully in charge. God loves us enormously and desires to use us for His purposes here on earth. However, we cannot both be in control. True Christian maturity - spiritual *perfection* is trusting God enough to be abandoned to intimacy with God!

The Currency of Exchange

Chapter 8: Currency of the Exchanged Life { Absorb! } { 140 }

"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless. And I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" Philippians 3:7-8. When God calls a man to follow Him, He calls that man to follow Him, regardless of the cost. The challenge is simply, this. What are we willing to pay, sacrifice or surrender in order to increase our intimacy with God?"

Martyrs

The first thing to come to your mind may be the word martyr. Even Jesus might have been considered a martyr for the cause of saving our lives. And the cost for some, many through the ages actually, of intimacy with God, the exchanged life, was their very lives. And for some, becoming a martyr might be appealing as an heroic thing to do for God. Yet, martyrdom takes on new meaning in the context of our current culture. Few these days are called to give up their physical lives. But, any who truly desire to live abandoned to intimacy with God, will suffer death of an entirely different nature.

The Other-Preferring Choice { 141 }

Now some of the martyrs in recorded history also suffered this same death which I am about to describe. However, very few Christians these days in particular have ever considered the full cost of intimacy. We have some notions about the cost. And we have some examples of the cost like the sacrifices necessary to have an intimate marital relationship. But one thing is consistent about intimacy either with another human or with the Divine. This one thing is a change of motives from self-preferring to other-preferring. Our marriage vows usually express this.

Radiant Death { 142 }

The one human relationship which is worth dying for is a deeply, passionately, mutually desiring, marital one. Stephen's death made a great impression upon all who observed the glow on His face as his spirit left his body and joined Jesus at the right hand of God. Few, if any,

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

would deny that they greatly desire to be desired by another. But, to be sure, if any relationship is truly worth dying for, it would be one with honeymoon love.

Selfish Love

Since God has offered the hand of His Son, Jesus, in marriage to each of us, why do we not immediately abandon ourselves to intimacy with God. Why do we insist that our lover, Jesus, must cater to our whims instead of us to His? Marriages in which each person remains selfish are doomed to failure. This is made evident by the high percentage of marriages, even Christian ones, ending in divorce.

Misinformation { 143 }

Can it be, that the deep desire of God is obscured from our view? Have we been misinformed about our marital partner, Jesus? Or have we just never been told that He loves us unconditionally and will never leave us regardless of our infidelity to Him. As the perfect groom, He will do for us what the Prophet Hosea did for his bride, Gomer. If only we could believe this, it would heal the wounds of our souls that cause us to wander in the first place. (see painting on page XXXV)

Certainly Uncertain

Theologically, we know for certain that Christ made full atonement for us. So there is nothing between a Christian and God. Christ's atonement was so perfect and complete that it turns all that is against us into something that is for us. But emotionally and logically we cower and cringe at every moral failure and hide from Him instead of running into His arms of love.

Control Issues { 144 }

We run and hide partly because we do not believe that He can love us in spite of our selfish indulgences, demands for applause and insistence on being in charge. Yet this need to be in charge, when the groom's role is to be in charge, is the very crux of the conflict in our marriage to Him. Control issues are at the heart of every human conflict as well. Unfortunately, we have come to believe, incorrectly I might add, that when adversities and calamities come into our lives,

The Currency of Exchange

that God is angry and punishing us. But nothing, I mean nothing, could be farther from the truth.

Guilt Free — Shame Free { 145 }

Our adversities can be joyous when we see them as God's way to bring us closer to Him. Our calamities can make us stronger and more mature spouses. Jesus was punished enough for every one of our sins, past, present and future. And His Father imputed (applied to us) the very perfection of Jesus' entire life, when He placed our sins on Him. So why do we hide? Jesus may grieve when we wander off into our sordid forays. But His love never falters. It is because of this unfaltering, unyielding, unconditional love He has for us, that we can live guilt-free and shame-free lives as His significant other!

A Good Reputation { 146 }

We like ourselves too much. We are consumed with the opinions of other people. Their opinions of us are more important to us than God's opinion. Yet God's opinion is the only valid one as it is based on the truth and is therefore fact not just opinion. Our concern for reputation drives us away from the greatest lover in the universe. Why is the enormous value God places on us, so hard for us to believe? For, God's sake man, He let His Son take a brutal beating and humiliating crucifixion *for you!* **Driven to Shine**

We spend vast amounts of money and time and expend enormous amounts of energy to bolster our reputation. It is no wonder that so few Christians ever develop intimacy with God, when they place so little value in God's passionate desire for them. How can it be that we would rather impress (or at least try to) other people than live in the honeymoon suite with God? Satan appealed to the human nature in Jesus along this very line. Thank God, Jesus did not succumb to this temptation and walk away from the Cross.

In Whose Eyes { 147 }

I gleaned in invaluable insight into this phenomenon one morning at breakfast with my men. As they were conversing with each other and God, I sat back and pondered before the Lord. He revealed to me, through recalling memories to mind that these men loved me enough

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

to sacrifice greatly for me. At the same time, He flashed memories onto the video screen in my mind of many people who actually hate me. I realized in that moment that to these men, I was a man of great character. To the others in my replay, I had poor character. But I could only be one man. I was the same in either crowd.

Jesus' Tarnished Reputation

Jesus was considered a blasphemer and many other seedy things by the most powerful leaders of the right religion. But His Disciples and followers loved Him and gave their lives to Him. In this moment God revealed how foolish I had been in my pursuit of a good reputation in the eyes of man. From that day forward there was never even the slightest consideration of any opinion of myself other than God's, not even my own.

A Little Glory { 148 }

Another diversion from our quest for intimacy is the desire for at least a little recognition for what we do for others (or at least what we think we have done for others). We are willing to let God have most of it, but we want some too. I asked one of the men one morning as he was leaving the breakfast table, "If you worked hard on a service project for God and I took all the credit, would you be OK with that?" He instantly shot back, "Absolutely not!" My word for him was this, "In that case, what you did was not for God, it was to bolster your own image."

Our Glory or HIS

Are we not all a little bit like this. Don't we all want to be admired and worshipped by other human beings? God desires that you bring others into their own love affair with Him. His purpose for leaving you here on earth after you become a Christian is that you would be a reproductive, fruitful Christian. He wants your love for Him to compel others to desire such a love affair for themselves. God counts fruitfulness, not in terms of behavior, but in terms of relationship!

Self Defense { 149 }

Other things we do that are purely selfish in nature are: defending ourselves (from harm or embarrassment), seeking positions of control or influence, avoiding pain and suffering, heaping pleasures upon ourselves, criticizing others so as to look better ourselves, and so the list

The Currency of Exchange

could go on and on. Because of these things we end up wandering around as though we had not light or compass or map, when we have all of these. So unless and until we make use of the resource God has placed at our disposal, we will never find intimacy with Him.

My Wilderness of Wandering { 150 }

I was personally, like many Christians, very intentional about pursuing God and trying in every way possible to serve and please Him. Yet, it seemed that I never quite met His expectations of me. After 40 years of this, I said to God. “This fortress mentality, where we come to church week after week, actually several times a week, is not working. I’m leaving this church but I’m taking Jesus with me.” In other words, I had seen way too little fruit in my life.

Making Points — Making No Difference

It was not about moral failure, as I was pretty respectable in that area. But if my Christianity was only making a point but no difference, it was useless. Yet, I still wanted to be close to God and grow to be useful to Him. So instead of preaching to the choir, that is hunkering down with a bunch of Christians in a *fortress* called a church, reinforcing what we believed in common and little more, I was asking God to show me why my faith felt so disappointing, almost futile, so much of the time. Fortunately, God replied to my proclamation that I was leaving the community of faith, “I want you to stay in this church, with these people. I will show you what is missing in your life which has brought you to this point of dissatisfaction.”

Exposure to Deep Affection { 151 }

Over the next few years, God introduced me to several new people, in communities that were different from my own. And to top it off, He brought a sorely needed mentor into my life to help me experience a radical transformation within. God also brought me into the orbit of a Bible teacher whose passion for God was so great, that he wept when he read the Word of God while leading Bible Studies. His affection was so deep that you could almost see his heart beating in his chest. His love for God so intense that his shirt was drenched with the perspiration of his desire.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Pride Precludes Intimacy

Once exposed to the deeply passionate love of another man for his God, I knew what was missing in my life and what I wanted to find at any cost. And the cost was immense. I went, in less than a year, from riches to rags as God brought me down to bankruptcy. Then God, performed miracle after miracle to restore more than had been lost. Meanwhile, and only by way of humility, which was to submit completely to the authority of my mentor, I began to see how proud I was in so many ways. I immediately realized that I had never submitted to any authority except God. I also realized that it was my pride, and only my pride, which had kept me from the intimacy with God and the passionate desire that I wanted to have for Him. God revealed that until I could love Him more than my most significant other on earth, I would never become intimate with Him.

No Longer Possessed { 152 }

Once I reached the point where I was no longer obsessed with my own possessions, successes, achievements, relationships with people, concern for my own reputation and was happy to sit in the back row, anonymously, instead of standing behind the lectern, I felt a peace so deep, that it eludes words to express it. As the seat of control of my life was finally and completely given to God, I was able to relax completely in every circumstance. I began to be aware of God's presence in me constantly. I began to actively turn every decision, many every day, over to His management. And I have not experienced anxiety for more than a few moments in any decision before I relax in His control. Since it has lasted for over 15 years now, I believe it will last until my last breath.

Insatiable Hunger for Love { 153 }

Most Christians are satisfied to follow the church crowd with little or no fruit on their branch of the vine. They never experience the richness of intimacy with God. Without a deep insatiable hunger for the love of God, there's nothing within them, prodding them to fall deeply, passionately in love with Him. This is the condition of today's Christian Church from leadership on down. Nothing will ever be more compelling, for us to put someone else's interests ahead of our own

The Currency of Exchange

than a deep, genuine affection for them. And it is only the enormous love for God, through the Holy Spirit within us, that makes other-prefering love possible.

The Currency of Exchange { 154 }

At salvation we make an exchange of all of our evil for all of Christ's good. We exchange our allegiance from ourselves to God. We exchange the control from us to Him. But what does this look like and how does it happen? In short, John the Baptist had it right when he said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease." John even sent his own disciples to Jesus. There are several things which concern us and are the currency of the exchange. We must exchange each of these by way of giving them to God instead of trying to accomplish them ourselves.

Safety. Those who insist on a safe environment are never going to move forward in their journey to intimacy with God. Your safety must be under God's control, not yours.

Convenience. Dying and personal sacrifice are not convenient. Medical malady and adversity are not convenient. Your convenience must be at God's direction not your own.

Pleasure. Pleasure seeking has been common to all human cultures. None of the martyrs in the church found it to be pleasurable. You can either hang on to your pleasure or exchange it for a passion for God. Let me qualify this. God wants us to enjoy pleasure, but never at the expense of the task He gives us to do. God is fine with me spending a week at Disney World with my family, unless He needs me to minister on His behalf somewhere else.

Popularity. Being popular is one of the three most common temptations of man. It leads us to do evil things, if necessary in order to be popular. Until popularity with God satisfies your soul, you cannot be intimate with Him.

Success. Are you willing to exchange your success in business, in sports, in your career in order to achieve a greater passion for God? From the world's perspective, Jesus' ministry was a terrible failure. Take heart. His failure achieved the greatest success in the universe!

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Obsession for Control { 155 }

Control. We all want to be in control of one, or many, others. If you don't believe me, think about what you are doing when you scream at someone for not doing something in a manner you see fit. For example, you may have told someone that they should wear a mask to prevent the spread of a virus. Who's to say that your opinion on the matter is any better than theirs. Even doctors cannot agree on this. Unfortunately we not only want to be in control of our own lives, but also the lives of others. Being in control of our lives and our destinies is unfortunately taught widely, but has no place in the heart of a Christian. Yet, we are by nature control freaks.

It is when we are out of control that we get anxious and fearful. This leads to all sorts of expressions, bodily and verbally, which can be very destructive to those around us. Raging out of control is simply an extreme attempt to regain control. As long as we are in control, God is not. God controls everything in the universe except the one thing he delegated to each man. That is free will, personal sovereignty, self control or other expressions of personal independence from God and all other beings. The exchange of control from self, back to God, is an expression of true love. It is the essence of this journey. Remember this: "God will never ever be a co-pilot for anyone. He demands complete control, or He will sit back and watch you writhe in your self-induced anxiety and misery." — J. H. Alan

Obsessed by Reputation { 156 }

Reputation. Our reputation is often the cause of our disobedience to God, or failure to put His calendar of events as a higher priority than our own. One of Satan's most effective diversions from God's purposes is that we must respect others by way of promptness in our appointments with them. We are told to be on time for appointments and that is part of our Christian testimony. Yet, for 40 plus years, my appointments literally prevented me from being God's instrument of blessing to someone in need standing before me.

Schedule. Nearly every time someone sought my spiritual guidance, I told them that I had an appointment, but that I would get back to them later. But, by the time I contacted them, they had already crashed or had found help elsewhere. It was not important to anyone else that

The Currency of Exchange

I missed an opportunity for personal blessing. But it sobered me to realize that God's purposes will not ever be thwarted by me, but the blessing of availability to God's calendar was truly missed by me. So unless and until you actually let God manage your calendar and every event on it, you will not be an *available* servant to whom He can entrust His work.

Clutching Reputation

The rich young ruler was unwilling to sell all that he had and follow Jesus. This was because he valued his reputation over becoming a disciple of Jesus. This one area is usually the last bastion of our independence to be dismantled. But God will never force a man into subjection. His subjects are only those who, in love, submit completely to His leadership. The man or woman who is willing to exchange all their currency, turn over to God's control and value only His opinion of them in all of these areas, is the one who is going to experience and enjoy intimacy with God.

Exchanging Appraisers { 157 }

Christians are not supposed to be living *for* this world, its striving for prosperity, popularity and power, but rather *with* this world to come as their focus and pursuit. The economy in which we are bartering is spiritual not physical. To us everything is spiritual. The spiritual is the only eternally lasting thing. We have the awesome privilege of exchanging worldly success for favor, with our Father, which art in heaven.

Exchanged Emotions { 158 }

Living abandoned to intimacy with God is an expensive proposition, that's why it is sometimes called *the crucified life*. However, once you are transformed by the renewing of your mind, which results in paying the price of absolute abandon to God, you will become so passionately in love with God that guilt, shame, anxiety and every other negative emotion will give way to a deeper love, joy and peace than one could ever imagine.

LLJL

Christ paid the price for our salvation. We now pay the price for our full identification with Him as our most significant other. In making this exchange, we become the most loving, encouraging, accepting and embracing people on earth. We actually Love Like Jesus Loves!

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Chapter 9: Veils That Obscure God's Face { Easy now! } { 159 }

Tozer writes: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do. Forgetting those things, which are behind and reaching forth unto those things, which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:13-14. The new Testament message, objectives and methods have been allowed to lie dormant. Acts done in the name of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, a lordship in name only, introduces our own message, our own objectives and our own methods for achieving those objectives, which are in every case, carnal.

It is by the indwelling of Jesus that we receive the riches of God and see his smiling face. Unfortunately, there have developed between the Christian and the face of God, **veils of obscurity**. These veils hide the precious riches of God from those of us who press on to perfection (intimacy with God). The effect is that we can no longer see the smiling face of God. On a dark cloudy day the brightness of the sun is obscured. The sun is still there, but our ability to benefit from the sun's rays is greatly reduced. So it is in the spiritual world. There are certain veils that come between us and God and have a similar effect. These veils are usually of our own making. We allow them to develop in our lives and most of the time we are not even aware of the total impact they're having on us. Let me describe some of the **veils that are the most troubling**. **Pride { 160 }**

An inflated opinion of ourselves, self adoring and self worship is the root of our problem. It prevents surrender to anyone, not just God. As Christians, when we usurp God's rightful place and role in our lives, we forfeit nearly everything salvation affords us. Pride prevents us from admitting that we need God's help and prevents us from offering God the opportunity to help. Pride refuses to release control to God. He cannot be our LORD in the presence of our pride. God resists the proud!

The Veils That Obscure God's Face

Religious Ambition

Religious ambition may be the hardest of all the veils to see. The enemy of the best is not the worst. The enemy of the best is the very good. Religious ambition distorts the will of God. Doing what appears to be a good God thing, but with selfish motives makes it a selfish thing and not a God thing at all.

Ownership

Jesus never owned anything. And nothing ever owned Him. He was free to move about without encumbrances. We, on the other hand, place great value in our possessions and brag about how we use them for the glory of God. How arrogant! God does not need



us or anything we possess. If anything we are of little or no use to God when our possessions and our care for them preclude our instant and constant availability to God.

Money

Money is not evil. It is the love of money that is at the root of evil. Having too much or too little can quickly distract us from trust in God. The veil of money has never been about how much money you have, but rather about how much money has you.

Fear { 161 }

My circumstances are no indication of whether the smiling favor of God is upon me. Fear is caused directly by my distrust of God and His intentions for me. Unless and until I recognize that God architects every circumstance in my life to accomplish His great purposes, fear will stalk me. Perfect love is the cure for fear as it casts it out completely. Job had the right perspective on this and is a great example of absolute trust. So when I trust God enough to be intimate with Him, all fear subsides and lets me see Him clearly!

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Friendship { 162 }

More often than not, it is our friendships that come between us and God. God desires to be at the top of our passion hit list. Until He is, we will sacrifice His purpose on the altar of placating our friends and families. Our most significant other tends to be the highest of our priorities. So until God becomes our most significant other, over even our spouse, intimacy with God will not occur.

Social position

It is highly likely that the rich, young ruler who would not sell all and give it to the poor in order to be Jesus' disciple was more about his prestige than his wealth. Since influence is largely determined by our social position, so is our power(worship). And power is the third of the three temptations of Christ. So until we are more interested in God's influence than our own, we will not abandon ourselves to intimacy with God.

Take down the veils.

These veils are all aspects of life that, on the surface seem innocent but, certainly become things that obscure the face of God or distract us from looking in His direction. The face of God is always smiling on us. God is simply waiting for us to lift our eyes and see his smile. God will not take the veils down. He waits for us to do so.

Have no rivals to God. { 163 }

Intimacy with God is completely impossible while you are living in adultery with another lover. (see Oswald Chambers' May 23 message in *My Utmost for His Highest* in the Spiritual Teasers.) And don't settle for weekly or even daily ecstatic moments with God. Set your mind on Him all day every day. A simple awareness of His presence in increasing frequency will complete your journey to intimacy with Him. Tozer explains how we might be viewed by others is we actually put God as such a high priority that nothing and no one rivals Him in our lives. Listen to the Holy Spirit's voice within you. He is as desirous to inspire you to

“Are you willing to take down the veils of pride, religious ambition, ownership, money, fear, friendship and societal position?”

Dynamics of Intimacy

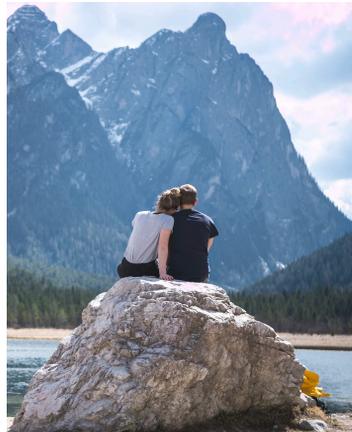
Chapter 10: Dynamics of Intimate Relationship { Not too fast! }

I Cannot, Only He Can { 164 }

“I can do all things through Christ, which strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13. The objective before us is *not* to do things in an enlarged personal strength, but rather to *let* the Spirit of Christ within me do the heavy lifting. To reword this verse might help you understand the dynamic. “I can do all things through Christ, whose Holy Spirit within me expresses Himself, while I withdraw from the scene so that only Christ and His powerful work can be seen.” Whew, that was much longer, but it is the dynamic of abandon to intimacy with God. We are to learn of Him, that is to become deeply intimate with Him. We are to be conformed unto His death, that is to be willing to die to everything selfish for the sake of others' salvation. We must count all things as refuse compared to an intimate knowledge of Him.

Release and Relax { 165 }

The objective is not to control but to relax. Enjoy the peace that surpasses all understanding. There's nothing more for you to do. God does not help those who help themselves. Quite the opposite. God only helps those who humble themselves enough to admit that they need His help and will let Him help. Through the experience of intimacy with God, fruitfulness *will* happen.



This is what the Gospel of John declares in chapter fifteen. *Abide* in the vine! You *will* bear fruit!

Sifting Out The Insincere { 166 }

God sifts out those who are unwilling to forsake all others to follow Him in order to lead on by grace those who truly want Him over anything else. Many may wax cold, but in every generation there is always a remnant of intimate believers. Many say they want to be intimate and fully surrendered to God but at the same time, they want to maintain a

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

good reputation or get a little bit of the glory or to continue to live comfortably. Most of us want only a theoretical crucifixion. Hearing sermons about dying to self and selfish ambitions is commonplace, but actually taking the risk of losing control is quite rare. As Tozer put it, "Until we put ourselves in the hands of God and let God do with us. what ever He wants, we will be just what we are, mediocre Christians."

We will not know what it is to be one with Him until, experientially, our hearts have been changed. And our true intent must be to perpetually love Him and desire to bring Him praise. Then we may be filled with His Spirit and become passionately in love with Him.

Marital Commitment { 167 }

You have no idea what it means to fall in love with God and then let Him be your most significant other. You are afraid of that or maybe you have never been told that it is possible. You know that the Bible says, "God so loved," but still you are afraid that if you leave your life in God's hands, He may not handle your life well. He may change you such that you may be considered strange or even fanatical. Anyone who wants this deeper love for God can have it, but it requires a full marital commitment. Instead we sit around, get old and wait for the undertaker. We go to church and Bible studies week after week, year after year, and get nothing out of them. We listen to sermons year after year, without learning anything about how to fall in passionate love with God.

Marital Fruitfulness { 168 }

Fruitfulness is the product of intimacy. Simply staying connected to the vine will bear fruit. When we separate ourselves from the love of God, our fruit cannot come forth. Just as human birth follows human intimacy, so spiritual birth follows intimacy with God. You will find great joy as your life bursts forth with the fruit of transformed lives all around you as you live in the love of God intimately. Intimacy begets intimacy. I have never met anyone who did not want to experience a "honey-moon" love affair with someone. We crave love. Yet we find it difficult to love others. But living in an intimate relationship with God,

Dynamics of Intimacy

in Jesus, His enormous capacity for love and compassion exudes from us and radically, positively impacts the lives of those in our presence.

Let Go { 169 }

It is time to let go of the controls of our lives and let the ultimate Captain of the Universe take the wheel. When we are living in intimacy with God, Galatians 2:20 becomes a reality within us. "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live yet not I, but Christ lives in me and the life, which I now live in the flesh. I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." Being dead, but yet alive is one of the unique qualities of the life established for us by Jesus dying on the Cross. But what love, joy and peace these qualities bring! *A.W. Tozer writes, "Test everything against the unconditional love of God. Christians should dispense grace without fail and introduce men and women to the possibility of loving relationship with God. The only means by which anyone can commit wholly to God is to become so passionately in love with Him, that doing what our Lover desires is a pleasure for us."*

Uniqueness Not Conformity { 170 }

We are not to look like each other. That is, we are not expected to change our personalities. God has made us uniquely different in order to serve His larger purposes. But we are all to look like Christ, that is in His manner of loving and showing mercy and grace to everyone. We can get all caught up in the nuances of religion and miss the glorious joy of developing a deeply passionate intimacy with Christ.

Whatever hinders us in our journey must be eliminated. Fortunately, the only things which can hinder us and must be eliminated are motives within ourselves. It is equally important to include in our journey those things that will promote our passion for God. A. W. Tozer wrote about the inclusion of the writings of intimate believers, "In my pursuit of God, I want to know what they knew of God and how they came to know him on such intimate grounds. This is not to say I agree with everything they wrote as I would not agree with everything anybody else would write. These grand old mystics of the church pro-

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

duced wonderful spiritual fruit. The fruit is what really matters, not the appearance. It matters not if the man wears a robe or a suit. It only matters that he is cloaked in love! Many of them were harassed and tormented by the established church. Some even were martyred because of this uncontrollable passion for God. They were only interested in pursuing intimacy with God.”

Simply Christians { 171 }

It matters not whether they were Protestant, Catholic, fundamentalist or evangelical. Nor does it matter whether we are of any particular theological persuasion. They were and we are all simply Christians. Hot pursuit of God is the ultimate for any man or woman. When we read their writings, we feel the fire of lives ablaze with love and adoration for God. Nothing ever extinguished the fire of their devotion. The fervor of their love for God has, in their writings, transcended time. A W Tozer states, “In reading these great works one is transported out of time and into the mystical wonder of pursuing God. It is hard to read such material for long without feeling the heartbeat of the author's passion.”

Share the Love

This passionate desire for God is what is missing among Christians today. And it is impossible to pass on to others a passion which we ourselves do not possess. When and only when our pursuit of God is only matched by our desire to share the object of our love with any and all who will listen, have we become true lovers of God. Hopefully some of the writings of these men and women contained in the Spiritual Teasers will light a fire in your heart.

Spiritual Not Academic { 172 }

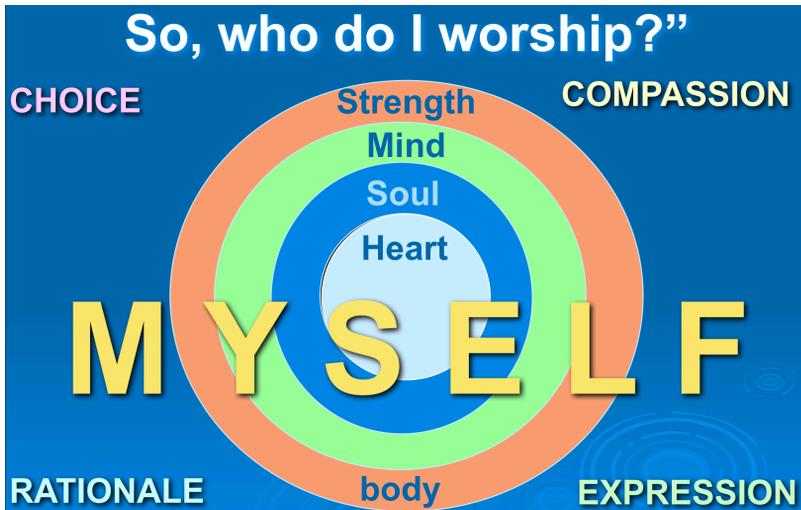
I have observed over several decades that many Christians do not understand that such passion for God is attainable or even desirable. The problem is not with which translation of the Bible you read. The problem is not academic. The problem is purely spiritual. Tozer sums it up this way, “It is a problem with the relationship with the author of the Word, God Himself. One important point many fail to understand is that the Bible was never meant to replace God. Rather it was meant to

Dynamics of Intimacy

lead us into the heart of God. Too many Christians stop with the text and never go on to experience the Presence of God. It has always been “the Spirit Himself, bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Romans 8:16. If you will wait for the Holy Spirit quietly, He will reveal the experience of the Presence of God.”

Magnificent Imagery { 173 }

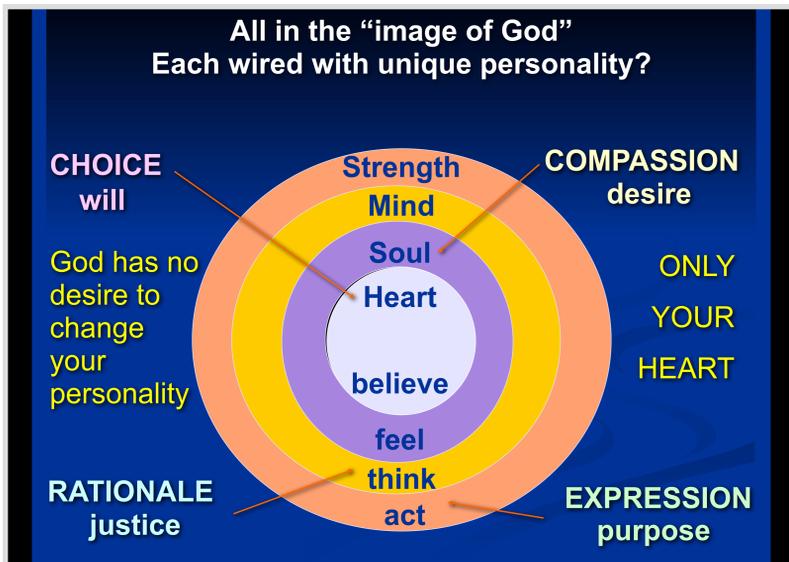
In order to more fully understand relationships in general and especially a relationship with God, we must consider just how much like God we truly are. I am not suggesting here that we are actually gods, as it were. But God had a specific purpose for making creatures in His own image. And to properly relate to such a God it is essential that we understand just how it is that we are made **in His image**. Obviously, we cannot all look like God physically, nor does that matter in any way. However, apart from our physical appearance, we are a spitting image of our Creator, in similar ways that we are like our parents. As we explore the image of God in the next chapter, consider this:



Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Chapter 11: Made in the Image of God { Slowly!, Absorb! } { 174 }

When God said, "Let us make man in our own image," He put an enormous gulf between men and every other creature. Only mankind was created with the capacities necessary to be in personal relationships, with each other or between themselves and God. He later introduced Himself, in the person of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus, into the drama of human experience. The diagrams below show the similitude between man and God and as spiritual beings, we can be united to God in relationship as no other living being.



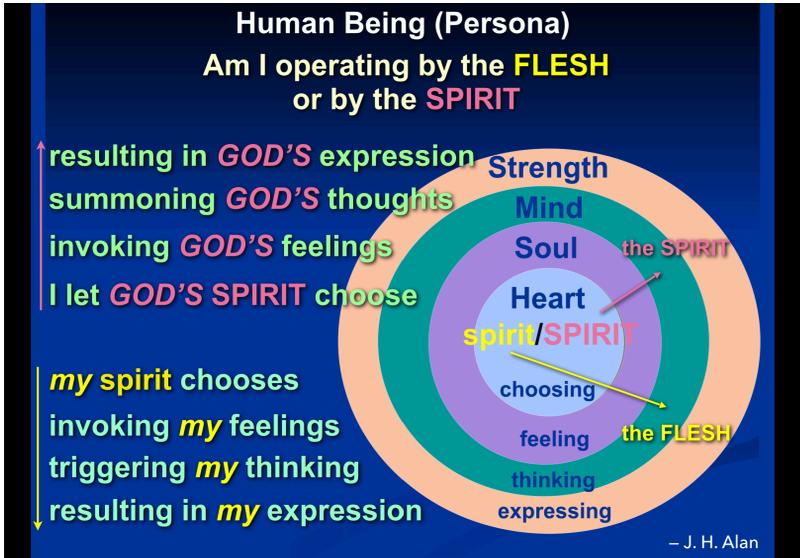
The four aspects of God's image in which we are made are CHOICE, COMPASSION, RATIONALE and EXPRESSION. Our 'free will,' 'desire,' 'sense of Justice' and 'purpose for communicating' correspond to God's image. With the HEART we choose beliefs, with our SOUL we feel, with our MIND we think about what course of action or words we will use and with our BODY/STRENGTH we do or say.

Knowing Ourselves { 175 }

In order to know and understand each other., we must come to an intimate knowledge of God. An old German theologian once said, "There is nothing in the universe so much like God as the human

In the Image of God

soul." We are unlike any other created being. Once joined with the Spirit of God, every decision invokes an action in the sequence shown in the diagram below. If my spirit makes the choice, it is my reaction that affects those present. If God's Spirit is allowed to make the choice, it is His response which they experience! Better His than mine.



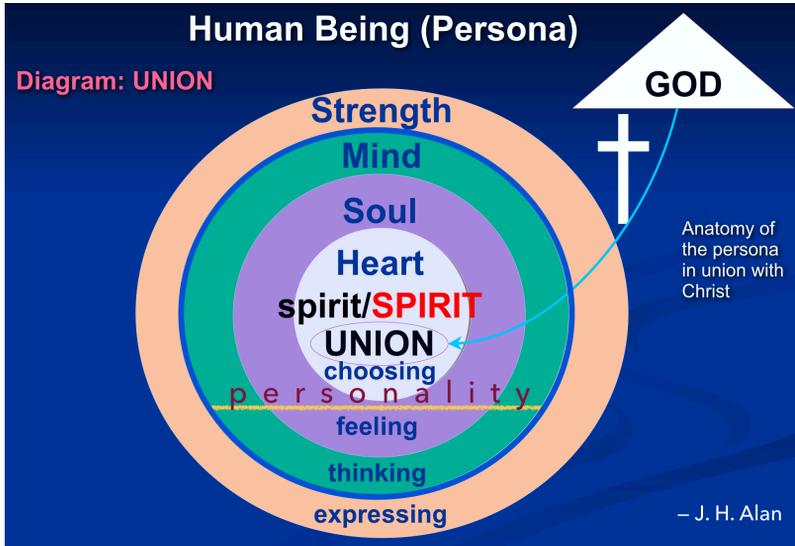
[What my spirit chooses to believe causes my soul to feel emotion when that belief is challenged or affirmed. Once my feelings kick in, my mind begins to formulate what expressions are needed. Then my body expresses those thoughts. -or- I can let God's Spirit within me do the willing, feeling, thinking and expressing. It is best to "Let God!"]

The primary hindrance to intimate relationships is selfish ambition which in order to be achieved must 'use' or 'abuse' others to gain advantage over their pursuit of the same goals. Although selflessness is the key to wholesome relationships, our nature is to be selfish instead.

Personality { 176 }

In the next diagram, we see that our personality is comprised of heart, soul and mind. The essence of personality is the choices we make, the feelings we experience, our thoughts and our expressions.. We need a body to house our personality and enable it to express itself.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !



A God in Our Image

It is curious that Christians experience so little affection for God. It is understandable for an atheist. Tozer queries, “Why is it that the one creation of God who was created in His image, and has become a Christian, has such a shallow relationship with his creator?” It is because we do not see God to be Himself, perfect in every relationship way. We cast on God’s character our own character flaws! We treat Him more like our equal than our superior. If we could only see that God is the most passionately loving personality in the universe, we could become passionate toward Him.

Basic Desires of God (and those in His image) { 177 }

“Jesus was ... tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15. Thus part of the image of God in which we are cast, includes three basic tendencies. The three temptations of Christ in the wilderness after 40 days of fasting and preparation, will be consistently encountered from birth until death of every human being. The following discussion of these temptations may help you see yourself more clearly and determine more accurately what motive is behind each expression you make. Knowing how the personality works and how temptation affects us, gives us a better chance of living authenti-

In the Image of God

cally and according to God's design. It may appear that we mostly do the opposite of what God's unconditional love would do.

3 common temptations prevent surrender to the Holy Spirit.

There are three ways that we have succumbed to temptation which keep us from releasing control of our personality to the Holy Spirit.

{ 178 }

1 **INDULGENCE** = expecting *prosperity*, comfort and pleasure in the journey; expressed in simpler terms: "give me"

God Is Not into Your Whims

It amazes me just how many priests, rabbis and preachers sermonize about the blessing of God. We have listened to countless sermons that imply, if not outright proclaim, that God wants to bless His people with health, wealth and trouble-free lives. Actually it is the father of all lies who likely gives us these things. He uses these things to distract us from God and to eliminate our need for God. People flock to churches which have "blessing services" where the sermon promotes the idea that God wants to prosper them. There are prayer leaders after these services to pray for the prosperity, popularity and power which these seekers come to find. But this only appeals to the self-indulgence and self-promotion of the participants. Wasn't this the very first temptation of Jesus, "make bread of these stones"?

Intimacy Through Adversity

The surrendered life actually brings upon us tragedy, travesty, carnage and ruin. This even makes sense. It is only through adversity that we learn the very things that will ultimately produce both intimacy and endurance. This was very evident in the life of Paul, many first century Christians and the martyrs through the ages. But, by enduring adversity, for the love of God and with insatiable desire to please Him, we actually find our selves rich in relationship, not only to God but also to others. In the state of absolute abandon to intimacy with God, we are most satisfied and contented. We actually find the most joyous, loving and peaceful spirit in the midst of all adversities. And we know that we have made progress when we can love our enemies like Jesus did in

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

asking God to *forgive them because they do not know what they are doing*, from the Cross!

{ 179 }

2 **APPLAUSE** = seeking *popularity*: our own interests under the guise of seeking God's interests; in other words: "**see me**"

Ulterior Motives

We have a devious way of serving our own interests while claiming that we are doing this for God or the benefit of others. We have become very clever in this endeavor, and very good at believing our own lies in this regard. For example. A pastor may talk about building the church and going around doing kingdom work for the glory of God. He may be quite eloquent about this. But what he may actually be doing is shamelessly promoting himself, while saying I'm doing this for Jesus' sake. When it comes right down to it, it is really his work, his influence and his ambition. That is why he's really doing it.

Church musicians can have a music ministry under the guise of serving the Lord, while at the same time hoping to promote their own talents and possibly furthering their musical careers. There's a fine line between promotion of self and exaltation of Christ. That line is motive. And it sometimes becomes so faint that people do not really know which side of the line they're on. While saying that they seek the interest of God, they fall prey to promoting themselves. We want God to have the glory, but at the same time, we would like a little commission paid to us for all the work *we* do. After all, God is using *us* for His glory. And we do have to make a living and appear to be successful.

{ 180 }

3 **CONTROL** - Wanting *power* to be in control (worshipped) yet asking the Holy Spirit to fill us "**serve me**"

We Cannot Do It Together

We want the Holy Spirit to fill us (or so we say), but also want to do things our way. We frequently talk about surrender to the Holy Spirit but never actually give up control. The Holy Spirit cannot take control

In the Image of God

of us until we get out of the way in full surrender. Nothing is easier to talk about than surrendering ourselves to God. But nothing is harder than actually doing it. I find some Christians who ask God to fill them with the Holy Spirit. The only problem is that when God begins to move upon them, they reject that move. They say they want God to take full control of their lives, but actually, they want to keep everything within their own control. The Holy Spirit will never fill a man or a woman who refuses to give up and give over to Him all control of their entire life. Keep only one part of your life back from the Holy spirit and it grieves Him that he cannot go any further. I long ago concluded that the Holy Spirit works alone in my heart and needs no help from me.

King of the Road



give me
see me
serve me

But, it is no wonder that control is so important to us. We remember that "God created man in His Own Image." The most significant part of that image is *free will* or *personal sovereignty*. God made each of us and granted us sovereignty over our own kingdom. [Sovereignty is having final authority over everything, like a king or queen.] This was, by the way, the third temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. When Satan offered Jesus a hoard of worshippers if Jesus would

simply bow down and worship Satan, the temptation was great. This method of gaining worshippers would certainly have been far less painful than the way of the Cross, which Jesus knew was His destiny. Every one wants to be in leadership or in charge of the lives of others. It is part of our DNA and explains why there is so much evil in the world. Everyone is competing against all those around them to be the supreme leader, respected, admired and emulated.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

How Do We Best Approach God { 181 }

It is worth mentioning here, a little known paradigm. Many claim to love God very much. Many, when asked, “Do you have an intimate relationship with God?” will say emphatically, “Yes.” But is their life as unconditionally loving and accepting as God, Who let His Own Son be crucified for us? Do their expressions always encourage and embrace others, even their enemies? Do their lifestyles cause any to ask them how they can be so merciful and forgiving when most would strike back? Mostly this is not the case for Christians around the world. And it can be traced to a general misunderstanding as to what they mean by their claim to love God. Most may have never been challenged to consider what I am about to say. There are three ways we each approach God once we have become a *born again, born of the Spirit* Christian. There is a significant difference between them.

INTENSITY - ECSTASY - INTIMACY { 182 }

The **first** approach to God is with *intensity*. Many avidly pursue compliance to the law and service to God. Great *intensity* may produce a life that appears to be good, but it has no basis in love. It is based on personal strength. *Intensity* can be either loving or hateful. We see in Judas Iscariot great *intensity*, but it was misguided, and he eventually betrayed Jesus and subsequently hanged himself for it.

The **second** approach to God is by way of *ecstasy*. Christians go to church to be ecstatically charged by the songs, sermons and demonstration of the gifts of the Spirit. They are satisfied with this “one night stand”, sorry “one hour stand” with God wherein they have the tingles with God and feel better for a while. Unfortunately for most of them, those euphoric feelings of *ecstasy* dissipate within hours, if not minutes. They may even pick up the violent argument with their families, which was suspended when they entered the church, as soon as they leave the meeting. They usually find themselves craving this *ecstasy* within a day or two. When they don't have a church meeting to give them this *ecstasy*, they indulge themselves in some secret sordid activity to find it. They are up and down like yo-yos.

The **third** way to experience God is by way of *intimacy*. When one is *intimate* with any other, their thoughts are almost constantly inclusive

In the Image of God

of the object of their love. *Intimate* lovers care more about the needs and desires of their partner than their own. *Intimacy* brings with it the highest pleasures known to man. But *intimacy* never ceases to produce pleasure, even when the lovers are miles apart. The best news is that there is “no distance between the hearts of two genuine lovers.” So with *intimacy*, we can be so aware of the ever presence of God that we don’t need to seek ecstasies which leave us wanting more.

Consider these three people and their feelings toward God:

Judas Iscariot == *Intensity*; Simon Peter == *Ecstasy*; Mary == *Intimacy*

Highest Affection { 183 }

To be sure, intimate lovers experience ecstasies and intensity. But all of their ecstasies and intensity simply fulfill their pleasure with God. It is because of their intimacy that their intensity and ecstasies are always loving. On the other hand, ecstasies and intensity can be extremely selfish and produce awful results. But **intimacy with God transforms a life into an expression of God Himself**. This is similar to the appearance of God, in Jesus. God wants Christians to be “like Christ” in order to continue the work of Jesus here and now.

Perfect Example

In the diagram below, we see how John the Baptizer’s words about Jesus are the key to what Paul refers to as “walking in the Spirit.” By



Let's Fall in Love — with God !

nature we are compelled to take charge of each circumstance we encounter. Walking in the Spirit is never accomplished by straining not to do what comes naturally. Walking in the Spirit is the autonomic (automatic) response to a deep affection for and trust in the Holy Spirit of God within us to take charge.

In a Nutshell { 184 }

So, in summary, the image of God is associated with the spiritual aspects of similarity rather than the physical. What we do in body is simply the expression of the inner personality. When we begin to see all of life's experiences as affecting our emotions, we can trace our good and bad behaviors to our spirit. That is where motive comes into play. Most, if not all, criminal activity is induced by feelings. There are crimes of passion (a feeling) and crimes of desperation (again a feeling). There are crimes of greed (a form of desperation) and crimes committed to get attention (again feelings-based).

There are crimes committed in the name of fairness. When our sense of fairness is violated, we often become angry and defensive either for our own unfair treatment or for the unfair treatment of another. Unfortunately with our limited vision and information, we may truly become the villain by making wrong assumptions in these regards.

Nonetheless, we are emotional beings. Yet we are also rational beings. This brings the necessary balance to enable us to live civilized lives in community with others. In the end, however, it is our free will, that is our personal sovereignty, that determines our responses to everything and the resulting harmony or discord we experience. The one additional, and maybe the most important aspect, of our likeness to the image of God, is that our spirit can be in union with His. This union, and only this union, will provide the capacity to love like God does and demonstrate grace instead of retaliation.

Our body has nothing to do with personality except to assist it to take advantage of the body's resources to gain advantage in every situation.

Spiritual Growth Inhibitors

Chapter 12: Spiritual Growth Inhibitors { Absorb it! } { 185 }

Settling for Second Hand Knowledge

Many Christians are so busy that they know God only by hearsay. We hear, but fail to experience it for ourselves. We too easily settle for substitutes rather than the real thing. Under these circumstances, the most we can expect to hear is the opinions of others about what God says.

Wanting Things Instead of God

Some want things *from* God instead a relationship *with* God. We are more interested in the gifts than the giver. God wants to give us Himself. Separated from God, the His gifts can actually become distractions from a relationship with Him. When we take the gifts from Him instead of waiting for Him to give them to us, we become thieves.

Living Comfortably with Sins

Any thing that comes between us and intimacy with God is simply put, sin. Sin might be best defined as crimes against relationship. Sin can also be defined as anything that is done which is relationally destructive. All sin can be traced back to 3 basic tendencies in us: (seeking *indulgence*/pleasure/trouble-free life; seeking *applause*/affirmation/reputation; seeking *to be worshipped*/emulated/followed — all for personal gain and at the expense of others).

Estranged by Guilt and Shame { 186 }

Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden because they broke relationship with God by rejecting their relationship with God by disobeying God's only rule/demand. The evidence of the broken relationship is that they hid from God once they knew that they were naked, caught in the act of disobedience and overwhelmed with shame. All of us recoil from others when we feel guilt or shame for something we have done wrong to them. One example, adultery, is the most common reason for divorce. Infidelity is one of the most emotionally charged words in any language or culture!

Misunderstanding Forgiveness { 187 }

The only pathway to intimacy with God is forgiveness of our relationship crimes (sins). Now to be sure, God does not forgive in the man-

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

ner which most think. God cannot just let the perpetrator go free and still provide justice to the victim. God's forgiveness is like the motor cyclists' saying, *Pay it forward*. God *pays forward* the sins to Jesus, so that the due penalty of our crimes is *paid in full* by Him. No sin goes unpunished by God. God declared emphatically, "Vengeance is mine, I *will* repay." God will either let you pay your punishment forward to Jesus, or He will allow you to serve your own sentence (separation from relationship with God). That is the single message of the Gospel.

Holding Others Accountable { 188 }

The matter of personal accountability is another hindrance to living abandoned to intimacy with God. It is never our responsibility or authority as Christians to condemn anyone (for their actual sins or perceived sins — things which in our opinion are sin). I suggest that you think twice before you do so. Unfortunately, false teaching in the church, in which we are to hold each other accountable for moral, ethical or legal behaviors creates relational carnage.

Double Jeopardy

God has appointed government and judicial systems to handle civil consequences. God handles all spiritual consequences. Yet, many Christians actually add their additional penalties to what the civil justice system has devised. This is nothing short of double jeopardy, which is illegal by any system of justice in history. For all spiritual matters, personal matters between a man and God, are adjudicated by God. He is the the judge. Get out of His chair. Don't even approach the bench!

The Difference Between Fellowship and Relationship { 189 }

The importance of this one thing in the life of the believer is vastly underestimated. Sin (breaking relationship) is responsible for most of our problems. I believe all will agree that our greatest pleasures in life come from good relationships and our greatest pains come from broken ones. The essence of the life of Jesus is that He chose to love everyone, even His enemies. He even asked God to "forgive" those responsible for His crucifixion, as they stood at the foot of His Cross jeering, as He agonizingly suffocated, naked until He died. And to this

Spiritual Growth Inhibitors

day, Jesus offers a personal relationship with Himself to everyone. And Jesus only, ever treated harshly those who came between people and their attempts to worship God or those who tried to negate the truth of God. And, to be sure, Jesus' life and messages about God and mankind were, and still are, perfect.

Silenced by Guilt and Shame { 190 }

The reason sins committed by Christians hinder their intimacy with God, is that the guilt and shame associated with them, generally causes Christians to cower from God and withdraw from His Presence. We have been sidelined by the lie of Satan, "If you can't walk the walk, then you can't talk the talk." Your personal purity has no bearing whatsoever on your testimony as a believer in Jesus. Jesus said that your testimony is your unconditional love for others which matches His love for them. John 13:34-35

Feeling Unworthy to Speak

Neither you, your pastor or your most righteous acquaintance are worthy to proclaim the good news of the Gospel. However, even a donkey's lips were used to save Balaam from the sword of an angel. The message of the Gospel is its own authentication and credibility. The *foolishness* of preaching the Gospel, is not the preaching. (Every salesman is a preacher of his product's gospel.). The foolishness is that the purest message in the universe, when spoken by soiled lips, is not in any way sullied! So, just because you don't live a sinless life, don't stop bragging about your personal relationship with God, in Jesus Christ.

Only God Can Pay It Forward { 191 }

Many respected '*Christian*' teachers, proclaim from their pulpits and lecterns, the false teaching of moralism. The proper response to acknowledged sin is, "Thank You, Lord, that Jesus has paid for this sin already!" Then go about your Father's work again immediately. One sacrifice and one repentance is all that God required for all of the sins of any one who in faith lets God *pay their sins forward* to Christ. But to give thanks in everything is the ultimate in freedom from guilt and shame. When a Christian joyfully thanks God for the forgiveness already applied to their entire life, and instantly restores their commu-

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

nion with the Holy Spirit, they can immediately hear His guidance and walk in it. This is truly what the Bible calls walking in the Spirit.

Hiding from God in Shame { 192 }

We will all likely continue to commit sin until our physical death. And even the Apostle Paul declared in Romans chapter 7, "the things I want to do I don't do and the things I do not want to do, I do. Oh, miserable man that I am." And in Romans chapter 8, he states, "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." So until we stop cowering in guilt, shame and fear, Satan has us immobilized. When you let your selfish spirit break relationship with anyone, remember this, that since God has applied our punishment to Jesus, there is no need for this to come between us and our intimacy with God. Get back up, admit to the one you have wronged, open your heart to relationship with them again, and take one step closer to God. The more you practice this, the more you will fall in love with God and the less you will continue to sin. In this practice, you will also eventually find complete freedom from guilt, shame and fear.

Lost Decades { 193 }

For several decades of my own life, even while I was a practicing ordained minister, I was hindered from developing intimacy with God by this very issue. I had been taught that if I did not walk the walk of Jesus, then I should not open my mouth to talk the talk of Jesus. So my guilt and shame, reinforced by this erroneous teaching (of which I was also guilty of teaching), caused me avoid God altogether for weeks or months until I felt that I would not sin this particular sin again and could step back into God's presence. Oh, that I could buy back that lost time!

Admission, Not Condemnation { 194 }

Yes, we need to admit that we have done wrong, instead of hypocritically pretending that we have not or secretly hiding the fact that we have. Many Christians are hated because their loveless, self-righteous superior attitude fails to deliver the love of God. Rather, Christians exude their disgust with those who have openly committed sin or admit that they have privately committed sin.

Spiritual Growth Inhibitors

Not Believing That I Am Perfect { 195 }

Know that our most significant other, God (this includes Jesus and the Holy Spirit), will never leave us or forsake us. He never holds our sin against us. The penalty has been paid by Jesus. Now, we can come boldly anytime, especially after committing sin, into His presence. Actually the Holy Spirit within us prays to God for us during the moments in which we are committing sin. By the way, the Holy Spirit does not come out of us while we are in the very act of sin and then come back in when we feel unashamed enough to invite Him back in. He is present in us during the act of sin.

Fortunately the Holy Spirit keeps us in the perfection of Jesus. Beware, however, that paying our sins forward to Jesus, does not give us a *get out of hell free* card. Those who would use God's grace as a license to commit sin, have not really become intimate with Jesus. They may have proclaimed that they have, but the evidence is irrefutable to the contrary. It is not action, but the motive which God uses to receive us into the Kingdom of God. And His Kingdom is the only one in history which is comprised of only those subjects who ask to be a citizen and volunteer to live under His authority!

Making the Bible an Idol { 196 }

Why has God given us the scriptures? It is because by reading the scriptures we can know God. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17 But, the scriptures are not an end in themselves. We hear them talked about as though they were an end in themselves. No man can believe more in the verbal inspiration of the scriptures as originally given than I do, but verbal inspiration or any other theory of inspiration that makes the Bible an end in itself is a dangerous thing. The purpose of the Bible is not to replace God. The purpose of the Bible is to lead us to God, not to be an end in itself.

Not Realizing That the Bible Is a Love Story

The central theme of the Bible is relationship, and in particular healthy ones. The original 10 Commandments and Jesus' one and only commandment are exactly the same on this issue. The command of Jesus

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

is simply the original 10 on steroids! It is an impossible command to obey without the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. That is why the Holy Spirit was given to us.

You Choose the Voices that Inform Your Soul { 197 }

The only Christians you want to listen to are the ones who give you more of a hunger for God. You cannot know all that God has. But you can know all that God will reveal to your soul, which is infinitely more than you now know. The church of Christ needs to return to teaching this. She needs to preach God Himself and that all of the gifts of God are ours the instant we receive Jesus. God will continue to reveal Himself. All the blessings of God will come along with God. We want the fullness of the Holy Spirit to fill us. We want godly living. We want a love divine, like Jesus demonstrated in giving His life for His friends. We want all of that.

Thieves Rather Than Beneficiaries { 198 }

But if we take His gifts, apart from God himself, we have only become thieves. If you find God, then you find all these things in God. You now say I've accepted Christ. And that is very wonderful and good. Paul had been converted and was one of the world's great Christians. But he still wrote, "that I may know Him *intimately* and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings and be made conformable unto His death". Philippians 3:10. Many want to know what the deeper life is, what living abandoned to intimacy with God is.

Failing to Abandon to God { 199 }

In brief, it is akin to the theme of this book. God wants us be romantic with Him and nurture a passionate intimacy with Him. He wants us to love Him more than our most significant other on earth. We call it, *Abandoned to Intimacy with God*. Just as in marriage down here, we commit ourselves to care more for our spouse than ourselves. We vow to put their needs as our highest priority. To be sure, if God truly becomes your dearest lover, your spouse may actually get jealous of God. Jealousy will not occur, though, if both spouses have their highest affections for God. When that happens, you have the most beautiful companionship with your earthly mate. Your desires are both for the

Spiritual Growth Inhibitors

same love of God. As we come further into an intimate relationship with God, our hearts become more abandoned to His pleasure!

Allowing Distractions to Diminish Loving Desire { 200 }

Everything in life is either an *attraction* to God or a *distraction* from God. Anything that keeps me from knowing God intimately is my enemy. Look for any distractions from thinking about God. (Intimacy with God causes you to think about Him as often as you think about your most significant other.) Any possession that comes between you and Him is an enemy. I do not believe in keys per se, but if there ever were a key to unlock the mystery of living abandoned to intimacy with God, it would be simply this. Allow God to be Himself and learn to love Him.

Not Stepping Out of the Box { 201 }

This may seem like a simple thing. But if it were, Christians would not need encouragement to press on to *intimacy with God*. Christians are infamous for trying to put God in a box. The God who fits in a box is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God who fits in a box (or church building) is the God who can be controlled by man and who is at the beck and call of man. But this is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is an awesome and mighty force in this universe. When we persist in allowing God to be Himself, the most unconditionally loving being in the universe, that becomes within our inner being an explosion of reality regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Our understanding of Him goes beyond academics and into that marvelous world of personal intimacy. Perhaps the ultimate truth here is that when we allow God to be Himself, we then, and only then, discover who and what we are as men and women. We are then well on our way to living abandoned to intimacy with God.

Believing That God Is Unreliable { 202 }

The major problem with allowing God to be Himself and do what pleases Him is our misunderstanding of His motives and actions. Many have heard that God never changes. Then we see that God seems to be fickle. First He tells the Israelites not to take any loot, and kills those who do. Then He tells them to keep the loot. God seems to be extremely unpredictable. The reconciliation of these two im-

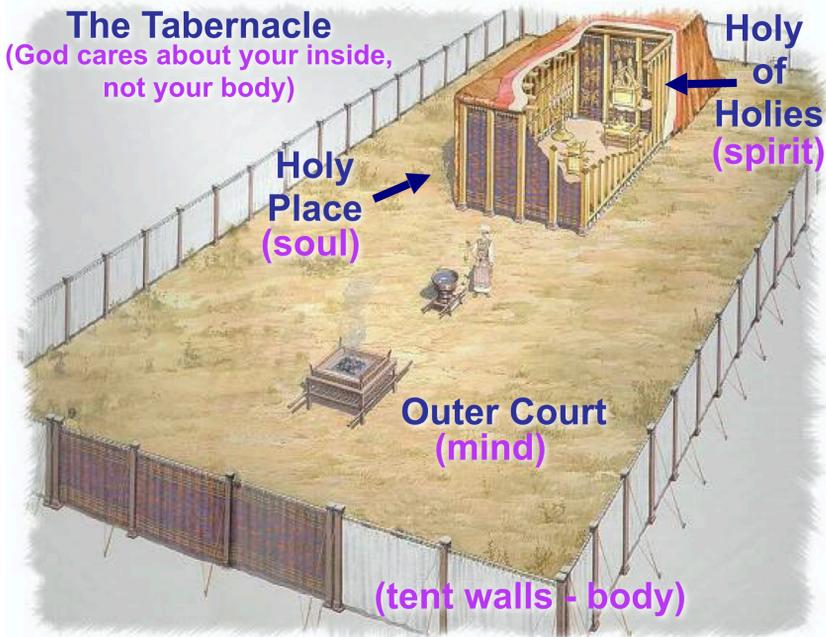
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pressions is this. God's character never changes. But His actions are often unpredictable. God is completely reliable!

Perfect Parenting

Often, God's actions *must* be different, in what seems to be the same scenario. It is the same manner in which we must change what we do for each child, in order to accommodate their very different personalities and tendencies. Imagine that God is parenting over seven billion of His kids simultaneously. And then imagine still that He magnificently architects all circumstances of all people to create divine appointments, intersections and so on in order to help each one live their most effective and most loving life.

This is one of only two dwelling places of God. In the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies or our innermost being, the heart.



Beware of those who would insist that you take particular care with your body so as not to defile it. Scripture is clear that it is what comes out of a man that defiles him and not what he takes in.

Individuality of Intimate Relationship

Chapter 13: Individuality of Intimate Relationship { 203 }

“Abide in me and I in you as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me”, John 15:4. Every relationship has its ups and downs, its times of peace and strife, its times of pleasure and pain. The single most important thing in relationship is effective communication. We have several means of communication ranging from verbal expression through intuition. God has no physical form, but He possesses the highest of all communications’ ways and means.

Unfortunately, many scholars insist that God does not ‘speak’ to people today except by way of what has been recorded in the Bible. Yet many of these same teachers would agree with my premise that God desires to be in up-close-and-personal relationships with us. How, may I ask, would that be even remotely possible without spontaneous expression. I will admit that for many decades I only heard God by reading the Bible. But oh what excitement filled my soul when I began to communicate with God as intimately as with my most significant other. To that end, let me share ideas about hearing God communicate in real-time and in unmistakable communications.

Intimate relationships are particularly unique and individual. So the ways in which I communicate with my significant others may differ from yours. However, most of what I will share here has been experienced by many others in similar fashion. With that having been said, let me jump into the deep end of the pool. (By the way, there is a life guard on duty at all times at this pool, His name is the Spirit of God.)

Hearing God’s Voice { 204 }

Many Christians have desired to hear God’s voice, but **do not know how to listen or how to recognize when God is speaking** to them. This is true partly because there is little teaching on this matter. Another reason for some is that they **have trouble discerning whether they are hearing God’s voice or their own**. For most of us, God’s voice sounds like our own. Rarely will one hear an audible voice of God. But remember that sound is not necessary for God to speak to

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us. He can speak to us in several ways. Liken it to body language which is spoken without words. Communication between persons takes many forms. So as I articulate some of the ways you might hear God's voice, feel free to let your imagination reveal other ways that work for you. God is very uniquely individual with this. You may hear Him in ways that others do not. Your imagination is actually where God plants His inspiration and revelations.

Logos and Rhema Logos is the written Word of God. Most of us are used to hearing God speak as we read scripture. Rhema is when God's Spirit reveals something to you from the words you are reading. This is like an "Ah, Ha" moment or when suddenly you see something new in a passage you may have read several times before. Listen for the fresh rhema of revelation every time you read the Bible. Rhema can come from spoken words or supernatural events.

4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice { 205 }

One approach to hearing God's voice is by way of 4 key elements of the process by which God communicates to us. Stillness, Vision, Spontaneity and Recording are 4 elements of effective communication and ways to *hear* God's message (voice).

1) **Stillness** is the state of silence or quietness in which we can hear even the faintest of voices. God often speaks in a *still, small voice*. If we are too noisy or distracted, we may miss the most important words or revelations from God. So the first thing to do is to quiet yourself down. This does not necessitate a perfectly quiet space. You can learn to be quiet in the middle of a noisy place so as to hear God while you are actively involved in activities of life.

2) **Vision** is when God gives you actual visions or dreams. Be open to the fact that many dreams are God's way of speaking to you. As we have all heard, "A picture paints a thousand words." Well, visions and dreams speak millions of words. For example a one hour movie might take several hours to read in the book on which the movie was based. As soon as you awaken from a dream, take the time to write down things you remember about the dream. Then as soon as you have time to reflect on it, ask God to explain what He was trying to communicate to you.

Individuality of Intimate Relationship

3) **Spontaneous Thoughts** come to us all the time. We may be in the middle of a very busy day when God puts a thought in our mind. A friend once told me this story. He said that He had never heard God's voice for over forty years of life. Someone had suggested to him that God often speaks to us through our thoughts. My friend had never heard that before. There had been times in his life when he had wondered if a particular thought was from God or conjured up in his own mind. Mostly, he had dismissed these thoughts as his own because they were thoughts which fulfilled his own desire on the issue.

Is This the Voice of God { 206 }

One day, John was driving to Charlotte, North Carolina for a meeting with some fellow believers about a *life of Grace*. When he approached the north side of the city, a random thought came to him. He had never considered this idea before, but he wondered if he should take the interstate loop around the city rather than drive straight through the city. Then he realized that maybe this was God speaking to him. He had no particular agenda in the matter. But since it was a *new* thought, he decided to take the bypass. When he arrived in South Charlotte, he was told that there had been a terrible traffic accident on the highway through the middle of Charlotte and traffic was backed up for over an hour.

Consider It So

Based on the advice and counsel of some of the meeting attendees, John chalked up the *thought* to go around the city, to the voice of God. He began to consider every thought as possibly a word to him from God. Eventually, John, felt as though he was hearing God's voice all the time. And to be sure, that was largely true! Don't dismiss any thought as simply your own machination just because it is something you might want to hear. By the same token, consider whether your own personal desire might mislead you into thinking it is God's voice when it is only yours. Test your motives. God will reveal any selfishness in you which might make you attempt to call a thought God's voice when it is, in fact, only yours. The more you practice listening for God's voice in your spontaneous thoughts, the more you will hear God's voice.

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4) **Journaling** is another element of hearing God's voice. God usually intends for us to share what He says to us with others who might be encouraged or enlightened by God's message to us. Journaling can take the form of a hand-written journal, an audio recording, a video recording, a typed document or any other form of capturing the message of God's *voice*. I personally record in text, audio and video formats all of the time. I record everything of significance. I also keep a pad of paper beside my bed with a writing instrument so as to capture 'ah ha' moments in the twilight of wakening moments with dreams, visions or just spontaneous thoughts. That way, I do not forget them and can ponder them more thoroughly in the morning. Journaling can produce a very effective legacy which might last for decades or even centuries beyond your lifespan.

Creativity and Imagination { 207 }

Feel free to be creative and let God reveal many other ways for you to *hear God's voice* speaking to you. You can never hear too many words from God. But you might miss too many if you don't practice specific ways of listening such as these. Through unceasing awareness of God, He begins to speak fluently to us. "Pray without ceasing."

WAIT -- Isaiah 40:31

"But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint." - Isaiah 40:31 NKJV

BE STILL -- Psalm 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" - Psalms 46:10 NKJV

BE SPEECHLESS -- James 1:19

"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." - James 1:19-20 NKJV

BE TAUGHT -- Isaiah 40:13

"Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has taught Him?" - Isaiah 40:13 NKJV

Pathway to Intimacy

Chapter 14: Pathway to Intimacy { Absorb! } { 208 }

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Psalm 133:1 Tozer speaks about the journey:

The worth of any journey can always be measured by the difficulties encountered along the way. The more difficult the journey, the more satisfying the destination. Think of being *abandoned to intimacy with God* as a journey. It has a beginning of course, but the end is never this side of glory. As everybody who has traveled this journey knows if your journey is not cluttered with difficulties and hardships and burdens, you just might be on the wrong path or going in the wrong direction.

Welcome Adversity and Struggle.

Throughout recorded history, adversity and struggle appear on nearly every page. There are both good times and bad times. Many are tempted to blame the devil for the bad things and give God credit for the good. People who get angry with God over bad things happening to good people and vice versa, fail to understand that God cannot just crush all evil doers and coddle all the do gooders. He cannot just intervene in this way. But God can be with us in both good or bad times. Unfortunately, we often ignore God in good times and only call on Him when things go south. Fortunately, we can be assured that “All things work together for good to those who love God.” And when we look for the good in every adversity or calamity, we will find it and it will be of benefit to us.

Do Not Blame Others. { 209 }

Blaming others for our problems is almost as natural as breathing. Who knows why any of us would think blaming solves anything. Blaming others is like asking a surgeon to save me from a failing organ by doing surgery on my friend. We will only arrive at solutions to problems we own. God cannot fix in someone else what is wrong with me. Nor will he fix me unless I admit that I need and want His intervention.

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See Adversity As Positive.

Everything has a positive side. There is a positive side to severe problems and adversity. The positive side may only be a lesson learned or evidence of growth or lack thereof. But much can be learned by facing them. There is an enemy facing us, but it would be far better to turn to God for assistance than to even think about engaging the enemy by ourselves. Our greatest weakness is a lack of intimacy with God.

Do Not Ask for More Faith. { 210 }

I was at my breakfast table one morning with several men. We engaged weekly in a few hours of conversation about relationship with God and God's grace. As the conversation was flowing, the Holy Spirit took me briefly on a rabbit chase. I don't know what had been said to trigger the thought, but it was profoundly useful to me. God asked me why I kept asking Him for more faith. Then the scripture came to mind where Jesus said, "If you have faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'be cast into the sea' and it will happen." So, what you are saying is that I don't need to have more faith. I simply need to have faith in the right mustard seed. "Yes, that is what I am saying," He replied. Then He pointed me to the icon of faith, Abraham. "Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness."

Do It Without Hesitation. { 211 }

I reflected on Abraham's faith when God told him to pack all his belongings and family and head out without any specific destination. I thought that would be like loading up my family in cars, my belongings in moving vans, and my horses in trailers and driving to who knows where! But for some reason Abraham did it without questions. Another time God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone. God had such a close relationship with Abraham that He thought it was the appropriate thing for Him to share with Abraham what He was about to do because Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived there. The friendship was so great that God did not become exasperated with Abraham's several requests to save the cities on behalf of his nephew. And even when there were obviously no other righteous men

Pathway to Intimacy

in the cities other than Lot, Abraham's friend, God Himself, fetched Lot out of the city before the destruction occurred.

Faith in the Right Mustard Seed { 212 }

So I began to ponder Abraham's relationship with God as it pertained to faith. As I looked around the room I estimated that billions of mustard seeds would fit in that space. I said to God, "I think that I get it. I have enough faith already. I simply need to figure out which one of this host of seeds is the right seed in which to put my faith." "Yep," He replied. And here is what I concluded. I had to believe about God exactly what Abraham believed. As I pondered this thought, I realized that Abraham never doubted God's perfect intentions toward him and God's perfect love for him. So what I finally surmised is that Abraham believed that God was the perfect relational being. As such God Himself could be trusted.

The Perfect Relational Being.

The logical extension of Abraham's belief is this. God is the *perfect Father*. And as such I can trust Him to protect me and look out for my best interest. I can trust Him to help me become the happiest adult and reach my highest potential. God is the *perfect Mother*. As such I can trust Him to comfort me when I am troubled, nurture me, and care for me in every motherly way. God is the *perfect Sister and Brother*. I can be assured that even though siblings may fight with each other, that they will lock arms with me to defend the family if anyone comes against us. God will do the same for me. God is the *perfect Friend*, as it were. He is a BFF (best friend forever). And the perfect friend is one in whom I can confide, with whom I can be vulnerable, and who will guard my reputation and dignity. God is the *perfect Mate*. In Jesus, the embodiment of God, I have a mate that will always cherish and adore me and be faithful to me in relationship and provide the ecstasies and intimacies of deeply passionate love for me. It is only when God can be trusted to always do right by me, that I can surrender the control over my life to Him. When I fully *trust* God, I *will* let God handle my reputation and provide everything I need to grow and thrive.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Bigger Than Just Me { 213 }

In addition to being my provider, promoter and protector, God will sometimes bring adversity into my life, but only when it can help me reach my potential or accomplish something in His grander scheme of things. His blessing may contain circumstances that are in themselves not pleasant and maybe even painful. But these can be a blessing to me only if I continue to trust Him as making the *perfect choices* in the circumstances and that they will provide the greatest glory for Him, in me or in the mass of humanity. As we saw with Joseph, much of his entire life was spent in miserable situations, but in the end God raised him up to be the second most powerful man in Egypt. And with this promotion, Joseph was able to save all of Egypt and his entire family.

Premium Message of Faith { 214 }

Along this same line, hear what Oswald Chambers spoke about Abraham's faith in his teachings in the Bible Training College in London, England which was later recorded in *My Utmost for His Highest*, a compilation of his teachings, by his widow, Bidy, 18 years after his untimely death to appendicitis:

April 26

THE SUPREME CLIMB

"Take now thy son . . . and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Genesis 22:2

Character determines how a man interprets God's will (cf. Psalm 18:25-26). Abraham interpreted God's command to mean that he had to kill his son, and he could only leave his tradition behind by the pain of a tremendous ordeal. God could purify his faith in no other way. If we obey what God says according to our sincere belief, God will break us from those traditions that misrepresent Him. There are many such beliefs to be got rid of, e.g., that God removes a child because the mother loves him too much - a devil's lie! and a travesty of the true nature of God. If the devil can hinder us from taking the supreme climb and getting rid of wrong traditions about God, he will do so;

Pathway to Intimacy

but if we keep true to God, God will take us through an ordeal which will bring us out into a better knowledge of Himself.

The great point of Abraham's faith in God was that he was prepared to do anything for God. He was there to obey God, no matter to what belief he went contrary. Abraham was not a devotee of his convictions, or he would have slain Isaac and said that the voice of the angel was the voice of the devil. That is the attitude of a fanatic. If you will remain true to God, God will lead you straight through every barrier into the inner chamber of the knowledge of Himself; but there is always this point of giving up convictions and traditional beliefs. Don't ask God to test you. Never declare as Peter did - "I will do anything, I will go to death with Thee." Abraham did not make any such declaration, he remained true to God, and God purified his faith.

Just develop a faith like Abraham's !

Trusting Jesus as my Life means I am free to choose to:

| Give up the Right to Be or Feel: | Be Willing to Be or Feel: | Trust Christ as My: |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Accepted | Rejected | Friend |
| In Control | Not in Control | Savior |
| Perfect | Make Mistakes | Adequacy |
| Successful | Fail | Identity |
| Loved | Unloved | Security |
| Proud | Embarrassed | Reputation |
| Healthy | Sick | Strength & Peace |
| Listened to | Ignored | Friend |
| Appreciated | Taken for Granted | Identity |
| Respected | Made Insignificant | Reputation |
| Trusted | Viewed with Suspect | Confidence |
| Married | Single | Security |
| Defend Myself | Falsely Accused | Protector |
| Financially Secure | Poor/Bankrupt | Wisdom/Safety |
| Seen as a Success | Seen as a Failure | Reputation |
| Angry | Forgive | Judge & Redeemer |
| Comfortable | In Pain | Strength & Peace |
| Treated Fairly | Mistreated | Protector |

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Chapter 15: Spiritual Guides for the Journey { Pay attention! }

Beware of Relative Truth { 215 }

“And I will give you pastors, according to My heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Jeremiah 3:15. The life *abandoned to intimacy with God* for most Christians is elusive. Many strongly desire it, but have not been taught how to become intimate with God. Several things create this dilemma. The greatest of which is that much of what we believe is actually relative truth (because we got it from our relatives) rather than absolute truth. So it is critical that we choose the right voices to inform our souls (that which we believe).

You Need A Mentor { 216 }

Having a spiritual mentor is essential in most cases. You need someone who has taken the journey to intimacy with God and is way ahead of your current experience of God. To be sure, we must abandon any doctrine, tradition, practice or belief which stands between us and acceptance of the unconditional love of God. Most often it is our guilt, shame, anxiety and fear that cause us to keep a *safe distance* between ourselves and God. We think it is necessary to live a holy and morally respectable life before God. We think that if we live right enough, then we can have intimacy with God. But when we fail, we run away and hide from God.

Well-meaning But Misguided Guides { 217 }

Unfortunately, most pastors and teachers who have become abandoned to intimacy with God, have made some wrong assumptions about how they became sweet on God. Most of them have mistakenly assumed that their *exemplary moral purity*, their *extensive scripture reading*, their countless *prayers and fasting*, and their *meditations* were the cause of their intimacy with God. However, they are sadly and grossly mistaken. If they were correct in this thinking, only full-time paid professional clergy could attain an intimate relationship with God. The rest of us do not have the same amount of time to dedicate to God. Most of us have real jobs. Remember Brother Lawrence in the kitchen of the monastery. While overwhelmed with the duties of a full-time job,

Spiritual Guides

he attained abandon to intimacy with God by a sure and simple method of keeping God in his awareness at all times and in all tasks.

Blind Leading the Blind

Many *so-called* spiritual guides are wandering around with traditions and practices in hand which they believe are a sure pathway to spiritual perfection. And these may be useful, if your definition of spiritual perfection is anything other than *abandoning to intimacy with God*. Unfortunately as well, self-effort and self-righteousness are proclaimed as a way to draw closer to God. This is absolutely not true. Falling in love is not an exercise of the mind. It is an experience of the heart.

An Appropriate Mentor

Since you have not been taught how to develop intimacy with God by pastors or teachers, ask God to provide a mentor in this specific journey who has actually developed intimacy with God for themselves. You need a mentor who knows what has hindered your love affair with God and how to remove such hindrances. A mentor of intimacy with God will help you discover your misperceptions of God, yourself and others. Such a mentor will help you know the correct perceptions of relationship at all levels. So, not just any mentor will do.

Absolute Truth { 218 }

God's truth is what He says it is, not what we think He should have said. Our twisted and corrupted interpretations of the scripture keep us from what we want most, *an intimate relationship with God*. God's truth is absolute and pure. Our truth is relative, because we received it from sources other than God. Intimacy with God requires the basic exchange of any relative truth for God's absolute truth on that matter. When we have our truth aligned with God's truth, we will find the center of love and peace. So in *abandoning our culture* (family beliefs) with an intense desire *to embrace absolute truth* (God's beliefs) we cease the struggle against the purposes of God. It is this struggle that is the source of our anxiety, fear and misery!

Logical Opinions Are Useless { 219 }

There is no shortage of *would be* counselors or **wannabe** advisors. But there is a shortage of spiritual guides (mentors) with the wisdom

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

needed to provide mentees not only the absolute truth of God, but also the courage to disbelieve many of their current beliefs. It is only unbelief or misbelief that trouble our souls. The biggest hurdle for most is their pride in believing that they are farther along in the journey, or at least as far, as everyone around them, except maybe the clergy. Even most of the clergy, who have extensive training and high credentials in theology, have little or no intimate knowledge of God. So unless you are willing to submit to the mentor whom God will bring to you for this journey, you will likely never develop intimacy with God. You will likely have to humble yourself and submit to the authority of someone, regardless of their social or economic status being beneath yours. Otherwise, you may never be taught these ways.

False Spiritual Guides { 220 }

How do you recognize a true spiritual guide? There are far more false or incompetent ones than truly good ones. Therefore, we must watch out for the false ones. The enemy, Satan, revels in using false guides in order to keep believers from this intimate passion for God we espouse. Some false guides are easily recognized as such because their teachings are completely unreasonable. However, since there are false guides who are close to the truth, we must consider them more dangerous than the obviously false ones. One characteristic of a good guide is an obvious *deeply passionate love for God*. The guide's use of scripture always *conveys the unconditional love of God*. And in compliance with scripture, he *models healthy relationships* all around.

True Spiritual Guides

The true spiritual guide teaches truth without wavering. He will speak truth, even if it hurts, rather than placate or play politics or try to be politically correct. By this I do not mean he is crude or rude. But as Jesus did with the Pharisees, when they tried to corrupt His teachings of God, He had to call them down. A spiritual guide will teach you how to speak truth in love. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." How can a guide help anyone if he leaves out any truth which might offend the mentee. Walking on 'egg shells' of easily hurt feelings will negate entirely the value of a spiritual guide.

Spiritual Guides

Beware of the Three Sieves { 221 }

The Moravians now have what they call the three sieves. Before you speak, you should consider these three things. Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? These sound good, but they actually stunt the growth of believers. Absolute truth has no feelings, even though yours are affected by it. Kindness is not about hurt feelings or self-esteem. It is about saying what in the scope of one's life span will produce the greatest potential for the listener. Anything that can be received and incorporated into a mentee's life in order to bring them to a greater love for God, self and others is necessary. Unfortunately we have been largely taught that a good Christian does not say things that hurt people's feelings. That is absolutely *not* true!

Hurt Feelings

Another teaching among Christians is that a good Christian strives to be politically correct. And so on. The problem with these teachings is 1, *they are false*. 2, *they are destructive to relationships*. It causes us to focus on the opinions of others, rather than on God's opinion alone. The irony of the journey to intimacy with God is that one must learn the truth about their own ugly, selfish, hurtful ways in order to deal with them effectively. "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." This verse in John is best understood to mean, "You will know the truth about *yourself*." And the truth about *yourself* will be what sets *you* free."

Contradictions or Cancellations { 222 }

A third characteristic which depicts a true spiritual guide is that his teaching is always consistent. He does not say one thing now and later say the opposite. We expect this from politicians and dishonest businessmen. But, unwittingly, most of our pastors often cancel the message of the sermon by stating logically or spiritually opposing concepts. One of these which happens in supposedly grace based ministries is this. At the beginning of the sermon, there is a honey coating of the love and grace of God. God loves you every moment of every day. He loves you on your worst day as much as on you best day. This general tone is also reinforced at the end of the sermon, so you can go out feeling good. But in the middle, the pastor might say, "*But God is*

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

concerned about your behavior. He wants you to live right. He may even punish you if you don't behave."

Behavior Follows Affection { 223 }

To be sure, when we love like Jesus loves, our behaviors will also be more loving toward God, self and others. In order to become intimate with God, we have to eliminate all concern about our *badness* and "Cast all of our cares and concerns upon Him because He loves us." 1 Peter 5:7 Find your own spiritual guide who will teach you to offer thanks to God for the forgiveness you have in Jesus, instead of groveling and cowering before God in shame when you do sin.

Look At Me

False spiritual guides will place emphasis upon themselves, their credentials or their leadership ability. The true spiritual guide will focus on Jesus Christ and His unconditional love. You are not looking for anyone to be your guide into moral purity or personal holiness, because you can have neither of these except *in Christ*. And in Christ, you have both as God declares it to be so. A true spiritual guide will exude the unconditional love as witnessed of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Tozer writes about mystics:

Spiritual Physicians { 224 }

There are several other aspects of these spiritual guides that are important. First true spiritual guides are what I would call soul surgeons who possess *the power to diagnose the inner spiritual life - read motives*. Spiritual diagnosis is invaluable in maintaining good spiritual health. It is one thing to diagnose a problem and something else altogether to *prescribe a cure based on scripture* and not on worldly wisdom. We need a spiritual guide who knows God, knows the word of God and understands human nature. Their goal is to lead the soul upward into *a passionate love for God*.

The literature of the spiritual mystics focuses on the worshipper rather than the student. Reading it is to experience their passion for God. These writers were able to express their deepest feelings for God. These works were meant to be read in the privacy of personal worship.

Spiritual Guides

Here are some guidelines for reading this devotional literature in order to get the most out of it. Never come to one of these books as you would come to another type of literature.

Contemplation and Meditation { 225 }

Read slowly and do not rush to finish the reading or you will miss out on the fullest **experience of the presence of God**. Come with a **spirit of longing**. Be **prepared to receive** new revelations from God. Reserve ample time to quietly wait before God and meditate on every word. Come with an **attitude of devotion**. Develop reading disciplines of **silence and meditation**. Humbling ourselves in silence before God will create within us a real spirit of expectation of what we really **anticipate God** will do in and through this book. Before you begin to read, take a deep breath, set your mind on God's Spirit and open your mind to receive inspiration from God Himself. Come with an **intentional purpose of knowing God more intimately**. These books are for the souls of those who thirst for God and only God. The books will not entertain you, but will enlighten you.

Assemble A Library { 226 }

Sir, Francis Bacon wrote. "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested." The great Christian classics fall under the last category. I encourage you to assemble a small library of the books which have increased your love for God. I further suggest that your library include any and all media, written (books and articles), spoken (audio tracks), sung (music tracks), watched (videos) and so forth which may be stored in electronic form. What better legacy to leave behind than a library which contains the best of the best inspiring and revelatory works which have most helped you abandon to intimacy with God.

The Journey Is Rough

The path we have to tread is one filled with danger, calamity, ill-health, financial crises, troubles and difficulties. It is highly likely that you will need a trustworthy guide to help you along the way and enable you to learn how to live absolutely abandoned to intimacy with God.

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Chapter 16: Success Through Failure { Dig for the gold! }

"God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Galatians 6:14.

Surrender Your Rights { 227 }

Men who have lived the intimate love affair with God agree that God cannot possess, and would not even though He could, anyone who is not surrendered to the conquest of God. How much you enjoy God is in direct proportion to your trust and absolute abandon to Him. That is why rebels seldom enjoy the pleasure of true love. Yet even the most stubborn rebel can be transformed into a humble and tender friend of God. In Christ, any of us can become intimate with God.

We are created beings and as such are derived, not self existent. We were never intended to have life in ourselves without God. Codependence on God alone was His plan from the beginning. We will only reach our full potential in close relationships with Him. We were **created in the image of God** for the specific purpose of being **in intimate relationship with God.**

"For how dare we put confidence in anything so fugitive, so fleeting as human life. The wise man, I affirm, can find no rest in that which perishes. Nor will he lend his heart to anything which does on time depend." Those words were written by a 16th century mystic. And in our quiet moments, we know they are true. Why then do we put our trust in things that perish? Even nature itself teaches us, that apart from God, we are like orphans caught helpless in a morass of external forces beyond our comprehension. The only thing that is certain is our ultimate death.

God Is Not Surprised { 228 }

I believe that God is not surprised at the decline of the church. For just as Israel did under the Jewish religious traditions, they lived in cycles of rebellion, punishment, repentance and restoration. This went on, cycle after cycle, for two and a half millennia. So also has the church for two plus millennia since the birth of Jesus. Revivals have come and gone. The church is in desperate need of one right now.

Success Through Failure

But unless and until she is willing to face the the lions and gladiators of today with the love of God, beginning in the heart of each individual *Christ-In*, revival will remain distant from her.

A Personal Wilderness { 229 }

In my own experience with God, I too, wandered away. But my wandering was not in rebellion and complaining. It was an inadvertent lapse in my fellowship with God caused by what I thought was the right way to live the Christian life. As I became involved in my career and responsibilities as a father, I believed that it was my Christian duty to be successful and provide for my family. Little did I know that this very world view would lead me into a wilderness spiritually.

Distracted by Success

Over time, my career successes and excessive participation in lay ministries in the church distracted me from God. I read my Bible, prayed, read daily devotional books and all of that. But they actually brought numbness to my relationship with God. My first love had deteriorated almost to the point of indifference. But when God revealed my wandering heart and wrong priorities, I repented of that choice for my priorities and put God's business and purposes at the head of my list of priorities. And this restored my soul.

Responsible but not Responsive { 230 }

Many budding artists, ministers, and missionaries did as I did. They embarked on their journey as a Christian as *sold out* as a bond-slave by choice. But the glamor and clamor for success and responsible living somehow overtook them. I remember specifically one musical artist. Amy Grant started out in the 1960s with an intensity for God and Christian music. Later on, she seemed to have *sold out* to the lights and glitter of Music City, Nashville, Tennessee! Her music became very popular and profitable in non-religious circles. In more recent times, she has written some of the most life-changing lyrics. One that I use a lot in my current teaching and mentoring ministries is "Don't Try So Hard!" This song reflects a sentiment shared by millions of Christians who are working their fingers to the bone in an attempt to please God. Amy's song releases the grip of the *tyranny of the should* from their

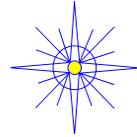
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hearts. It helps them **relax in the loving arms of the most significant lover in the universe!**

Gold Stars Instead of The Lode Star { 231 }



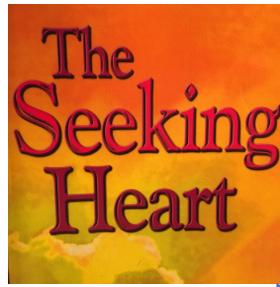
So where have all the worshippers gone? I would suggest that they have actually gone nowhere. They have stayed right in their pews. They have kept their gold stars for perfect attendance. They have continued their home Bible studies packed



with information about God but avoiding the emotional expression of unconditional love from God, to God and to all men, especially fellow Christians. They have continued, for decades, in their tiny klatches of men or women meeting. They have mundanely exchanged the same boring stories of their own lives. They have been passing the bottles of *Christian* baby food around, trying desperately to keep from eating the *possibly poisonous* fare of new revelation from God. And they have continued their prayer meals and meetings, engaged in a constant begging of God that He rescue them from their current morass of disease, distress or discomfort. And all of this has been cloaked in the same religious garb that covered the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

Affirmation of Men { 232 }

How is it that the *Christianity* of today should avidly seek the affirmation and acceptance of man, when it was the very most religious men who abhorred and rejected the very Son of God as He walked among them. How is it that we *Christians* are so intent on being indulged, applauded and served by other *Christians*, rather than washing every one else's feet as Jesus did? And how dare we claim to be *Christians* when we are so full of ourselves that there is nearly no room for God. Our busy lives shout so loud, that our words which proclaim our love for God, either cannot be heard or are taken for exactly what they are, hypocrisy!



Success Through Failure

Contestants in Popularity Contests

As long as we continue to be contestants in popularity contests among unregenerate people or other believers, we will be of little use to God. Jesus' disciples, according to Jesus Himself, will suffer greater rejection and more horrible treatment than He Himself did. So if you are actually popular in the eyes of other people, you may want to look in your mirror to see what sort of person you have become. Are you a *Christ-In* or merely a follower of a *Christian* religion?

A Remnant Abides

Alas, there is hope. There is still a remnant of *Christ-Ins* who are so deeply in love with God, that their lives are, and will continue to be, a sacrifice of worship to God. To that end let me tell you of my own recent experience.

Now That's Worship! { 233 }

I was urged by the Spirit of God one morning to visit a church whose pastor and some members were familiar to me. I sauntered in and sat down in the front row. As the pre-church music was playing my attention was drawn to a passage of scripture displayed on the video screen. It said, "Abide in Me and I in You. If you abide in Me you will bear much fruit." John 15. I was immediately struck by the fact that if each believer in my church or this church was truly abiding in Christ, our churches would double in size every few years. It almost moved me to tears to think that our lives, in Jesus, were so disconnected from the Vine that very little fruit was evident on our branches.

Worship or Entertainment

As the worship band of about twenty persons entered the sanctuary, they all seemed a bit tense as they watched me sitting alone in my expensive business suit. It was almost as though they thought I might be a government spy. But when their pastor came out and sat beside me and we engaged in jovial conversation, their fears subsided. They began leading in worship and the pastor and I turned to follow along with them. Because I was already well into my personal journey into intimacy with God, I asked the Holy Spirit to connect me with one of the band who was truly worshipping and not just entertaining. I

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

sensed only three who were actually worshipping and locked onto one young woman who in her worship of God ushered me into His Presence with her.

Tears of Intimacy

When the service was over, I turned and headed out of the church. Again the Holy Spirit caught my attention and told me to tell the young woman about my experience of worship. I went back to the stage and approached the young woman. I told her how her spirit of true worship had led me with her into the very Presence of the Almighty. She broke down in tears and said, "That is all I ever want to do in this place of service." As I walked away, I shed a few tears of joy myself. God had not only allowed me to worship Him, but also to be an instrument of encouragement to another seeker of God's intimate love!

Perhaps we need a call to repentance. Not a repentance for sins, but a repentance for shallow relationship with God. For all who desire to live abandoned to intimacy with God, *Christ-Ins*, the way is abundantly clear. To reach this intimacy, he must pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He must attend the funeral of his own reputation!

Oh, No! Not Death { 234 }

Men crave life. When they are told that life comes by the Cross, they are not willing to embrace the humiliation that comes with it. Yet if they only knew the absolute peace and freedom this death to life brings, they would clamor to have it.

Even though our cross of death must occur, God never planned for us to live forever stretched upon it. Jesus endured His Cross for only six hours. Once the Cross had done its work, life emerged. "Wherefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name," Philippians 2:9. Sharing the cross of death to self with Jesus leads us quickly away from our own pursuits and in the opposite direction from the crowd. We are now free from any and all condemnation and can walk free from all guilt, shame and fear of punishment. As Jesus put it in His final utterance from the Cross, "It Is Finished!" Never has a truer statement been made!

Success Through Failure

Christian or Christ-In { 235 }

There are several distinct differences between ‘so-called or self-calling’ *Christians* and truly surrendered “*Christ-Ins*” as they were first called in Antioch. The Cross, for the *Christ-In* is not death to sinful words or deeds. These are only the symptoms of a deep inner disease. The Cross for the *Christ-In* is death to the cancer of deeply selfish motive. His Cross is the last breath of one who has for his entire life been crying out, “Give Me!” or “See Me!” or “Serve Me!” to everyone around him. It is ever, only through identification with the Cross of Christ, that we allow our selfishness to be extinguished, so that His selfless love and life can be *born again* within us. It is this very exchange which puts *Christ-In* the true believer!

Love Like Jesus Loves

This is clearly stated by Jesus to His disciples at their last supper together when He said, “When people see the same selfless, unconditional love I have for you in each of you toward each other, then and only then, will they know that you are My Disciples.” It was this *Christ-like*, unconditional love observed by unbelievers in Antioch that compelled them to call the believers *Christ-In*. The only evidence, and irrefutable evidence to be sure, that one is a *Christ-In*, is an other-preferring love which is both observed and felt by the objects of that love.

**When my
appointments
trump God’s,
my actions
declare that I am
a Christian
atheist.
— J.H. Alan**

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Chapter 17: Emotionally Intelligent Design - (God's Love)

The Reason for Humanity { 236 }

Before the beginning of the earth and everything in its creation, there was God, Who existed in three unique Personas. God's primary emotions are love, joy and peace. Since there were only three in heaven to share this enormous love, they decided to create other creatures who could share in this love. Thus, in the beginning of the creation of the universe as we know it, God created man in His own image. Obviously, He also created thousands, maybe even millions, of other creatures that were not in His image. He created man with capacities that are so much like His own, that man could actually join the Trio in the love triangle in heaven. As many as desired to share it with God, could share this enormous love, joy and peace with Him.

Personal Sovereignty { 237 }

Free Will, or *personal sovereignty*, is the most important aspect of the *image of God* that He passed on to mankind. The importance of *free will* to every *creature in God's image* is that it is the very thing upon which all relationships hinge. Every relationship requires two choices. One must choose to love another. And the other must choose to love the one. Love (relationship) is always a two person choice. If either one withdraws or withholds love, the relationship is wounded to the point of death. One of the beautiful aspects of love is that the more it is given, the larger it grows!

Kingdom of Loving Hearts { 238 }

Since love is the ultimate in relationship, and brings us the greatest pleasures in life, it is the single most compelling force on the landscape of humanity. This is not a mystery when seen in the context of God having created us for that purpose for Himself. God in His infinite wisdom, released man to be his own *free agent* or *self sovereign*, to choose whom he would love or hate, embrace or shun, control or serve and so forth. The genius of this is: *the only kingdom ever established, based on the voluntary submission of those who wanted to be in it, is the Kingdom of God.* It is truly a *kingdom of the hearts of men.*

Mutual Choosing { 239 }

All relationships require only one thing. That is, a mutual choosing between two individual sovereign beings. We were each granted the

Emotionally Intelligent Design

royal title of king or queen at birth. And God could not be in relationship with us without giving us a choice to say either 'yes' or 'no' to His offer of relationship. If any person was forced to be in the presence of God, relationship could not be established. Such a person would simply be a puppet or play toy.

Man Willfully Broke Relationship

Man, originally without sin (in perfect relational harmony with God) in the Garden of Eden, broke relationship with God by violating God's only command. Man essentially in that moment of rebellion, said, "No!" to God. We should not be surprised that God, in His infinite wisdom, had also devised a plan to restore the broken relationship with Him and broken relationships between people.

Identified Alien Object

God's infinite perfection as a God of justice, demanding restitution for all 'crimes' (sin), mandated that He create a way to have justice served, both for the victim and the perpetrator, if ever the relationship could be mended or restored ("liberty and justice for all"). To do this, He sent one of the three, in the trinity of God, down to earth to be born as a man, live as a man and die as a man. His purpose in this was two-fold.

{ 240 }

Relevant Communications

1- So that God could communicate in relevant and personal terms how He feels about us and how important a relationship with us is to Him. And 2- so that, as a man, His Son Jesus, could live a perfect, sinless life and thereby be qualified legally to serve the sentence of separation from God in the stead of any guilty party (every man that ever lived). However, as with justice systems throughout history, the villain must agree with the commutation of his sentence to the innocent one offering to pay for his crimes. Without the criminal's personal consent, the offer of commutation is null and void.

Offered to All

The beauty of this plan is that it is available to any man or woman who has ever lived. An interesting thing to me about this plan is that it causes everyone to make the same choice as the two in the Garden. The only thing that prevents anyone from taking advantage of this plan is his own pride. Pride was the original sin. And pride is the for-

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ever sin. It is pride that causes us to indulge ourselves, seek applause for ourselves, and crave for others to worship and serve us. God does not send anyone away from Him. Each of us choose either to be with or apart from Him.

Together Forever

So, in the end, the ultimate purpose of God is to live forever with those who choose to be with Him and to let those go their way who do not. I believe that heaven will be most pleasurable because all those who enter in have chosen not to be selfish, but rather other-caring enough to give up comfort, pleasure, applause and worship for the sake of others (God included). How much better a scenario could God have created than this, to pleasure, affirm and serve other persons. In living that selfless lifestyle, myriad people in your pathway will be helped and encouraged. So now that we have the bigger picture, let us contemplate two aspects of the exchanged life (abandoned to intimacy with God).

Salvation Satisfies Justice { 241 }

-I have heard the Gospel of Jesus and that He alone can make restitution on my behalf.

-I believe that Jesus is God, lived a perfectly crime-free (sinless) life and is therefore completely innocent of any of my crimes.

-I believe that God had Jesus nailed to a cross to take the penalty of all who would believe in Him (consent to Jesus' restitution).

-I have agreed to let Jesus pay for *my personal* crimes. -and-

-I have accepted God's offer of relationship with me and said "Yes." to Him.

Salvation Accommodates Reconciliation

God applied Jesus' righteousness to my account, while God put my sin on Jesus.

-I was given the gift of the 'Comforter' promised by Jesus at His ascension back to the Father in heaven (a.k.a. the Holy Spirit).

-I became a *new* man, *born again, born of the Spirit of God*.

-I was made a new creature, one that was capable of selfless living, caring more for the needs of others than my own.

Emotionally Intelligent Design

-I was empowered to live selflessly, not just toward my most significant other, but also for friends, strangers and even those who might call themselves my enemy and treat me as such.

Beloved Disciples { 242 }

John, the beloved disciple, in Revelation 2:1-4 writes, "... you have left your first love" which confirms this issue. So, if your salvation has not been producing the fruit of the vine, that is, bringing others to faith in Christ, there is a reason and a cure. The reason is insufficient love for God. The cure is simply to stay attached to the vine in a constant awareness of God within us. This can best be expressed as "Abiding in the Vine," "Living Loved and Living Loving," "Abandoned to Intimacy with God," and so forth. When we are passionately in love with Jesus and God, our mouths will speak prolifically and proudly of Him.

Our Desire for Every Reader

Our prayer for all of you who read this book is "That you will be encouraged to leave behind any vestiges of mundane, common *Christianity* and fully embrace God in absolute abandon to intimacy with Him. May your lives become so reflective of the Love of Jesus that those whose lives you touch might call you *Christ-Ins* when they feel His Presence and His love flowing through you." My song for you is:

Absolute Abandon copyright 2004 Thomas Peck Music

Clarkson/Peck www.cathieclarkson.com

The story behind the song:



(I was reading a Beth Moore book a couple years ago – and in the preface she spoke of our need to be absolutely abandoned to the Lord. The words rang in my heart and I went to the piano and began writing what was the beginning of this song. In May of this year, I had the opportunity to work with an accomplished song-writer in Nashville, named Rebecca Peck. She helped me turn the musical idea I had into the song that is now the title song of this project.

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It is my prayer that we all strive to be more and more absolutely abandoned to Him, everyday.)

Absolute Abandon

I long to love You with absolute abandon
I want Your love to steal my heart away
that I might be totally surrendered
consumed with passion to seek Your holy face.

Chorus:

Absolute Abandon, to You Jesus
Absolute abandon empty at Your feet.
To be a living sacrifice, to lay down my life,
absolute abandon as You gave Yourself for me.

I long to serve You with absolute abandon
I want Your love to cleanse my heart and mind
That what is seen is only You and Your love
That as I yield, You will be glorified.

Bridge:

I surrender all, I surrender all.
All to Thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

Chorus

Repeat as above



Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Spiritual Teaser #1: Prayer — Spontaneous Dialog

Prayer is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied of all human communications. It may even be the least effective. I say this, not to discourage anyone from prayer. It is important, however, whenever you attempt to communicate, that you actually express your message in such a way that the listener, not only hears your words (and body language), but also understands what you intended to communicate in the same way as you understand it. This having been said, expression must of necessity be *two way*. It must be a dialog which gives feedback to the speaker which informs him as to whether or not his message was properly understood. The dialog continues until both parties think that they understand what the other has expressed.

Now, prayer, as it is used in religious circles, regardless of the religion or denomination of which you are a part, tends to be *one way*, directed at God, usually requesting (or begging) God to do something without any thought for what God might prefer to do in the circumstances from which one is praying. Mostly, we forget (or never even consider) who it is that we are talking to. Worse, yet, is that we treat God more or less like a lucky charm or magician or a doting parent who wants to indulge us and that He exists primarily for that purpose.

Christians tend to be among the most self-centered in this regard. Christians (as well as many others) tend to define *good* in terms of anything that is *right* morally, ethically or legally, or that is *comfortable or pleasant or healthy or financially rewarding, or that is something that gives me a good reputation, a following of some who respect, admire and want to be like me* and so forth. Yet, what God defines as *good* is quite different from all of this.

Now we usually grovel a bit, denigrating our character or otherwise speaking junk about ourselves. Then we launch into this *one way, myopic* begging for assistance and things that benefit us in some way, be it large or small. We pray for our projects, ministries, health for us, our friends and family, wealth, pleasure, comfort, easy living and so forth. This kind of prayer is ineffective at best and quite repulsive to God, We pray and nothing happens because we *ask selfishly* to the end that we may satisfy our own whims (lusts) in regards to each particular re-

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

quest. And the ultimate slap in the face of God is one calling himself a *prayer warrior*. Who on earth are you warring against? Jesus already won the entire war. You are waging war on an already defeated enemy, Satan. And in fact, you are acting like Satan, in demanding (begging) God to do your bidding rather than you surrendering to God and doing His bidding.

“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much!” James 5:16 Well, don't we all, think that our prayers will be effective because we are desperately desiring to be *righteous* or God owes us something? Maybe we think He will say, “yes” because we go to our religious meetings and scripture studies frequently, or because we actually manage to obey the commandments of God most of the time. Yet, we keep score cards of *answered* prayers. We list every prayer request that we submit to God. Then we place a check mark by each one that He answers. How *preposterous!* God answers every prayer. But we only give credit when the answer is a definitive “yes.” But God also answers “no” or “wait” as it pleases Him.

If you actually keep track of what percentage of the time God does say *yes*, you will likely discover that you get a *yes* answer about 50% of the time. The odds are about that number in games of pure chance! But, worse than this, when we pray with absolute confidence that God *will say yes* because what we ask for is a *good* thing, we are assuming, and wrongly so I might add, that our definition of what is *good* is the same as His definition of *good*. The problem with this point of view, is that it assumes that *God is made in our image* because we have been made in His. Wow! Is this not the height of arrogance, not unlike Lucifer who was cast out of heaven for exactly that reason?

Now, I am not suggesting that just because you may be guilty of *ineffective and selfish* prayer, that you should stop praying. Rather, we should *pray without ceasing and without fainting* according to the scriptures. When our prayers are the wrong ones, it is time to change the content of our prayers and the focus of our prayers. Further, the *without ceasing* aspect of prayer indicates that our usual and common definition of prayer and what we think its content should be, must be wrong. And, to be sure, that is a correct assessment.

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Prayer might best be characterized as a spontaneous conversation between myself and God.

“This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His Will, He hears us ... and we know that we have what we ask of Him.” 1 Jn 5:14-15.

So, the “effective, fervent prayer of the *righteous* man” is the prayer of the man who is in a *right relationship with God*. When, and only when, what I ask God to do is something that I know with absolute certainty that He wants to do, will I know that He will do it. So I must reconsider every prayer that I pray as to what results I am hoping to get. Let me give examples of some of my former prayers that I was convinced God would think were *good* and would therefore come through for me with a resounding *Yes!* answer. And yet that *yes* answer for me would be a *no* to another child of God praying for the opposite.

If I am praying that God will grant admission to a particular college for my son, while my spouse is asking that God prevent him from going there, God can only say *yes* to one of us. Or if the farmer is pleading for much needed rain for his crops to flourish and I am praying for sunny weather so I can minister to people in my outdoor adventures, camping, hiking and kayaking, God can only say *yes* to one of us. Actually it is most likely that God is not hearing either of our prayers, or at least will not participate in any way regarding those requests. This is because, to a large degree, all of us are praying *selfishly*. We are asking God for specific results which benefit us. And the results are always at God’s bidding and to serve His purposes, which we fail to acknowledge or even imagine. All of us thought our prayers had noble intent. But without the intent of *The Noble One, God Himself*, nothing happens. On the other hand, just because what I am asking for coincides with my personal preferences, does not mean that I am not praying according to the will of God. As a matter of fact, the more intimate I become with God, the more my desires will coincide with His and my prayers will be more and more effective.

Another thing to consider in the seemingly *ineffective prayers* we pray is that we often pray for something which *we* think is good but is not in keeping with God’s idea of good. We might be praying for someone’s healing, while God actually brought the sickness to them in order to

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

teach them something or to reveal something in themselves that needs to come to their awareness. To cut short the adversity, simply because it would be more comfortable for them, which we think of as good, could hinder their spiritual growth. Anything that hinders our spiritual growth is bad and not good. This is how God defines good. Worse yet, it might keep them from the very intimacy with God which they truly desire. I might also be praying for a result which would distract me from my relationship with God. *Every thing and every experience in my life is either an attraction to God's love or a distraction from it.*

In order to test my motives for prayer, I ask myself three questions. Is this prayer a *give* me prayer to satisfy my desire for self-indulgence? Is this prayer a *see* me prayer to satisfy my desire to be recognized as effective for God, to pray powerful prayers or to in some way bolster my reputation in the eyes of the people around me? Is this prayer a *serve* me prayer through which my desire to be respected, admired and emulated (worshipped or followed) will be satisfied? These questions, if you may recall, are the same as the appeal of Satan to Jesus in the three temptations in the wilderness.

Another gap between what we pray for and our receptivity to God's answer, either *yes* or *no*, comes by way of unrealistic expectations or selfish desires. We may, for example, pray for courage. We expect God to give us courage, because that is a *good* thing to pray for. However, the proper expectation would be that when I ask for courage, God will introduce circumstances into my life which will give me the *opportunity to be courageous* or to see my cowardice more clearly. Be careful when you pray for character. This prayer may heap lots of very trying times upon your life. "Tribulation produces patience." You may not ask God to give you tribulation / trouble. But if you ask Him to give you patience, His divine recipe for that is troubles which enable you to build endurance in that area. Some of your most challenging and trying people are the very workshop of God's crafting patience in you.

I had another interesting and revealing experience in prayer with a dear Brother from Cameroon Africa. I had experienced, more than once, terrible accidents on the highway. Fortunately in all of these cases I had walked away virtually unscratched while the vehicles were

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

completely demolished. As I was leaving the home of my dear brother, he prayed over me. This is commonly prayed. One part of his prayer was that God would give me a trouble-free, safe journey home. When Gilbert finished his prayer for me, I prayed for him. When I finished praying, I asked Gilbert not to pray for my safety in the future. But rather, I asked him to pray for opportunities to bring glory to God through divine appointments which might actually be produced by a terrible accident on the highway. Actually, after one of those devastating car crashes, my divine appointment was to deliver the love of God and the message of salvation to the EMT's who attended to me on the fast ride to the hospital in their ambulance! Even the Apostle Paul was plagued by various calamities in his journeys. And each of them produced opportunities to promote the message of Jesus and the love of God.

Most world events ebb and flow or swing back and forth like a pendulum or fly back and forth like a tennis ball in a tournament. But God has a purpose in all of these situations. His purpose is not just for the world at large, but also for me individually and to every other person individually. To pray for the results to be as I deem them to be *good*, is an affront to God. Only His definition of *good* can be trusted, because He sees the entire situation and knows what *good* can come from it for each individual. What I learn through a particular world situation will be different from what another will learn, and so forth.



Know this, my friend, nothing can be called *good* simply because it caters to my own (or that of my inner circle) selfish pleasure, comfort, affirmation, admiration, health,

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

wealth, or desire to be worshipped. **Only those things which bring glory and honor and affection to God can be called good.**

There are two goals of effective prayer. 1- that God's glory be seen by all; 2 - that Christ-Ins be delivered from their own bondage to *selfishness* and *misperceptions of God, self and others*.

We may say that we are pining to be in the likeness of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Job, David, Samuel, Daniel or others who were deeply passionate toward God. Yet we are not willing to be *set apart, consecrated to God* as they were. They were loners, but not alone. They were loners, but not lonely. They were rejected (by man) but accepted (by God). They were completely abandoned in a love relationship with God characterized by joy and peace when circumstances demanded the opposite. And they had become so enamored with God Himself, that He became their *Most Significant Other*, without exception.

Nothing short of a radical reformation or transformation can bring us to intimacy with God which is deeply passionate enough to bring heaven to earth in the space where we sit, walk or stand. The sum and substance of prayer is that it becomes as natural and frequent as breathing. It is as connecting to God in relationship as is human marriage to an earthly mate. It is a relationship in which we can finish His sentences and He ours. Our passionate desire for Him supersedes every other relationship we have. And our thoughts of Him are as constant as our heartbeats.

When our prayers become as spontaneous and genuine as the conversation with our family gathered around a holiday meal together, we will likely forget many of the things spoken, but we will never forget the wonderful feelings of being together with and in conversations with those we love dearly.

The single best defense against Satan, is intimacy with God. God has entirely defeated the enemy, Satan, through the victory of God's Son Jesus through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. Therefore we have no need to fight battles in a war that is over. *Let us be about our Father's business.* This business is the great commission which is to make disciples of Jesus, which in essence is to make *lovers of others* out of *lovers of self*. A disciple is one who has the heart of his master. When one loves the things his master loves, he will do what

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

his master did, in every situation. Stop trying to imitate the actions of Jesus (WWJD) and rather love like Jesus loves (LLJL).

One other thought to take away from this word about prayer, is this. *Self is never as extremely selfish as when it is on its knees begging God for things.* You and I are *selfish* enough so as not to need Satan's help or anyone else's help for that matter. The sooner we stop blaming Satan and others for our own evil motives, the sooner *we will know the truth (about ourselves) and that truth will set us free.* Am I, in the likeness of my Savior, willing to be used, abused, overlooked, ignored, humiliated and forgotten? *If I do the work, while you get the credit, and I am fine with that,* I am on the right pathway to intimacy with God!

Jesus did *not*, I repeat, did *not*, sacrifice Himself for any reason other than the joy in anticipation of an intimate love affair with anyone and everyone who would take His hand in marriage! Do not be deceived for one more moment. Love is not actions. Actions speak the words of truth in contradiction to the words of my mouth. Jesus endured the most brutal and humiliating of all deaths because, and only because, of His deeply emotional desire for you and me! His actions screamed to the ends of the universe, "I love you so much that I am dying so that you might live in love with Me!"

The most powerful prayers are those of which we can remember the least detail. That is because the prayer isn't formulated in our own minds, it is prayer by the Holy Spirit through our lips entering our minds by way of our hearing it as it comes from our lips.

I was recently approached by a man while visiting his church. He came to my pew and asked if I remembered having prayed for God to sell his house over a decade before. I told him that I remember praying for him, but not what I had prayer for. He told me that I had prayed that God would sell his house. And he said that God had sold it the very next week. The week after his house sold, the bottom dropped out of the real estate market. He was elated at God's miracle on his behalf in this regard. But he seemed almost crushed when I did not remember praying that his house would sell. Well, the amazing revelation to me in that moment was that I actually had not prayed for his house at all. I had prayed that God would encourage him and walk with him through the process of moving. That much I know to be

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

certain. I almost never ask God for any specific earthly result, only that the person for whom He has called me to pray might find a deeper, richer and fuller relationship with God. That is something I can count on to always be in the will of God!

There is no evidence that the prayers of the men of old cited above prayed anything but the glory of God. None of them prayed for the destruction of others. Even the weapons of our *warfare* listed in Ephesians 6 are all *defensive* pieces of armor except for the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which does not destroy the hearer, but rather discerns the motives of the hearers to their own point of surrender to the truth about themselves and surrender to the love of God for them.

Warriors *shout war cries* as they launch into battles of destruction and death. They also wannabe heroes. God resists the proud. You may want to call yourself or anyone else anything other than a *prayer warrior*.

Pray-ers *whisper tender words* of love as they surrender their very lives to those enemies who would kill them. Loving to the end, so that lives will be redeemed by love alone. Jesus prayed for, *not against* anyone!

Prayer is not:

- pious monologues on current events with an earthly vision desiring earthly results
- wish lists of what I want or what I want for others
- part of my daily *lucky charm* moment with God so as to bless my day
- an expectation of God that I do this prayer thing on a schedule

Prayer is:

- an awareness of God's presence with me day and night every day
- a heart eager to talk with a God desiring to be in dialog with me
- desire to become more intimate with my *significant other* in heaven
- desire to know what God wants and *agreeing with Him* on every issue
- desire to bring God pleasure by my expressing of affection for Him
- God and I communicating our inner thoughts and affections
- an opportunity to know His heart and mind better
- an inclusion of God in everything that is in my heart and mind
- an opportunity for me learn how to love God and others *selflessly*
- developing a unity with God in both purpose and desire

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Spiritual Teaser #2 — A taste of intimate writings

Excerpts, Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*

Fourth Conversation: Brother Lawrence spoke with great openness of heart concerning his manner of going to God. He told me that all consists in one hearty renunciation of everything which we know does not lead to God. We might accustom ourselves to a continual conversation with Him with freedom and in simplicity. We need only recognize God intimately present with us and address ourselves to Him every moment. We need to beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful and for rightly performing those things which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving God thanks when we have completed them.

In our conversation with God we should engage in praising, adoring, and loving Him incessantly for His infinite goodness and perfection. Without being discouraged because of our sins, we should pray for His grace with perfect confidence, relying on the infinite merits of our Lord. Brother Lawrence said that God never failed offering us His grace at each action. It never failed except when Brother Lawrence's thoughts had wandered from a sense of God's presence, or he forgot to ask His assistance. He said that God always gave us light in our doubts when we had no other design but to please Him.

Our sanctification did not depend upon changing our works. Instead, it depended on doing those things for God's sake which we commonly do for our own. He thought it was lamentable to see how many people mistook the means for the end, addicting themselves to certain works which they performed very imperfectly because of their human or selfish regard. The most excellent method he had found for going to God was that of doing our common business without any view of pleasing men but purely for the love of God.

Brother Lawrence felt it was a great delusion to think that the times of prayer ought to differ from other times. We are as strictly obliged to adhere to God by action in the time of action, as by prayer in its time. His own prayer was simply a sense of the presence of God, his soul being at that time aware of nothing other than Divine Love. When the

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with God, praising and thanking Him with all his might. Thus his life was a continual joy.

Brother Lawrence said we ought, once and for all, heartily put our whole trust in God, and make a total surrender of ourselves to Him, secure that He would not deceive us. We ought not weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed. We should not wonder if, in the beginning, we often failed in our endeavors, but that at last we should gain a habit which will naturally produce its acts in us without our effort and to our great delight.

The whole substance of religion was faith, hope, and charity. In the practice of these we become united to the will of God. Everything else is indifferent and to be used as a means that we may arrive at our end and then be swallowed up by faith and charity. All things are possible to him who believes. They are less difficult to him who hopes. They are more easy to him who loves, and still more easy to him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues. The end we ought to propose to ourselves is to become, in this life, the most perfect worshippers of God we can possibly be, and as we hope to be through all eternity.

We must, from time to time, honestly consider and thoroughly examine ourselves. We will, then, realize that we are worthy of great contempt. Brother Lawrence noted that when we directly confront ourselves in this manner, we will understand why we are subject to all kinds of misery and problems. We will realize why we are subject to changes and fluctuations in our health, mental outlook, and dispositions. And we will, indeed, recognize that we deserve all the pain and labor God sends to humble us.

After this, we should not wonder that troubles, temptations, oppositions, and contradictions happen to us from men. We ought, on the contrary, submit ourselves to them and bear them as long as God pleases as things highly advantageous to us. The greater perfection a soul aspires after, the more dependent it is upon Divine Grace.

Being questioned by one of his own community, to whom he was obliged to respond, by what means he had attained such an habitual

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

sense of God; Brother Lawrence told him that, since his first coming to the monastery, he had considered God as the aim and the end of all his thoughts and desires.

In the beginning he spent the hours appointed for private prayer in thinking of God, so as to convince his mind and impress deeply upon his heart the Divine Existence. He did this by devout sentiments and submission to the lights of faith, rather than by studied reasonings and elaborate meditations. By this short and sure method he immersed himself in the knowledge and love of God. He resolved to use his utmost endeavor to live in a continual sense of His presence, and, if possible, never to forget Him more.

When he had thus, in prayer, filled his mind with that Infinite Being, he went to his work in the kitchen where he was then cook for the community. There, having first considered the things his job required, and when and how each thing was to be done; he spent all the intervals of his time, both before and after his work, in prayer.

When he began, he said to God with a filial trust, "O my God, since Thou art with me, and I must now, in obedience to Thy commands, apply my mind to these outward things, grant me the grace to continue in Thy Presence; and prosper me with Thy assistance. Receive all my works, and possess all my affections." As he proceeded in his work, he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring His grace, and offering Him all his actions.

When he was finished, he examined how he had performed his duty. If he found well, he returned thanks to God. If not, he asked pardon and, without being discouraged, he set his mind right again. He then continued his exercise of the presence of God as if he had never deviated from it. "Thus," said he, "by rising after my falls, and by frequently renewed acts of faith and love, I have come to a state where it would be as difficult for me not to think of God as it was at first to accustom myself to the habit of thinking of Him."

As Brother Lawrence had found such an advantage in walking in the presence of God, it was natural for him to recommend it earnestly to others. More strikingly, his example was a stronger inducement than any arguments he could propose. His very countenance was edifying

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

with such a sweet and calm devotion appearing that he could not but affect the beholders.

It was observed, that even in the busiest times in the kitchen, Brother Lawrence still preserved his recollection and heavenly-mindedness. He was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its turn with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit. "The time of work," said he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer. In the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great a tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Supper."

Fourth Letter: I am taking this opportunity to tell you about the sentiments of one of our society concerning the admirable effects and continual assistance he receives from the presence of God. May we both profit by them.

For the past forty years his continual care has been to be always with God; and to do nothing, say nothing, and think nothing which may displease Him. He does this without any view or motive except pure love of Him and because God deserves infinitely more.

He is now so accustomed to that divine presence that he receives from God continual comfort and peace. For about thirty years his soul has been filled with joy and delight so continual, and sometimes so great, that he is forced to find ways to hide their appearing outwardly to others who may not understand.

If sometimes he becomes a little distracted from the divine presence, God gently recalls Himself by a stirring in his soul. This often happens when he is most engaged in his outward chores and tasks. He answers with exact fidelity to these inward drawings, either by an elevation of his heart to God, or by a meek and fond regard for Him, or by such words as love forms on these occasions. For instance, he may say, "My God, here I am all devoted to You," or "Lord, make me according to Your heart."

It seems to him (in fact, he feels it) that this God of love, satisfied with such few words, reposes again and rests in the depth and center of his soul. The experience of these things gives him such certainty that God is always in the innermost part of his soul that he is beyond doubting it under any circumstances.

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Judge by this what content and satisfaction he enjoys. While he continually finds within himself so great a treasure, he no longer has any need to search for it. He no longer has any anxiety about finding it, because he now has his treasure open before him and may take what he pleases of it.

He often points out our blindness and exclaims that those who content themselves with so little are to be pitied. God, says he, has infinite treasure to bestow, and we take so little through routine devotion, which lasts but a moment. Blind as we are, we hinder God, and stop the current of His grace. But when He finds a soul penetrated with a lively faith, He pours into it His grace and favors plentifully. There they flow like a torrent, which, after being forcibly stopped against its ordinary course, when it has found a passage, spreads itself with impetuosity and abundance.

Yet we often stop this torrent by the little value we set upon it. Let us stop it no more. Let us enter into ourselves and break down the bank which hinders it. Let us make way for grace. Let us redeem the lost time, for perhaps we have but little left. Death follows us close; so let us be well prepared. We die but once and a mistake there is irretrievable.

I say again, let us enter into ourselves. The time presses. There is no room for delay. Our souls are at stake. It seems to me that you are prepared and have taken good measures so you will not be taken by surprise. I commend you for it. It is the one thing necessary. We must always work at it, because not to persevere in the spiritual life is to go back. But those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep. If the vessel of our soul is still tossed with winds and storms, let us awake the Lord who reposes within. He will quickly calm the sea.

I have taken the liberty to impart to you these good sentiments that you may compare them with your own. May they serve to re-ignite them, if at any time they may be even a little cooled. Let us recall our first favors and remember our early joys and comforts. And, let us benefit from the example and sentiments of this brother who is little known by the world, but known and extremely caressed by God.

I will pray for you. Please pray also for me, as I am yours in our Lord.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Spiritual Teaser #3 — A taste of intimate writings

{ 243 }

Excerpts, Frank Laubach's *Letters of a Modern Mystic*

A rare experience awaits any one who reads these selections from the letters of Frank Laubach. In them a great spirit has opened the very doors of his soul and invited us into the inner sanctuary to share his experience of God. To read this book quietly and with sympathetic insight is to find oneself transported into an atmosphere of dedication, of discernment and of spiritual ecstasy which reminds one of St. Francis of Assisi. It is as exciting as breathing the ozone of a mountain summit and makes the reader long to rise on the wings of the spirit as the author has done.

Although Laubach began his missionary work in 1915, it was not until 1930, having to endure extreme loneliness when his wife and son were for medical reasons withdrawn from the field, and he was isolated from any intimate fellowship with them, that this very lonesomeness led him to the deep mystic experience of God which is recorded in his letters. No one who reads these letters can fail to see that through it all Laubach yearned to help those he wanted to reach with the love of God, to a richer experience of God. He did not seek primarily to compel them to Christ, but he strongly desired to make a deep and transforming spiritual experience the basis of their life. Here, as elsewhere in the world, the great mystic has been the loving servant as well as the effective channel for the outflow among needy people of God's transforming power. Enjoy!

January 3, 1930

To be able to look backward and say, "This has been the finest year of my life.", that is glorious! But anticipation! To be able to look ahead and say, "The present year can and shall be better!", that is more glorious!

If we said such things about our achievements, we would be consummate egotists. But if we are speaking of God's kindness, and we speak truly, we are but grateful. And this is what I do witness. I have done nothing but open windows. God has done all the rest. There

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

have been few if any conspicuous achievements. There has been a succession of marvelous experiences of the presence of God. I feel, as I look back over the year, that it would have been impossible to have held much more without breaking with sheer joy. It was the lonest year, in some ways the hardest year, of my life, but the most gloriously full of voices from heaven.

As for me I resolved that I would succeed better this year with my experiment of filling every minute full of the thought of God than I succeeded last year.

January 20, 1930

Although I have been a minister and a missionary for fifteen years, I have not lived the entire day of every day in minute by minute effort to follow the will of God. Two years ago a profound dissatisfaction led me to begin trying to line up my actions with the will of God about every fifteen minutes or every half hour. Other people to whom I confessed this intention said it was impossible. I judge from what I have heard that few people are really trying even that. But this year I have started out trying to live all my waking moments in conscious listening to the inner voice, asking without ceasing, "*What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire done this minute?*"

It is clear that this is exactly what Jesus was doing all day every day.

January 26, 1930

For the past few days I have been experimenting in a more complete surrender than ever before. I am taking by deliberate act of will, enough time from each hour to give God much thought. Yesterday and today I have made a new adventure, which is not easy to express. I am feeling God in each movement, by an act of will; willing that He shall direct these fingers that now strike this typewriter - willing that He shall pour through my steps as I walk - willing that He shall direct my words as I speak, and my very jaws as I eat! You may object to this intense introspection. Do not try it, unless you feel dissatisfied with your own relationship with God, but at least allow me to realize all the leadership of God I can. . . .

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Spiritual Teaser #4 — A Taste of Intimate Writings

Excerpts, Madame Guyon's *Experiencing the depths of Jesus Christ*

This little book, conceived in great simplicity, was not written to be published. I wrote it for individuals who desired to love God with all their heart. But because of the profit they received from reading the manuscript, many asked to obtain their own personal copy . It was because of these requests that this little book was committed to the press.

I have left the book in its original simplicity. It contains no criticism of the teachings of others who have written concerning spiritual things. To the contrary, it enforces those teachings. I now submit the entire book to the judgment of learned and experienced men with but this request:

Please do not stop at the surface but enter into my main purpose in writing. That purpose is to induce the whole world to love God and to serve Him in a way that is easier and simpler than any could imagine.

I have intentionally written this book to those dear, simple followers of Jesus Christ who are not qualified for intensive research but who, nonetheless desire to be wholly given to God. The reader who comes to this book-without prejudice- will find, hidden beneath the simplest expressions, a secret unction. This unction will excite him to seek after that inward happiness which all the Lord's disciples should wish to lay hold of and enjoy.

I have stated that perfection can easily be attained, and this is true. Jesus Christ is perfection, and when we seek Him within ourselves, He is easily found. Perhaps you will reply, "Did the Lord not say, 'You shall seek me and shall not find me..?'" (John 7:34) Ah,_but your Lord, who cannot contradict Himself, also said to all, "Seek, and you shall find." , (Matthew 7:7) Yes. it is true, if you seek the Lord and yet are

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

unwilling to stop your sinning (that is living for your own selfish gain), you shall not find Him. Why? Because you are seeking Him in a place where He is not. Therefore, it is said, "You shall die in your sins." But if you will take the trouble to seek God in your own heart, and if you sincerely forsake your sins so that you may draw near to Him, you shall infallibly find Him.

I realize that the prospect of living a 'life of piety' is frightening to most Christians. And prayer is viewed as a very difficult attainment. Consequently, most believers are too discouraged at the very outset even to take the first step in this direction. It is true that if you consider the difficulty of some new undertaking, it can cause you to despair and make you reluctant to begin. On the other hand, the desirability of such an adventure - and the idea that it may easily be accomplished - can cause you to launch out with vigor.

This book, therefore, lights the way to the desirability, the pleasure, the advantages and the ease of these two matters: prayer and piety.

Oh, if only once we could be convinced of God's goodness towards His children and of His desire to reveal Himself to them! We would no longer seek our own selfish desires. We would not be so quickly discouraged from pursuing what He is so longing to give us.

"He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him, also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

We only need a little courage and perseverance. Actually, we have enough of both in our earthly affairs, but none at all in the only thing that really matters. (Luke 10:42)

Some of you may doubt that God can actually be found so easily. If so, do not merely take my word for it. Instead, try for yourselves what I am proposing to you. For I am sure that your own experience will convince you that the reality is far greater than what I have told you.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Beloved reader, read this little book with a sincere and honest spirit. Read it in lowliness of mind without the inclination to criticize. If you do, you will not fail to reap profit from it. I have written this book with a desire that you might wholly give yourself to God.

Please receive this book with that same desire in your own heart.

This book has no other purpose than this: to invite the simple and the childlike to approach their Father, a Father who delights in seeing the humble confidence of His children and is grieved by their distrust.

Therefore with a sincere desire for your own salvation, seek nothing from this book except the love of God. With such an expectation you shall assuredly obtain that love.

I am not saying that this way is better than that of someone else. I am only honestly declaring, from my own experience and that of others, the joy found in following the Lord in this way.

JeanneGuyon

Grenoble, France

“I don't become a new person by changing my behavior.
I discover the person I already am in Christ
and let His Spirit behave in my stead.” — Graham Cooke

“God did not make us to be worshippers or servant.
He created us to be intimate lovers.” — Graham Cooke

“There is not standard of excellence in the kingdom of God.
There is only the standard of humility.” — J H Alan

“I am not holding on to God. He is holding on to me.”
— John Lynch

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Spiritual Teaser #5 — A taste of intimate writings

Excerpts, Hudson Taylor's *The Spiritual Secrets of Hudson Taylor*

The experience of the Practice of the Exchanged Life came to Hudson after nearly 20 years on the mission field in China. Read his account and take heart, **it can happen to you!**

“I strove for faith, but it would not come; I tried to exercise it, but in vain. Seeing more and more the wondrous supply of grace laid up in Jesus, the fullness of our precious Jesus, the fullness of our precious Savior, my guilt and helplessness seemed to increase.” Months passed. Hudson kept constantly on the move, his time divided mostly between the mission’s two semi-official headquarters in Chin-kiang (where the mission’s printing press was located) and Yang-chow (with its rapidly growing Chinese church). Summer brought yet another bout of serious illness that weakened Hudson for over a month.

He hadn’t even regained his strength before he embarked on yet another strenuous journey up the canal to provide medical care for Mr. Judd, who was dangerously ill himself. The Gordons, who were stationed in Soo-chow-Fu, came to consult with him about problems in their work. And the Duncans were on their way from Nanking for a special strategy session with the leader of the mission. Hudson had never felt so worn-out, pressured, or discouraged. He clung desperately to the end of his physical, emotional, and spiritual rope.

Amid a pile of mail on Hudson’s desk when he finally got back to Chin-kiang was a letter from his young friend and colleague, John McCarthy, written from the old home in Hang-chow. He knew something of Hudson’s inner struggles because the two of them had talked about them the last time they were together. Since then he had made a spiritual discovery that he wanted to share with this friend and mentor.

In his letter to Hudson he wrote: “I do wish I could have a talk with you now, about the way of holiness. At the time you were speaking to me about it, it was the subject of all others occupying my thoughts,

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

not from anything I read . . . so much as from consciousness of failure—a constant falling short of that which I felt should be aimed at; an unrest; a perpetual striving to find some way by which one might continually enjoy that communion, that fellowship, at times so real but more often so visionary, so far off! . . . “Do you know, I now think that this striving, longing, hoping for better days to come is not the true way to holiness, happiness, or usefulness. It is better, no doubt, far better than being satisfied with poor attainments, but not the best way after all.

The Lord Jesus received is holiness begun; the Lord Jesus cherished is holiness advancing; the Lord Jesus counted upon as never absent would be holiness complete . . . He is most holy who has most of Christ within, and joys most fully in the finished work. It is defective faith which clogs the feet and causes many a fall.” “This last sentence, I think I now fully endorse. To let my loving Savior work in me His will, my sanctification, is what I would live for by His grace. Abiding, not striving nor struggling; looking often unto Him; trusting Him for present power; . . . resting in the love of an almighty Savior, in the joy of a complete salvation ‘from all sin’—

This is not new, and yet 'tis new to me. I feel as though the dawning of a glorious day had risen upon me. I hail it with trembling, yet with trust. I seem to have got to the edge only, but of a boundless sea; to have sipped only of that which fully satisfies. Christ literally all seems to me, now, the power, the only power for service, the only ground for unchanging joy . . . “How then to have our faith increased? Only by thinking of all that Jesus is and all He is for us: His life, His death, His work, He Himself as revealed to us in the Word, to be the subject of our constant thoughts. Not a striving to have faith . . . but a looking off to the Faithful One seems all we need; a resting in the Loved One entirely, for time and for eternity.”

Hudson wrote afterwards about the impact of these words saying, “As I read, I saw it all. I looked to Jesus, and when I saw—oh, how joy flowed!” And on his next trip to Yang-chow he hardly greeted his

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

friends there before he began pacing back and forth across the room with his hands behind his back excitedly explaining what had happened to him. “Oh, Mr. Judd. God has made me a new man! God has made me a new man!” And so it seemed to everyone who knew him.

His friend Judd wrote: “He was a joyous man now, a bright happy Christian. He had been a toiling, burdened one before, with latterly not much rest of soul. It was rested in Jesus now, and letting Him do the work—which makes all the difference. Whenever he spoke in meetings after that, a new power seemed to flow from him. Troubles did not worry him as before. He cast everything on God in a new way, and gave more time to prayer. Instead of working late at night, he began to go to bed earlier, rising at 5 a.m. to give time to Bible study and prayer (often two hours) before the work of the day began.”

Only six months earlier Hudson had lamented his spiritual weakness saying, “I have continually to mourn that I follow at such a distance and learn so slowly to imitate my precious Master.” But this was no longer an imitation. He now experienced the truth the apostle Paul described when he wrote that “Christ liveth in me.” Instead of bondage, Hudson felt an exciting new freedom within; instead of failure, he sensed victory; instead of fear and weakness, he knew beyond doubt that his Lord would be sufficient.

The difference seemed so amazing and so simple that Hudson wanted to share the secret with anyone and everyone he knew—starting with friends and loved ones. To his sister Amelia Broomhall, whom he knew to be burdened by the cares and responsibility of a family that grew to ten children, he wrote: “So many thanks for your dear, long letter . . . I do not think you have written me such a letter since our return to China. I know it is with you as with me—you cannot—not you will not. Mind and body will not bear more than a certain amount of strain, or do more than a certain amount of work. “As to work—mine was never so plentiful, so responsible or so difficult, but the weight and strain are all gone.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

The last month or more has been, perhaps, the happiest of my life, and I long to tell you a little of what the Lord has done for my soul. I do not know how far I may be able to make myself intelligible about it, for there is nothing new or strange or wonderful—and yet, all is new! . . . “Perhaps I may make myself more clear if I go back a little.

Well, dearie, my mind has been greatly exercised for six or eight months past, feeling the need personally and for our Mission of more holiness, life, power in our souls. But personal need stood first and was the greatest. I felt the ingratitude, the danger, the sin of not living nearer to God. I prayed, agonized, fasted, strove, made resolutions, read the Word more diligently, sought more time for meditation—but all without avail. Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of sin oppressed me. “I knew that if only I could abide in Christ all would be well, but I could not.

I would begin the day with prayer, determined not to take my eye off Him for a moment, but pressure of duties, sometimes very trying, and constant interruptions apt to be so wearing, caused me to forget Him. Then one’s nerves get so fretted in this climate that temptations to irritability, hard thoughts, and sometimes unkind words are all the more difficult to control. Each day brought its register of sin and failure, of lack of power. “To will was indeed ‘present with me,’ but how to perform I found not.”

“Then came the question, is there no rescue? Must it be thus to the end—constant conflict, and too often defeat? How could I preach with sincerity that, to those who receive Jesus, ‘to them gave he power to become the sons of God’ (i.e., Godlike) when it was not so in my own experience? Instead of growing stronger, I seemed to be getting weaker and to have less power against sin; and no wonder, for faith and even hope were getting low. I hated myself, I hated my sin, yet gained no strength against it. I felt I was a child of God. His spirit in my heart would cry, in spite of all, ‘Abba, Father.’ But to rise to my privileges as a child, I was utterly powerless.

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

“I thought that holiness, practical holiness, was to be gradually attained by a diligent use of the means of grace. There was nothing I so much desired as holiness, nothing I so much needed; but far from in any measure attaining it, the more I strove after it, the more it eluded my grasp, ’til hope itself almost died out, and I began to think that—perhaps to make heaven the sweeter—God would not give it down here. I do not think that I was striving to attain it in my own strength. I knew I was powerless. I told the Lord so, and asked Him to give me help and strength. Sometimes I almost believed that He would keep and uphold me; but on looking back in the evening—alas! there was but sin and failure to confess and mourn before God.

“I would not give you the impression that this was the only experience of these long, weary months. It was a too frequent state of soul, and that towards which I was tending, which almost ended in despair. And yet, never did Christ seem more precious; a Savior who could and would save such a sinner! . . . And sometimes there were seasons not only of peace but of joy in the Lord; but they were transitory, and at best there was a sad lack of power.

Oh, how good the Lord has been in bringing this conflict to an end! “All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was—how to get it out. He was rich truly, but I was poor; He was strong, but I weak. I knew full well that there was in the root, the stem, abundant fatness, but how to get it into my puny branch was the question. As gradually light dawned, I saw that faith was the only requisite—was the hand to lay hold on His fullness and make it mine. But I had not this faith.

“I strove for faith, but it would not come; I tried to exercise it, but in vain. Seeing more and more the wondrous supply of grace laid up in Jesus, the fullness of our precious Jesus, the fullness of our precious Savior, my guilt and helplessness seemed to increase. Sins committed appeared but as trifles compared with the sin of unbelief which was their cause, which could not or would not take God at His word, but rather made Him a liar! Unbelief was I felt the damning sin of the

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

world; yet I indulged in it. I prayed for faith, but it came not. What was I to do?

“When my agony of soul was at its height, a sentence in a letter from dear McCarthy was used to remove the scales from my eyes, and the Spirit of God revealed to me the truth of our oneness with Jesus as I had never known it before. McCarthy, who had been much exercised by the same sense of failure but saw the light before I did, wrote (I quote from memory): “‘ But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One.’

As I read, I saw it all! ‘If we believe not, he abides faithful.’ I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh joy flowed!) that He had said, ‘I will never leave thee.’ ‘ Ah, there is rest!’ I thought. I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I’ll strive no more. For has not He promised to abide with me —never to leave me, never to fail me? And, dearie, He never will. Nor was this all He showed me, nor one half.

As I thought of the vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured direct into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in wishing to get the sap, the fullness out of Him! I saw not only that Jesus will never leave me, but that I am a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The vine is not the root merely, but all—root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit. And Jesus is not that alone—He is soil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for or needed. Oh, the joy of seeing this truth!

I do pray that the eyes of your understanding too may be enlightened, that you may know and enjoy the riches freely given us in Christ. “Oh, my dear Sister, it is a wonderful thing to be really one with a risen and exalted Savior, to be a member of Christ! Think what it involves. Can Christ be rich and I poor? Can your right hand be rich and your left poor? Or your head be well fed while your body starves? Again, think of its bearing on prayer. Could a bank clerk say to a customer, ‘It was

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

only your hand, not you, that wrote that cheque'; or 'I cannot pay this sum to your hand, but only to yourself?'

No more can your prayers or mine be discredited if offered in the name of Jesus (i.e., not for the sake of Jesus merely, but on the ground that we are His, His members) so long as we keep within the limits of Christ's credit—a tolerably wide limit! If we ask for anything unscriptural, or not in accordance with the will of God, Christ Himself could not do that. But 'if we ask any thing according to his will . . . we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.'

{ 244 } "The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being sweeter than another, is the rest which full identification with Christ brings. I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest position He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient. It little matters to my servant whether I send him to buy a few cash worth of things, or the most expensive articles. In either case he looks to me for the money and brings me his purchases.

So, if God should place me in serious perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that resources will prove unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is mine, and is with me and dwells in me. "And since Christ has thus dwelt in my heart by faith, how happy I have been! I wish I could tell you about it, instead of writing.

I am no better than before. In a sense, I do not wish to be, nor am I striving to be. But I am dead and buried with Christ—ay, and risen too! And now Christ lives in me, and 'the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' . . . 'And now I must close. I have not said half I would, nor as I would, had I more time. May God give you to lay hold

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

on these blessed truths. Do not let us continue to say, in effect, 'Who shall ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down from above).

In other words, do not let us consider Him as far off, when God has made us one with Him, members of His very body. Nor should we look upon this experience, these truths, as for the few. They are the birthright of every child of God, and no one can dispense with them without dishonoring our Lord. The only power for deliverance from sin or for true service is Christ." It all seemed so simple and practical—as Hudson's sister discovered for herself.

"But are you always conscious of abiding in Christ?" someone asked Hudson many years later. "While sleeping last night," he replied, "did I cease to abide in your home because I was unconscious of the fact? We should never be conscious of not abiding in Christ." The discovery of this simple secret soon changed Hudson Taylor's life and ministry in ways he could never even have imagined before.

What you think of God is the most important thing in your life. — Graham Cooke

"All of us need a radiant idea of God. It's the only place to live. To be astonished! To be amazed! To marvel. To be so caught up with the beauty of God's nature, it becomes who you are. . . . It washes over you day after day after day, and you love every thought that you have about him. You love every word he says. You hang on it because it's life" — Graham Cooke

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Spiritual Teaser #6 — A taste of intimate writings

Excerpts, Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*

{ 245 }

December 9. — THE OFFENSE OF THE NATURAL

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Galatians 5:22

The natural life is not sinful; we must be apostatized from sin, have nothing to do with sin in any shape or form. Sin belongs to hell and the devil; I, as a child of God, belong to heaven and God. It is not a question of giving up sin, but of *giving up my right to myself*, my natural independence and self-assertiveness. And this is where the battle has to be fought.

It is the things that are right and noble and good, from the natural stand point, that keep us back from God's best. To discern that natural virtues antagonize surrender to God, is to bring our soul into the centre of its greatest battle. Very few of us debate with the sordid and evil and wrong, but we do debate with the good. It is the good that hates the best, and the higher up you get in the scale of the natural virtues, the more intense is the opposition to Jesus Christ.

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh" - it is going to cost the natural in you everything, not something. Jesus said - "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself," i.e., his right to himself, and a man has to realize Who Jesus Christ is before he will do it. Beware of refusing to go to *the funeral of your own independence*.

The natural life is not spiritual, and it can only be made spiritual by sacrifice. If we do not resolutely sacrifice the natural, the supernatural can never become natural in us. There is no royal road there; each of us has it entirely in his own hands. It is not a question of praying, but of performing.

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

May 23. — CAREFUL INFIDELITY

{ 246 }

"Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on." Matthew 6:25

Jesus sums up common-sense carefulness in a disciple as infidelity. If we have received the Spirit of God, He will press through and say - Now where does God come in in this relationship, in this mapped out holiday, in these new books? He always presses the point until we learn to make Him our first consideration. Whenever we put other things first, there is confusion.

"Take no thought . . ." don't take the pressure of forethought upon yourself. It is not only wrong to worry, it is infidelity, because worrying means that we do not think that God can look after the practical details of our lives, and it is never any thing else that worries us. Have you ever noticed what Jesus said would choke the word He puts in? The devil? No, the cares of this world. It is the little worries always. I will not trust where I cannot see, that is where infidelity begins. The only cure for infidelity is obedience to the Spirit.

The great word of Jesus to His disciples is abandon.

Commentary: There is no word more emotionally charged in all the world than *infidelity*. This one human activity has caused more relational destruction and emotional pain than all others combined. I began to think about my attempts to help God with my life, or at times ignore Him altogether, because my great mind and common sense would suffice.

When I realized after reading this devotional that all such attempts to *do it myself*, were not only offensive to God, but also caused Him deep pain, I determined then and there to stop it altogether.

And much to my surprise and delight, He was always there with guidance which not only enabled me to get the mundane, necessary tasks

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

of life done, but also to find His presence and guidance in the unnecessary and frivolous, fun things.

Notice also how Oswald's declaration of war on *common sense* is walking in the opposite direction of the mainstream of Christian teaching. Unfortunately we actually give a conflicting message to our children and students that God wants total surrender and then telling them they must help God. Jesus' disciples themselves acted irresponsibly to the world's way in order to be fully and instantly responsive to the call of God. Beware and be aware of the pain you may cause God when you are obedient to the tyrannies of the should in your culture.

I recommend that you give it a chance. You will be amazed at how much peace trusting Him to guide you moment by moment in each day brings.

This is how to live
a stress free life.



Your heart will
never be changed
unless you will
change what you
choose to believe.

— J.H. Alan

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Spiritual Teaser #7 —What's in your wallet?

{ 247 }

When I refer to your wallet, I am also referring to your electronic equivalent, such as smart phone or tablet and so forth. I am not talking about your money or valuable credit cards. Although how you spend your money does speak volumes about your love for God and love for self.

Are there pictures in your wallet (smart device) of persons about whom you would brag? We often say that “We love God more than anyone else.” But the Bible states, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” and “Out of the abundance of what is in your heart, your mouth speaks.” So I ask you, “Do you talk frequently and proudly about God?”

Are there images of Jesus in your heart that cause you to brag about Him as much as you brag about your family and friends?

I firmly believe that the first century believers could not be silenced because their love for Jesus was so very great. It had to be an enormous love, as it compelled belief even when that belief would bring almost certain death to themselves and their families.

I pray with God that, if nothing else comes of this global pandemic, Christians would find a deeper love for Jesus such that when they return to the work place they will no longer be silent about the *lover of their soul*, but **live the love of Jesus** such that their coworkers are compelled to come into the family of God.



< Birthday Celebration

She is **flying** now! >



XXX

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Spiritual Teaser #8: Passion for God

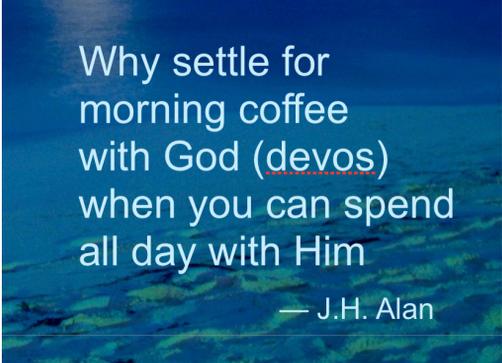
{ 248 }

For many years after embarking on this journey to intimacy with God, I conducted conferences, retreats, seminars, and Bible studies. I taught that we need to elevate God to the place of highest passion in our souls. I may have been correct in this teaching but God suggested that I try a different approach. Obviously, except for *love at first sight*, we generally take quite a bit of time to develop new relationships. So, God's idea was strikingly brilliant.

As I was standing in my shower one morning, God suggested this approach. I began teaching it immediately and found it to be very helpful for every one of my students and mentees. What God told me that morning was this. "If you can encourage people to just elevate Me to the *top ten list of their passions*, I can help them finish the priority rearrangement as they begin to *fall in love* with Me. I can and will get to the top slot, once I am in serious competition with their other loves."

For most Christians, even those who would insist that they love God the most, God is way down the list of their passions. Usually, a passion for God ranks somewhere below the thirtieth one. If you are serious enough and honest

enough, I would bet that an extensive list of the things or persons that you value the most, would actually reveal that your love for God is way down your list. Remember: "What's in your wallet?"



Why settle for
morning coffee
with God (devos)
when you can spend
all day with Him

— J.H. Alan

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Spiritual Teaser #9: Mirrors & Litmus Tests

{ 249 }

There are ways and means you can develop which will act as *mirrors* to reflect how others see you and help you become more truthful about yourself and become more like the Master, Jesus. You might also develop *litmus tests* which enable you to determine how caustic (like burning acid or poison) your expressions are such that you can moderate them. I have listed only a few here. I suggest that you create a list of your own and use them frequently to discover more truth about yourself, which will accrue to greater spiritual freedom.

One *mirror* which I use is this: I ask the question in *Spiritual Teaser #9*, “What’s in your wallet?” I was referring to people about whom I brag proudly? This helps me see how much or little I am proud of Jesus and speak delightedly and frequently about Him.

Three *litmus tests* I use to help me know the motive behind an expression are these:

Am I doing or saying this in order to *indulge* my desires?

Am I doing or saying this so that others will be *impressed* and think well of me?

Am I doing or saying this so that I might *manipulate* or coerce you to do what I want?

Another litmus test I use to help me see my selfishness is this question which I used to ask frequently after standing at the lectern teaching a Bible study:

I would ask someone, “Well, how was the lesson, good or not?”

This question could only be spawned by a desire to know if I had *impressed* the class.

You might think of a *mirror* as something that reflects the things you hold as *idols*.

Think of a *litmus test* as something that measures your *selfishness* which harms others.

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Spiritual Teaser #10: Advisory Admonitions

One Step Back, Two Steps Forward — Tozer speaks:

Allow me to go out on a limb and state something that I have no way of knowing for sure. It's an educated guess based on knowing spiritual laws and my experience in ministry. This is simply that once a person begins this journey of living abandoned to intimacy with God, in the first phase of that journey, he will experience some of the worst weeks or months of his life. It is at this point that many will get discouraged and give up. Those who persevere will find that instead of breaking into the clear bright sunshine, just ahead of them are more discouragements, doubts and deceptions. Instead of lifting you up, this kind of teaching may discourage you from this journey. But those who have been thus discouraged, those who have lost their reputation or been scorned or rejected by the church or have otherwise been pushed away, are the very ones who will become intimate with God.

Those who can still be worldly and not mind it, have made the least progress. But those who have found things going against them, those who in their longing and yearning for intimacy with God, wonder if He is actually discouraging them. They probably don't realize that they are very close to the very intimacy with God that they have wanted.

It is the giving up of all that the world holds dear, these very trials, that are making you into the likeness of Christ. Remember that the religious leaders of Judaism kept trying to discredit Jesus and called Him a blasphemer and finally killed Him.

A Little Bit of Glory

We conduct our Christian lives so that we get a little glory and our desires fulfilled our own way. Fenelon made this observation. "We are strangely ingenious in perpetually seeking our own interest and what the world does nakedly and without shame. Those who desire to be devoted to God do also, but in a refined manner." Tozer sums it up this way, "Evidently a man who could not invent anything, can, while claiming to love God, invent a way of seeking his own interests."

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Spiritual Delight: Simple Spontaneous Prayer

(Brother Lawrence)

{ 250 }

"... Spend the remainder of your life only in worshiping God. He requires no great matters of us; a little remembrance of Him from time to time, and a little adoration. Sometimes to pray for His grace, sometimes just offer Him your sufferings and sometimes to return Him thanks for the favors He has given you, and still gives you in the midst of your troubles, Console yourself with Him the oftenest you can. Lift up your heart to Him at your meals. And when you are in company, the least little remembrance will always be pleasing to Him."

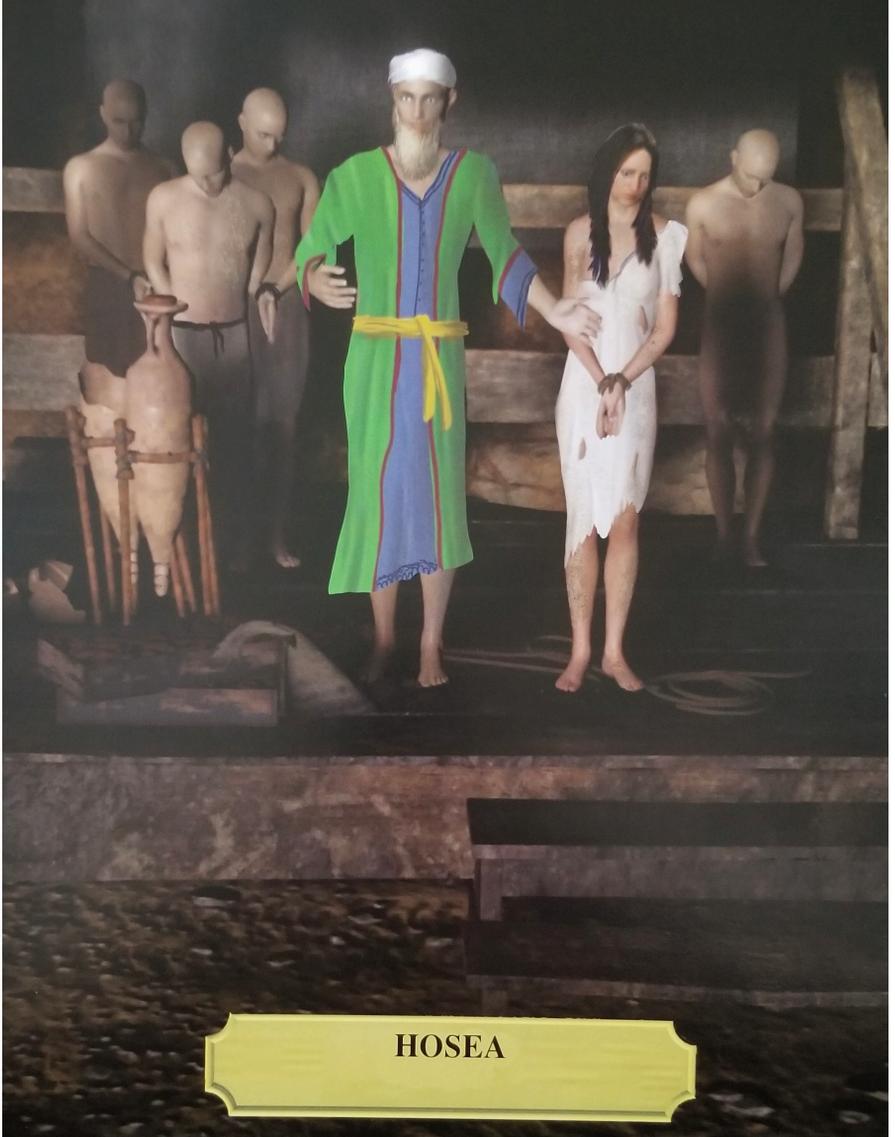
(Brother Lawrence)

"... I consider myself as the most wretched of men. I am full of faults, flaws, and weaknesses, and have committed all sorts of crimes against my King. In deep regret, I confess all my wickedness to Him. I ask His forgiveness. I abandoned myself in His hands that He may do what He pleases with me. My King is full of mercy and goodness. Far from chastising me, He embraces me with love. He makes me eat at His table. He serves me with His own hands and gives me the key to His treasures. He converses and delights Himself with me incessantly in a thousand and a thousand ways. And He treats me in all respects as His favorite. In this way, I consider myself continually in His Holy presence."

This is my prayer for you!

Father, I ask that You take all of these things which You have gathered together into this volume and use them in the life of each reader as You did in my life. May we all, pursue a constant awareness of Your presence within us. May we become so madly in love with You that all who observe us will be awestruck by our obvious love for each other. May our constant awareness of Your presence, energize our every thought and action, such that those near us feel Your love for them flowing mightily in their direction. And may it become "*on earth as it is in heaven*" in every place we walk, from now until we meet You *face to face!*

Spiritual Teasers and Delights



Herbert I. Burns, Jr.'s painting of Gomer on the auction block for sex slaves as Hosea buys her back again and again in order to lavish his love on her!

Let's Fall in Love — with God !

Spiritual Resources: [Classic & Contemporary Resources]

If you can't find them, visit our website: JohnHenryAlan.com

Wayne Jacobsen: www.lifestream.org

Engage; Sharing Father's Affection

Brennan Manning: **YouTube:**

Healing Our Image of God; Woodcrest; Cool in Jesus

John Lynch: www.trueface.org; **search: John Lynch grace**

2 Roads; Room of Grace; Biola; New Testament Gamble

Louie Giglio: www.passionresources.com

Hope - When Life; Fruitcake; Worship That Thing We Do

Beth Moore: www.lproof.org

The God Who Was, Who Is, Who Is To Come Atlanta 2003

Tullian Tchividjian: **YouTube**

One-Way Love; Inexhaustible Grace; Jesus Plus Nothing

Graham Cooke: www.GodInShorts.com

*Abiding in Christ John 15; 3 Stooges; Airplane Story;
Prodigal Father; Discipline or Delight; Missing Piece*

Matthew West: **YouTube**

Forgiveness; Forgiveness Interview

Laura Story: [www. Address bar search: her name](http://www.Addressbar.com)

Blessings; Blessings Message

Francois Fenelon's 'Spiritual Progress'

<https://ccel.org/ccel/fenelon/progress/progress>

Erwin McManus: *Unleashed (The Barbarian Way)*

Phillip Keller *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*

Brennan Manning *The Wisdom of Tenderness*

Oswald Chambers: *My Utmost for His Highest (classic ver.)*

Eugene Peterson: *The Message Bible*

Steve McVey: *Grace Walk*

Brother Lawrence: *The Practice of the Presence of God*

Francois Fenelon: *The Seeking Heart; (SeedSowers.com)*

Jeanne Guyon: *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*

Sarah Young: *Jesus Calling*

Tenth Avenue North: *Worn; By Your Side; You Are More*

Spiritual Teasers and Delights

Here are the names of myriad others (significant others) who enriched the soil of my heart, until just a few months ago I was urged by the Spirit of God to pour it all back out for the benefit of others!

Organizations: Alpha Delta Kappa Sisters; Grace Life Ministries; New Canaan Society; Grace Walk Ministries and Steve McVey; Transformation Prayer Ministries, Vintage Bible College, Reynolda Church, Believers Fellowship, First Baptist Church, Wichita Falls, TX, Youth for Christ; Navigators; Cru; Word of Life Camps; ...

Individuals: Boris Kressevich, Carl Baumer, Ellen & Jeff Steinberg, Charles Forrest, Cathy Fields, Frank Ferguson, Fred Hodgins, Steve & Jeanne Robertson, Dan Meyer, Dave Gordon, Allen & Allen Fausch, Doug Meeker, Al Alexander, Martha & Eddie Williams NCBM, Mary Beth & Dale Boger, Daniel Pasono, Dave Flemming, Debbie & Dean Harrison, Haines Maxwell, David Speaks, Dr. David Meyer, George Hoyt, Geoffrey Johnson, John Morgan, Karen & Todd DeNeui, Karena (DeNeui) Huston, Kathy & John Landis, ...

Musicians: Richard Kingsmore, Travis Cottrell, Marcus Dilley, Stephen Elmore, Doug Meeker, Brad Clarkson, Chuck Ohman, J. O. Stewart, Becky Peck, Luke Garrett, Pat & Larry White, Keith Green, Phil Driscoll, Steve Green ...

Pastors: Kevin Frack, John MacArthur, Andre Bustanoby, Frank Thomas, Chuck Swindoll, R. C. Sproul, David Allen, Dan Bartkow, Jeff Harlow, Alan Wright, Mark Key, C. Mark Corts, Kelvin Smith, Robert Schuller, Rick Warren, Ken & Sue Watkins, Billy Graham, ...

Relatives: To my large family of relatives strewn from Washington State to Florida and from California to Maine, way too many to name, but without whom these words would not likely have reached you. In memorial of Sharon Holt and honor of her husband Don

Significant Contributors: R. Allen Brown, Kari Tetrault, Robb Mayo, Dean Oldham, Wayne Jacobsen, Jeff Harlow, Jim Graham, Becky & BoB Meyst, The Stuart Epperson extended family, Rob Meyst, Mark Thompson, Ruth Ford Tilley, Brian Hayhurst, Brenda Wills, John Bost, Dean & Tom Groseclose, Pam & Scott Reed, Pat & Larry White, Gilbert Nyanjo, Cody King, ...

Let's Fall in Love – with God !

Topical Index

| TOPIC | Pages | TOPIC | Pages |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Accountability | 88 | Metamorphosis | 53 |
| Apprehending God | xi | Motives. viii 20 36 44 70 | 75 80 91 97 IV VII |
| Attraction or Distraction | 93 | Nature - Selfish | 17 49 63 79 108 |
| Behavior | 4-6 29 32 108 XVIII | Parenting | 27 77 94 V X |
| Change Beliefs | ix 27 77 101 | Placate or Obey | 27 106 |
| Choose Your Informants | 8 92 96 104 | Points but no Difference | 65 |
| Christian or "Christ-In" | 8 18 46 110 115 | Popularity | 5 67 81 112 |
| Commands - Old & New | 7 35 91 | Power | 5 69 81 |
| Contradictions | 43 107 | Presence | 51 |
| Control | 49 60 62 66 73 81 | Pride - Humility | 46 54 66 69 117 |
| Culture | xiv 13 18 42 | Prosperity | 5 69 81 |
| Ecstasy | 84 | Purpose / Reason | 11 31 |
| Egg Shells | 106 | Religion | 31 35 38 75 |
| Evidence | xi 3 20 44 115 | Repentance | 46 51 58 89 114 |
| Exchanged Life | 14 118 | Reputation | 41 46 63 87 114 |
| Faith - ENOUGH | 100 XIX | Responsible / Responsive | 111 |
| Forgiveness | vi 44 87 | Shame Free | vii 11 30 62 114 |
| Gracious | v 29 | Sin - Relationship Crime | 44 49 88-91 |
| Hearing God's Voice | 95 | Suffering | 57 92 |
| Hurt Feelings | 106 | Surrender | 81 110 115 120 |
| Image of God | 30 77 116 | Transformation | 31 44 52 85 |
| Intensity | 20 52 84 | Travelers | 10 16 56 IV |
| Kings & Queens | 68 83 116 | Truth - Relative / Absolute | viii xiv 50 104-105 |
| Knowing Yourself | 80 | Uniqueness | 75 |
| Loneliness | 6 23 28 XIV | Use the maps | 3 |
| Love - Choice | iv 4 29 61 78 116 | Wannabe | 5 57 105 |
| Love - Feeling | iv ix 30 35 79 84 108 VI XV | Who to Trust | 4 48-52 59 101 |
| "me" - "me" - "me" | 46 81-83 115 | Worship: what we value | 5-7 113 |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

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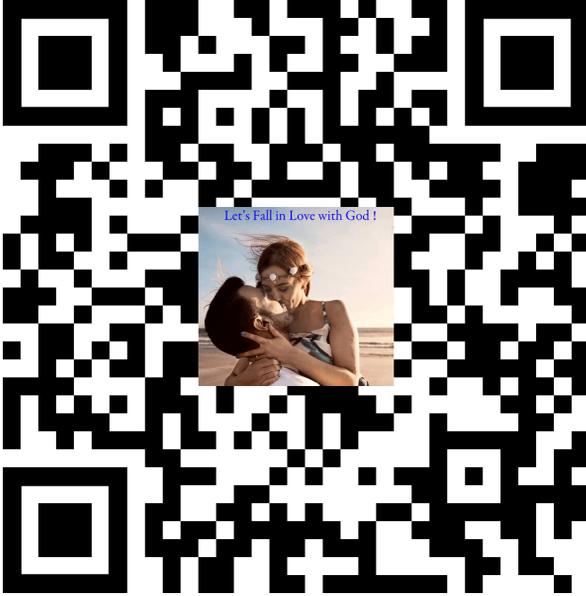
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