

Understanding God's Love

People are tired of religion, but many have a heart for God. This is manifest even in our culture where “spirituality” is vogue. Having a heart for God is why people flock to Promise Keepers events and revival locations such as the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship or Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla. As we've begun hosting conferences, we've come to understand how having a hungry heart is what draws people.

Having a heart for God is not about being “saved” or not, though that is a necessary first step. The Christian life is more than “fire insurance” to keep you out of hell. It's about whether you have a heart for God, whether you are pursuing God, as it says in the Bible: “If you look for Me in earnest, you will find Me when you seek Me” (see Jer. 29:13, emphasis added).

In recent months I have noticed a new stirring in my heart. It's been part of an odyssey that has involved being more involved in public ministry and also finishing my first book, *Old Man New Man*, which is excerpted in this issue. The process of looking deeply within has made me realize how my heart cries out for more of God—not superficial charismatic spirituality, but something deep where I know God and understand that He knows me.

As I wrote *Old Man New Man*, I interviewed scores of men who say they feel the same way. They want more of God, but they feel unworthy. It's as if God won't accept them as sons with their imperfections.

That's why a message by Mike Bickle at the 1999 Charisma conference seemed so life-changing for those who heard it. Bickle's book, *Passion for Jesus*, tells of his own odyssey to know God better. I invited him to speak at the conference because I knew he could lead people into God's presence.

But I was blown away by the revelation he taught. Mike asked this important question: Are you a sinner who struggles to love God, or are you a lover of God who struggles with sin? The answer will change your life and your destiny. It determines how we look at ourselves and our relationship with God.

Because we know our own shortcomings, we have trouble understanding that God loves us and enjoys being with us. We think we must achieve some sort of spiritual perfection before we can be good enough for God to love us. It's a fear—a fear of rejection by God. This fear paralyzes even Christian leaders, who go through the motions but underneath have deep shame that places them in shackles and binds them.

I know men who have been Christians for many years, yet who are still in a tailspin because they know they fall short. They fail to understand how much God the Father loves them—right now. They think God must be mad at them.

If the greatest longing is the assurance that we are enjoyed by God even in our weakness, then the greatest fear is that God will reject us. If that fear is lodged in the core of our beings, it will have a colossal effect on how we look at ourselves—whether we live in fear or faith, and whether we run to God or from God.

Jesus wants to reinstate you in the confidence that God enjoys you. If you remember that God longs to embrace you—even though you may fall short—then you won't stay in sin very long. It's not about getting totally set free in an instant; it's about the truth renewing you every time you come back. In time, the besetting sin will be gone.

The devil wants you to run from God, not to God. The devil wants you to define your success by your struggle, but God wants you to define your success by His love for you and by your love for Him.

Consider the apostle John, the only writer of the Gospels who records Jesus saying, "I have loved you even as the Father has loved Me" (see John 15:9). John understood such love. Isn't it interesting that he was the only disciple who didn't run when Jesus was crucified?

When we understand this love, we'll also be able to stand strong—no matter what the devil throws at us, no matter what in our past would bring us down, or no matter what we are trying to overcome.

Stephen Strang is founder of Charisma. His new book, *Old Man New Man*, is available at leading Christian bookstores everywhere or at