



Desire For God



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And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

We are so accustomed to receiving our regular "shots" of teaching, that we have conditioned ourselves to thinking that we always need more of them, whereas in reality what we really may be really need is to know how to *apply* what we already *do* know.

It's knowing God rather than knowing more ABOUT Him.

It's about ENCOUNTER with Him.

- Think of God as the Still One, in Whose Presence is fullness of joy as well as peace of mind.
- Think of Him as the Rich One to Whom you gladly come, and who it is safe to trust.
- Think of Him as burning desire whose desire is so great for fellowship with us that He sent Jesus not only to die for us, but to have intimate fellowship with us.
- Think of Jesus saying 'I have eagerly desired to share this meal with you before I suffer.'
- Think of Him as the All-Knowing One who knows every detail of our lives and who is prepared to share our lives and walk with us step by step through life.

Think how it grieves Him when we allow ourselves to be consumed by glancing "doubtfully" at Him, or by sideways stares at others, and backward glances to how much better things were in the past – or indulging in vainglorious hopes for how things *could* be for us if only certain things were not as they are.

God has given us today and eternity, and since tomorrow is the next day's today He will be none the less faithful to us then.

Most of us derive a large percentage of our identity from what we do rather than what we are. But what happens if we lose our job or aren't able to fulfil our anticipated position. Does that make us a cast off? No we are called human beings, not human doings – and we are the objects of His love.

If we examine the vocabulary of our lives we will probably find a heavy emphasis on doing:

- using this, getting or preparing, the other
- achieving goals, fulfilling projects or desires
- trying to protect ourselves by insurance policies and so on.

All of these things require both thought and attention, but the sum total of them can lead our focus being very heftily this-world centred.

The language of desire is rather different.

There is a need to get beyond action to loving, which in turn releases strategic acts of care and kindness and outreach.

There is value in pondering the meaning of events, and seeing the hand of God in the details of life. Taking time to see, as well as to do.

“This is why a retreat is so valuable. We are going to be with the Creator God and with Jesus, and with each other.”

At first this may sound somehow “weak” to our feisty achievement-focused mindset. In reality it is the beginning of a process of participating in the endless creativity of our Creator God, Who not only made the Malvern Hills, but Who loves to co-create through us.

God is vast, we are small, but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be eager to embrace a greatly enhanced sweep of our gaze and our understanding.

Take time. Make time.

Don’t expect to FIND time to do this.

It is closely linked to compassion. Have you noticed that whenever Jesus felt compassion, things happened? Desire broadens our spirits and expands our hearts.

It’s possible for the Lord to so inform and prompt our spirits that we are aware of things at a distance, and so enlarge our compassion that we can pray for nations with the same passion we do for people we know and love.

Active Ministry and the Passion of Christ

When we see Jesus moving around healing and doing good we are still in the realm of the active. Somebody pointed out that the verbs that describe this in the first two thirds of the gospels are what grammarians describe as active verbs: Jesus walked, taught, healed, chose disciples, prayed etc.

There came a time, however, when He entered what is known as His Passion. It occupies a full one third of the gospels, and here the verbs subtly change from the active to the passive tense. In other words things were done to Jesus.

He *was* betrayed, by Judas,

he *was* arrested (by the Roman soldiers),

He *was* tried before a prejudiced court (Herod)

He *was* sentenced by a cowardly ruler (Pilate)

He *was* whipped

He *was* crucified – and then finally

He *was* raised from the dead by his Father.

In all these things he went through something that we too so often experience, that of things being done *to* us. Yet whereas we are inclined to feel out of control at these times, Jesus knew that the Father was always in complete control.

And whereas he only reached so many hundreds of people in his active ministry, by his passion he saved the world! – and countless millions who have believed in Him.

I want to flag this up now, for those times when we are, or will be at some time in the future, in this condition, where things appear to be out of control and being done to us. When our jobs are at risk, or when unemployment strikes, when ill health strikes. When we are called to be passive rather than active.

Do you remember when Jesus said,

“Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted?” (John 6:12)

In the Kingdom of God, nothing is ever wasted.

Think for a moment if you will how it might be if things changed completely for you. **Amy Carmichael**, one of my heroines of the faith, was reduced to living in just one room for the last ten years of her life following an unexpected accident, from which she never recovered. Amy didn’t waste time bemoaning her fate; instead she wrote the books that have blessed so many thousands of lives.

St. Paul’s attitude comes to mind:

“In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don’t know how to pray for what we need, the Spirit prays for us in groanings that cannot be put into

words. All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people" (Romans 8:26-27). Christ called the Holy Spirit our "Advocate," or Helper.

There are people who are too sick, distressed or emotionally oppressed to even think, let alone to pray actively, but whose desire for God remains intact.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand endured 14 years of torture by the former Soviet Communist regime, three of which were in confinement in a cell thirty feet below ground. He writes,

"In solitary confinement, we could not pray as before. We were unimaginably hungry; we had been drugged until we acted like idiots. We were as weak as skeletons. The Lord's Prayer was much too long for us – we could not concentrate enough to say it. My only prayer repeated again and again was, 'Jesus, I love You.' " (Tortured for Christ, 1998.)

Someone who attended an assembly that Wurmbrand at heard him explain how he could no longer worship in prayer, being quite beyond words. He thought to himself, "If I could just stand up, Lord, would that be acceptable worship?" But Wurmbrand couldn't stand, so he said,

"Lord, if I could then just raise my arm in your name, would that be enough?" With the little strength he had left, he struggled to raise his open hand into the darkness of his cell. He couldn't quite get it above his head. But he knew it was acceptable. That was his prayer, more profound and articulate than any I have ever offered."

We certainly must stand "in the gap" for such people, and also call upon the Holy Spirit to "groan" in that unutterable language on their behalf. We go on retreat for the benefit of others. "Remember those in prison as if you were in prison yourselves." (Heb. 13:3)

"God has brought me into the sphere of silence. The silence around me is absolute. You cannot hear the guards approach. God wishes me to unlearn words. It is becoming more and more difficult for me to formulate long, clear sentences...I live in profound silence, a silence like that inhabited by the fish in the depths of the sea. The secret sign of the first Christians was a fish...

"Instead of a world in which bookshops sell volumes of sermons and poetry, I would like a world in which each man and woman is a poem of high thought, filled with melody and colour. If I am a hindrance to the coming of such a world, may God kill me here in prison! But this is how the world should be... Love all men, my dear brothers, but bestow the greatest part of your love on the ugliest souls. They need your love more than anyone else. You, my fellow-prisoners, must show your greatest love to the Communist torturers and those who betrayed us. The beautiful souls can endure without tokens of your love. Spend your energy where it is most needed!

"Let the word become flesh in us, flesh of a man who accepts the kiss of Judas and calls him friend, even when he comes at the head of an armed gang to arrest you." (With God in Solitary Confinement, 1969.)

How hungry are you?

I am all in favour of God developing our mind and deepening our understanding. But He doesn't want our thinking processes to get in the way of encounter. What we may really need is more desire for God. The hymn writer Faber wrote that the lack of desire is the ill of all ills.

CS Lewis wrote, "There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven; but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else. We are made to be close to the Lord."

Take time to find a place of stillness, to bring and submit your thoughts to your will and then to yield your will to God's will. It is so much easier for God when we live with an open hand approach. As Corrie Ten Boom warns, 'It hurts if God has to prise our fingernails open.'

Imagine how precious it is to the Father heart of God when He sees us reaching out to Him with all our hearts. . . .

Is that not what the world needs at this time?

There is a depth the Lord wants to release through us of authenticity and power.

All those who love Me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. John 14:23 NLT.

To no small extent, it is a question of what the Lord has wrought in us. *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.*

He who loves me will obey my commandments and we will come to him and make our abode with him.

No wonder we are commanded to seek the Lord early.

It doesn't matter two hoots what hour of the clock 'early' corresponds to; each one of us has our own body clocks; for some of us owls, 'early' will mean staying up late at night when there are fewer distractions around us.

It would be a great shame to make our focus of God-seeking revolve around a particular hour or two on a Sunday morning when we, as it were, depend on the skill and anointing of the worship leaders, the preachers and other leaders.

I love what Adrian Plass said when he said that he likes to look on the word church as a verb rather than just a noun.

We are called to do much churching together – and this not so much in a spirit of structure so much as of heart desire.

We can so easily do anything together rather than praying together.

Too many Christian couples don't pray very often together. God wants to do something about that – to renew the depths of our prayer life, the springs of it, the frequency of it, the subjects that we cover. It is so easy to become parochial, to pray little more than the grown-up equivalent of God bless mummy, daddy and the goldfish.

Whenever we meet together with other Christians we share things that are prayer-worthy – but all too often leave things at the matter of the cerebral information instead of going the extra yard to turn things into prayer.

It is so often when we say let's pray together that we turn what had hitherto had been an ordinary time of fellowship into an encounter with the Lord.

A good portion of my life is spent in writing - and the number one things that writers have to overcome is the temptation to make excuses for not getting on with the work of writing ! There are times when we would do anything rather than write sometimes.

Yes, we all have our excuses – we are too tired, we are too busy, we are too this, we are too that. And God knows our timetables better than we could ever do. But do we not always make time for the things we really want to do?

Enough said: now it's time to do!

We need to learn to see as it were out of the corner of our eye; to glimpse something that God is drawing our attention to. It is really important that we take it up, we harness it in prayer.

We never know how important that may be for the very people we are praying for.

God takes a little prayer and uses it to bring about great deliverances to reinforce mightily and to make certain things possible that otherwise would have remained just out of reach.

Two are better than one

So make the conscious effort that when you meet with other Christians that you will go the extra mile and say let us pray together.

You make the framework and leave it to God to decide how much to fill it.

Remember Gordon Macdonald's explanation that one draught horse can pull 2 tons of weight – but two can pull 22! Is that not a picture of how powerful it is when we are properly harnessed together? (Matt. 18:20)

May I invite you to let the Lord scan the skies, to direct your radar dish, as it were, to show you where He would have you renew your commitment in prayer, and to expend the greater bulk of your energy and service.

It may mean fine tuning your calling: spending more time with this person or that enterprise, and correspondingly less time doing something else. These may be important changes, for seek-

ing the Kingdom is about subtraction as well as addition – but only in order to achieve multiplication of fruitfulness!

Seeking to do a certain thing for the Lord may well be incompatible with certain other things that would be perfectly nice to do, but which we may actually be called to sacrifice in order to have the focus, the time and the energy to do something else.

If we are prepared to make such sacrifices it shows that we are not more influenced by the spirit of our times – the complacency, the lust of possessions, the lust of the eyes and so on than inspired by the heart motivation of the Kingdom of God.

Yes there are periods – especially when we are under the weather, or need to take time out after grief and other setbacks to recover and recharge, but always we must grieve into God and not away from Him.

May the Lord give us grace not to turn from Him in our distress but to turn profoundly to Him – and may we demonstrate that quality of empathy and compassion that enables each other to strengthen each other.

Wielding the Sword of Authority

Desire is whittled away when offences creep in, disappointments accumulate and our enthusiasm is blunted. We become like rusty swords when the Lord is saying take the sword of the Spirit which is shining pure not only to repel the darts of the devil but also to bring things into being by the word that comes from your mouth.

It is an extraordinary thing that in Scripture the two-edged sword literally translates as the two-mouthed sword.

The phrase ‘two edged sword’ is made up of two words: *di* which means two, and *stomos*, which means *mouth*. Why would the Bible refer to the word of God as a ‘two-mouthed’ sword? In Ephesians 6:17 Paul calls the word of God “the sword of the Spirit.” The word here is *rhema*, which carries the idea of a ‘quickened’ word – God giving us some clear insight or understanding through something He has dropped into our spirit, or which we have come to a clear understanding about. When God shares one of his *rhema* words with us, it not only gives us direction for the next phase of our lives, but also the authority to *attempt* certain things for Him.

The *rhema* word has the seeds of real power within it, but it is not enough to keep this word within us. Sooner or later we need to declare it out loud and then to act on it. As we speak out what God has given us, He adds His power to it.

I know we “say” all sorts of other things to ourselves that are frankly decidedly odd – quirky even – which in no way line up with God’s desires. But faith comes by hearing – and what can build our faith more than to speak out the truth of God’s word? Even if we only start with the faith of a mustard seed, the life that is in the word is released as it is spoken. An acorn on the ground looks small and insignificant, but hidden within that seed is all that is needed for it to become a magnificent oak. So it is when God’s word is spoken out.

I do hope you can see the difference here between co-creating with the Lord and the whole “name it and claim it” way of thinking. As Rick Renner puts it,

When you declare the word out loud, those powerful words are sent forth like a mighty blade to drive back the forces that have been marshalled against you, your family, your business your ministry, your finances, your relationships or your body. First, that word came out of the mouth of God. When it comes out of our mouth, too, it becomes a short two-edged (or “two-mouthed”) sword.

This takes us from being victims who are quietly submitting to whatever it is that they are going through– from just lying being stabbed while their own sword lies beside us still in its scabbard. We are *meant* to be taking ground for the Kingdom. May the Lord use you to release real authority in his name.

Friends of God

Remembering that we are called to be friends of God – and friends know each other’s heart (Psalm 25:14, Proverbs 3:32). Much of our knowing of each other comes by seeing, feeling, and being aware of things out of the corner of our eye. We know when a Bible verse is lighting up to us; or when the Spirit is convicting us that something is out of balance in our lives.

He may use a dream to show us something that is out of balance in our life or to point us to something that He would have us be more fully involved in; or remind us of somebody who we ought to get in contact with or to pray for.

Friendship works at so many different levels, but we must be comfortable with it operating at this profoundly spiritual level in our profoundly ordinary home and working circumstances.

Heaven is not far away – it is just a different dimension.

The Loneliness of Prayer in Arid Times

“The lives that are getting stronger are lives in the desert, deep rooted in God” Oswald Chambers

Our desire for God is tested in times of aridity when we are more conscious of His absence than of His presence. We saw earlier the extraordinary experiences that Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand went through in prison, and Amy Carmichael in the last decade of her life.

The Lord wants us to be very aware that His resources are available for us, even when we go through prolonged periods when we find it hard to sense His presence.

We are not going out of our minds. God may have withdrawn from us in order to test us; we may be going through hormonal changes or circumstantial changes or any number of things that make it hard to sense the presence of God with us.

But God honours our *desire* to keep seeking Him.

C S Lewis once declared that prayers prayed in times of aridity are worth three prayed in times of sweetness.

Some end up coveting experiences, as though they were an end in themselves. I love sun bathing, but it doesn't usually achieve very much. It is usually actually the time when I have my back to some wall and feel as though I am in darkness that I pray much more earnestly and with much greater singleness of heart: that is when I see usually the Lord accomplishing the most powerful and lasting results.

Somebody once said it is the devil who teaches us to pray unceasingly. That sounds blasphemous at first, but I know what they mean.

The pressure has caused these people to do exactly what the Bible says: *call on Me in the day of trouble and I will answer you says the Lord.*

Perseverance and Courage

We have less than no idea *how* the Lord will answer our prayers and our longings, but He takes and uses them all.

Therefore, at the deepest level of the soul we cannot afford to lose heart. Jesus teaches more about the need for perseverance in the context of prayer than any other single quality.

Jesus needs those who know Him intimately, love Him dearly and are courageous enough to go in to attempt the things He calls us to do.

Without courage nothing of any lasting worth is achieved for the Kingdom.

This calling on us is strong. Our task is to be linked together. Our meat is to do the will of Him who called us.

The phrase “take courage” was Biblical long before a certain brewery firm took hold of it.

To use another example from the brewery advertising world, the prayers of others can reach the parts our own cannot.

Desire makes Prayer an adventure

The Lord wants the spirit of prayer to be an adventure and not a chore. The man who popped into bed pointing and saying *same as usual for a Monday night Lord.*

Let the desire to pray become an adventure again in you.

Let the desire be a sturdy and robust thing that is not easily knocked by the sudden knocks that come our way.

Don't succumb to bitterness - use forgiveness as a weapon

I think we have all found the ones that come from hurts within the body of Christ perhaps the most painful of all.

Misunderstandings, seemingly cruel words spoken, certainly cruel actions – we are not exempt from these things in the Body, and they can blunt the fine edge of our desire.

When we have been truly hurt we cannot hope to reach that place of deep forgiveness in one fell swoop.

There are often layers to go through. We make the framework and say the right words, but it may take some considerable time to work right through to the place where we can truly bless the people who have hurt us and wish them the very best of the Lord's generosity when inwardly we are saying Lord they deserve to be brought down a peg or two.

May the Lord give us new springs of hope and new wells of forgiveness and not allow ourselves to be trapped and limited by bitterness.

As my friend put it from America – *May the Lord make our hearts stronger and not harder through the things that we suffer.*

Bitterness is such a horrible thing. It colours everything and poisons the well.

May the Lord search our hearts and show us where we have any trace of it towards family members, church members, colleagues at work, neighbours – literal and physical neighbours.

Remembering that He can always pick us up one more time than we can fail or fall, or and pick us up one more time too than we can be pushed over by others.

In the RSV translation it says *those who suffer with Him will also reign with Him.*

I love to spell the word suffering therefore suffer-reign.

Some of you have known a great deal of this in your life.

I pray the Lord will refresh the depths of your soul from the things that you have suffered so you can experience more of the *now O God.*

Open wide your hearts to receive this now. It is not that he wants us to forget what has happened in the past blithely, rather, it can become a valuable springboard for the future with which to launch more faith; precious memories becoming something creative with the Lord.

It is only when we have unhealthy ties to the past that we are unable to fully embrace the present moment.

And from there it is only a small step to fearing the future which feels less complete than what we have known in the past.

The Lord was and is and is to come but His focus for us now is on who He is for as we are faithful with Him today, He will take care of all our tomorrows.

As He has been faithful up to now, so he will be for those whose great desire is to please and honour Him.

Obstacles to Desire

Finally, with some reluctance, we must turn to the thing that would most hinder us: dishonesty in our relationships with God, and barriers that we set up between ourselves and others.

Someone once said, "We are only as close to God as we are to those who love us least". Or, to put that more strongly, to those who hate us most. What a challenge!

Most of you in all probability do not have dedicated opponents. It is a particular cross that many around the world do have to bear. It takes real grace to allow the love of God to flow through the Cross to these less than loveable ones? But as Jesus warned, we all love the people who love us anyway.

John speaks in his first letter about sins that do lead to death, and those that do not. (eg 5:16-17) We do not know precisely what the author had in mind here. The NIV study Bible says,

Judaism distinguished between deliberate sins--sins of open rebellion against God that were punishable by death--and inadvertent sins that can be atoned for ([Lev 4](#); [Nu 15:22, 29](#)). First-century Judaism retained this pattern. In the Johannine community some such distinction was pre-

sumably made, hence the limitation "sin that leads to death." Why does he make such an exception?

For life to be given to those who deny Jesus Christ, hate their brothers, and refuse the witness of God would be a contradiction. Since such persons deny the mercy of God, prayer for them would appear to be limited to asking for their repentance and conversion to God's truth.

John goes on, in 5:17, to warn that 'All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.' John aims first at honesty (cf. 1:8) and only then at resolution. Sin is not dealt with by denial but by confession and by community intercession (v. 16). Where this intercession occurs, the divine life of God is present and fellowship with God occurs. Within this life and fellowship, the blood of Jesus Christ purifies believers from all sin (1:7).

I hope I do not need to spell this matter out any more clearly. There is never any place for condemnation in the Body of Christ, but neither is there any place for slackness. Rules are rules, and none of us are above the Word of God. Where we are putting off doing what is right, and facing people and situations that need addressing, we are only wise if we are truly willing to do so but sense the Lord's hand of restraint until another time. There are occasions when to wade in would be to place ourselves too close to an angry bear to do ourselves or others any good. But one thing is for certain: we must be willing to do so, or we are liable to find our desire for God trickling into the sand!

For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of **fools** will destroy them . . .

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,
but the folly of **fools** is deception. Fools mock at making amends for sin,
but goodwill is found among the upright. (Proverbs 1:32, 14:8-9)

When you are struck, try praying from another perspective

There are other occasions when we are not getting through on one track not because we are "in sin" but because our prayers have become "stuck" like a gramophone needle in a groove. It may well be time to ask another question, and then to respond actively: "Lord is there any reason why I should not (do such and such a thing)? If the Lord does not go the extra mile and show us that that would be wrong, then we should do it, and so break the log jam and get ourselves moving once more.

We are wise if we seek the counsel of others, and they will help us because we are too subjectively bound up with the situation to be able to pray objectively into it, but others can pray for us with the necessary faith and objectivity. We cannot afford to be slavishly in bondage to our burdens.

The way of a fool seems right to him,
but a wise man listens to **advice**. (Proverbs 12:15)

Pride only breeds quarrels,
but wisdom is found in **those who take advice**. (Proverbs 13:10)

Listen to **advice** and accept instruction,
and in the end you will be wise. (Proverbs 19:20)

Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. (Proverbs 27:9)

Read also Proverbs chapter 2:1-11.

When we have been praying for a long time about our situations the soul can get wrapped around itself and we need to have our burdens repositioned so that they flow through us to the cross of Christ, the stopping place and we are free to continue again.

Developing our relationship with the Lord

When David Watson was on his deathbed the Lord said to him *all your writings and all your preaching* (and they were mightily used of God) *are as nothing compared with your relationship with Me.*

That is the power of what He is offering us and which we must at all costs seek not just to preserve but to develop.

it is precisely the renunciation of all desire to satisfy the senses that makes prayer strong and real. One meets God beyond the senses, beyond the imagination, beyond nature.

This is crucial: as long as we pray only when and how we want to, our life of prayer is bound to run in fits and starts. The slightest upset – let alone a full blown toothache - will be enough to destroy the whole edifice of our prayer life.

“You must strip your prayers,” the novice master told me. You must simplify, de-intellectualize. Put yourself in front of Jesus as a poor man: not with any big ideas, but with living faith. Remain motionless in an act of love before the Father. Don't try to reach God with your understanding; that is impossible. Reach him in love; that is possible.

“The struggle is not easy, because nature will try to get back her own, get her dose of enjoyment; but union with Christ Crucified is something quite different.

“After some hours - or some days - of this exercise, the body relaxes. The will becomes passive. The senses go to sleep. Or rather, as St. John of the Cross says, the night of senses is beginning. Then prayer becomes something serious, even if it is painful and dry. So serious that one can no longer do without it. The soul begins to share the redemptive work of Jesus. (Carlo Carretto).