

The Lover of Your Soul

Many Christians struggle in their relationship with the Lord because they don't realize that He sincerely desires intimate fellowship.

Some years ago the Lord visited my spiritual father, Paul Cain, who is now in his mid-70s and has been prophesying for more than 60 years. The Lord told him that He was going to raise up a young adult movement all over the world and reveal to the youth a new approach to holiness. It will be an approach that "wows" people with a revelation of His tenderness.

Instead of being motivated by fear or shame, believers will be drawn to holiness because of their understanding of the affection for them that burns in God's heart. The Lord told Paul Cain that He is raising up millions of sons and daughters who are motivated in this way and who will motivate others through this approach, which the prophet Jeremiah described as being "married to the Lord" (see Jer. 3:14).

What does it mean to be married to the Lord? We begin by recognizing that He is a passionate Bridegroom. That leads us to understand that we are His prized bride.

Often men struggle to view themselves as the bride of Christ. But the position we hold as the bride of Christ is not about being male or female. Men are the bride of Christ just as women are the sons of God. Both identities describe a position of privilege that transcends gender.

When God calls us the bride of Christ, it means He is sharing

His heart in intimacy with us. In other words, the message of the bride of Christ is that God is inviting us to experience intimacy with the deep things of His heart. And intimacy with God is not an option; it is the very essence of true Christianity.

But we cannot understand ourselves as a cherished bride until we know what our Husband is like. If we perceive God as angry or disappointed, how can we enter into our true identity? We'll have an inaccurate, distorted portrait of ourselves as well as of Him.

When we come before this passionate Bridegroom as His cherished bride, Jesus progressively reveals certain aspects of His heart to us. Typically, He begins with His tenderness and mercy.

A God of Tenderness. Jeremiah tells us God delights in showing us lovingkindness (see Jer. 9:24). He knows we can bring nothing to the bargaining table to motivate Him to deal kindly with us. He is fully motivated within Himself to be merciful.

But this is an extremely difficult message for people to receive. We are often hard on ourselves, thinking that condemning ourselves will somehow soften God's response.

The truth is, when we ask for forgiveness, the Lord forgives us instantly. His tenderness toward us far surpasses our own.

But most of the body of Christ is not established in even the most elementary understanding of God's mercy. They see Him as unreasonably fierce in His determination to get the job done. They imagine He is bent on accomplishing His purposes without

accepting mistakes along the way.

How wrong this perception is! God knew we would mess up. He saw it way in advance and made provision for it. He knows our frailty, both physical and emotional. He recognizes the limited capacity of our hearts.

But He is a God who recognizes and looks for our determination toward obedience over and above human frailty. He sees the yes in the hearts of His people and says, "I understand your weakness, and yet I recognize your willingness to be wholly Mine." He looks at the agreement in our hearts and calls forth our budding virtues into full maturity.

A God of Gladness. The second revelation He gives us is that He is a God of gladness. He possesses powerful pleasures beyond our comprehension. His rejoicing emotions are infinite in measure and eternal in duration.

Most people are accustomed to relating to a God they believe is mostly mad or mostly sad when they come before Him. They imagine that He is either mad because they have rebelled, or sad and grieved all the time because His people are not dedicated enough.

In Luke 15:4-7, Jesus describes what God's emotions are like toward those who lose their way in weakness. He portrays the Father going after the lost sheep until He finds him. When He does, He lays him on His shoulders and carries him home, rejoicing with great gladness all the while.

A God of Burning Desire. The third revelation is that our Bridegroom God burns with fiery affections. This fact is

separate and distinct from His tenderness and great gladness.

Most people have a hard time thinking of God as desiring or wanting anything. After all, He owns everything.

But the fact is deeply rooted in Scripture that He is full of intense desire and burning love for each of us. He longs to be near each one of us personally, in the way friends and lovers want to be together. This God of affection is what so many are longing to encounter, even though they may not be aware that the encounter will radically transform their hearts.

What gives us true meaning in the vast, complex world in which we find ourselves is that God pursues us with passionate desire. We did nothing to become born, and since then we have stumbled and fallen in so many ways.

Yet Jesus, our Bridegroom God, says, "I want you!" And that confers upon us eternal significance. We are the ones God desires. Though every other circumstance be unstable, and though we mess up in myriad ways, we walk in grace before an audience of One with profound success and contentment simply because He longs for us and declares Himself the lover of our souls.

A God of Fascinating Beauty. The final dimension of the Bridegroom God at which we will look is His infinite beauty. One day we will gaze upon Him for billions of years at a stretch. This description and any other will seem pitiful in its attempt to convey the reality of Him, but we must understand as well as we can that our Bridegroom possesses a beauty that transcends any other in the created realm.

He is far above all other magnificence and pleasure. His endless splendor shines forth from His tenderness, gladness and desire for us. (Indeed, it's impossible to understand His beauty without first understanding His tenderness, gladness and desire, for His beauty radiates from them.) As we encounter it through Scripture and by His revelation in our spirits, His beauty fascinates and captivates our hearts. He woos and wows us with magnificence.

Fascination with the God of beauty is easily the greatest source of pleasure in heaven and earth. Above all things that give the human heart pleasure, one is paramount: God revealing Himself to us personally and individually.

David testified, "At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11, NKJV). He was saying, in a way, "When I discover more of Your beauty, my spirit is completely exhilarated!" He experienced the highest pleasure known to the human heart. He lived with a fascinated heart that continually discovered new dimensions of God's magnificence.

King David gave insight into his heart's obsession when he testified, "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4, niv). This must also become our obsession if we are to be people after God's own heart fulfilling our destiny in this generation.

We will have divine satisfaction forever, discovering more of His beauty through endless ages. Let's begin now!

Indeed, we must begin now, for the sake of what God would have

us be. He wants us to be caught up in fascination and to become confident in love before Him; then and only then does He reveal more of His sublime beauty to us. Take one step into this realm, and you will find it's impossible to exhaust His store of surprises; they unfold as you perceive more of His heart and as He reveals Himself to you in progressively greater measure.

Are you surprised at this new approach to holiness? It will change the very face of Christianity. It's nothing like the legalistic straitjackets of yesterday. It's rooted in strong desire, not shame; beauty, not bashing.

By understanding that God desires us as His bride, our generation will arise in beauties of holiness yet unknown, with hearts ripe with passion. We will gladly choose Him over everything else that competes for our attention.

We will count all things as loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (see Phil. 3:8). We will deny our flesh not primarily because of fear but out of the overflow of lovesick hearts, captured by the man Christ Jesus, beauty incarnate. This intimacy will be motivated most of all by the astonishing revelation that He wants to marry us and have us share His gladness, pleasure and beauty for time and beyond.

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