Ways We Protect Ourselves

The diagram below describes ways we react to the insecurity and fear that results when we try to quench our thirst apart from God. It is sad, but when we try to quench our thirst with the glory of our own humanity, the pressure is on us to try to protect what we think we have achieved. These problems result from trying to fill our desires for God with reassurance and security apart from Him.

### Human and KINGLY Ways We Respond to Pain

All of these reactions are sinful wherever the result is isolation from others or isolation and independence from God. They are also sinful whenever the goal is to find refuge, strength, or glory apart from God.

#### Cynic; holds back; "The risk is too great."
Hides in hopelessness; Never thinks of it again;
Holds back; Holds to disbelief as reason to avoid God; Avoids admission of being wrong;
Wants more details before making decisions;
Avoids being social; Ignores it; "I don't want to talk about it;" Protects self by avoiding hope...

#### Dictator; gets tougher, busier; tries harder
Gets tougher; Demands more control;
Works harder for more results; Misuses personal authority; Justifies themselves more; Condemns more; Motivates others by fear and intimidation; "Just do it"; Hardens themselves to what God says and wants...

### Fears Any Potential Risk

#### Fears Disapproval from Others
"Why try;" Relates more warmly; Gives more of self; Blames and punishes self; Works harder to deserve approval; Avoids disapproval by justifying what they do wrong; Hardens heart with bitterness and passive rebellion toward God and others; Manipulates and feeds on sympathy; Weak when should be strong...

#### Fears Loss of Control

Laughs as distraction to avoid getting deep; Gets angry and blames others; Avoids being alone;
Punishes God and others by not talking; Works to be impressive; Relational envy; Sarchasm;
Avoids admitting guilt; "If you hurt me, you will hurt more"; Verbally Attacks; Manipulates people and relationships; Exaggerates if it will impress...

#### Fatalist: gives up or punishes and hardens self

Comedian: stays surface, or angry verbal attacks

### Earthly and RELATIONAL Ways We Avoid and Deal With Pain:

If life doesn’t cooperate and we can’t glory in what we say or how we appear, then we make ourselves look good by how well we put other people down. If that isn’t typical of you, if you want approval from people, it may be that you put yourself down. Driven by self-protection, you may be avoiding disapproval from others by directing anger at yourself. This way you glory in the power you feel in putting yourself down, and it keeps you from lashing out and making other people mad at you. Self-protection gets complicated, doesn’t it?

If you typically quench your thirst with what you do, then it is likely you will try to dominate more in order to maintain a kind of control that will allow you to keep accomplishing your goals and plans. This may feel like it “protects” you because it helps keep you achieving your goals, thereby ensuring that you will be able to keep drinking from something. But this keeps you insensitive, callous, and often hurts the people you love the most.
Our desperate attempts at self-protection result in many problems. The psalmist was right: “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man” (Ps. 118:8). Protection based on human effort is a tangled and complex web that keeps us in bondage, seldom able to consider that there might be something better. Learn to rest from your human ways of self-protection. Let God be your God. Be more alive toward Him. Hide in a fortress of His presence.

The Evidence is Overwhelming

All of these self-protecting behaviors are evidence of our thirsty desire for God. Clearly we need something significantly more effective than earthly ways of quenching our desires. Earthly sources are both inadequate and damaging. While glory for our humanity temporarily eases the pain of our lack, human glory is always an inadequate and harmful substitute. We want God. We want everything about God. We want Him close.

God’s plan was to design us so that we would need His presence with us, all around us and flowing through us—intensely. You can be confident that He will meet that very need.

Re-direct Your Attitudes of Praise to God

We have to turn to the Lord with all our “heart and soul” because idolatry is a thing that happens inside us: “Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them” (Deut. 11:16). Without realizing it, our hearts have been deceived. We have fallen into idolatry and don’t even realize it.

Directing your heart to boast in God is an important part of repentance. But for most of us our boasting isn’t verbal. We boast in our minds, but we do most of our boasting with attitudes, feelings, and fleeting thoughts—not with words. We need to re-train ourselves so that even the deep and often unconscious praise of our heart is toward the Lord and not toward ourselves. You can do that! The principles you find on this site will show you how.

Humble yourself into boasting in God—and not in yourself. Boasting in God is right. Direct your praise toward His attributes not yours.

Far more is realistic for you personally than what you may have ever observed in the church today! Don’t think that you have to be held back by the experience of other Christians.

Because we are so constantly in need and trying to fill ourselves, we have to thing big about receiving God’s presence. Receiving the river has to be possible for each one of us because that is what we long for. Nothing else will ever be enough.
Chapter 5

How We “Drink”

Why This Chapter is Important

Understanding how we “drink” from earthly sources can help you understand better how to receive the glorious presence of God. But the simplicity of what you see here may be hard for you to believe at first. Expect that reaction as normal!

Repentance will help you find freedom to rest into faith and to be able to apply what you see here in your relationship with God. Much of what you see on this page I had no idea about until I had been in repentance for a time. Repentance has a way of simplifying spiritual things. I am confident that you will find that same thing to be true for you.

(Let me add here that “drinking” from God also requires that we be close to Him. Don’t worry about that for now, because repentance will help you find greater freedom to do that too. Much more practical information is given on this topic in the book later in this series called, “Come and Drink.”)

Let me remind you again to think about repentance is a process of re-training your heart to trade what you are trying to receive by earthly sources by receiving God’s presence.

Remember that Jesus told us to come to Him and drink (John 7:37-39a)? Unlike when Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman (John 4), the original language in John 7 reveals that Jesus is telling us to do is something that should be done repeatedly. The only way to receive the river that Jesus promised is to keep on drinking. To do that it helps to know how.

How We Drink From Earthly Sources

Another way of saying that we “drink” from earthly sources is that we “receive glory” from them. Let me remind you again of Jesus words, “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God” (John 5:44)?

All my life I had been “receiving glory” from earthly things, but I was about 30 years old, before I ever really noticed! The first time I became aware of this, I had just pumped some gas and was going into the store to pay. On my way, a woman was coming back out to her car. As we passed each other she smiled. It was a warm accepting smile, but there was a curious reaction. It felt like something inside me opened up to the sense of her acceptance toward me. It wasn't sexual--I received her smile, I took a long and deep breath in and somehow I felt reassured.

Even though you may not be aware, the activity of trying to “receive glory” is common for all of us. In the years since, I have learned that receiving the presence of the Holy Spirit of God, is similar to the way
that I drank from that woman’s smile.

Since that time I have learned that taking a breath is only a natural reaction that happens sometimes when we are drinking from something and being reassured by it. When you learn to quench your thirst with the Spirit of God you will sometimes—but not always—find yourself reacting to the pleasure and reassurance of it by taking in a long deep breath.

Examples of times when we are “drinking” from something, include those times when we reassure ourselves with the sense of our having accomplished something, or like when we sense we have someone’s approval. We are “drinking” when we remember and enjoy how much a friend laughed at one of our jokes. We are “drinking” when we find reassurance from our having known the answer to a difficult question. On an everyday level, we depend on these kinds of things for a sense of confidence and security.

**Enjoy the Thrill, “Glory in” God**

It is best to understand the phrase ‘glory in’ as the process all people go through to quench their thirst. The Bible says, “...glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). When you “glory in” something you are finding delight, thrill, and pleasure in it. You are feeding the thirsty desires that drive your behavior.

Think about what happens after a high school football player runs for touchdown during a championship game. He drinks from the experience. Doing so is reassuring and makes him confident. As years pass, maybe when he is driving down the road, or sitting at his desk, he still recalls the run and the touchdown he made. In order to drink from it, He replays the experience right in front of him. It is real to him. Vividly he recalls how well he dodged those tackles, the deafening shout of joy from his friends in the stands, the pats on the back from his teammates, the glare of the lights, that one girl he is sure was impressed. He confidently believes there was glory in what he did, he lets himself delight in it. Over time, his having made that touchdown becomes identity to him. In reality, the time he made the touchdown isn’t the only thing he turns toward to drink from. There are likely many other moments in his life that he drinks from. But now, whenever he talks to someone, or does something difficult on the job, the confidence and security he has to meet the demand comes out of those contemplative moments when he has replayed the circumstance over again.

Maybe you can’t relate to the football example above, but can you relate that story to your own life in some other area? Are there circumstances or relationships that you recall to mind and from which you find confidence and a sense of well being? If the answer is yes, then you can learn to drink the presence of the Holy Spirit by learning to reapply principles you already know.

The elements involved in drinking the Holy Spirit are very similar to when you drink from earthly things. But rather than daydreaming about the glory of earthly experiences, you have to be like David who said, “I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (Ps. 16:8). Don’t settle for the little glory of earthly things, winning arguments, and relationships that can’t supply what you need most. The next time you catch yourself “drinking” by
earthly means, stop and think about what it feels like to be receiving from earthly sources, then reapply that to God. Trust with firm conviction that you are actually before the Lord and He is right here before you—in all His glory—and let yourself receive from Him!

Let me say again, that you have to think about repentance as something that includes turning to God and actually receiving His presence—graciously given to you—not because you have to deserve His grace! If you don’t let yourself actually receive from God repentance will be very difficult. Your Christian experience will be reduced to constantly “repenting” of the same things over and over—and that isn’t repentance at all.

**An Important Assignment**

You can learn how much about how to “drink” from the Lord by observing yourself. Catch yourself when you are “drinking” from earthly sources and observe what you are doing—without condemning yourself in the process. Notice especially what it feels like inside. Observe what it feels like to drop your self-protection and open up inside.

After you observe what it is like to “drink,” then trust you are entering the throne room and are before the Lord. Then reapply what you observed yourself doing. If you don’t know how to do that yet don’t worry. Just keep observing and learning what it feels like to “drink.”

Much more could be said about this topic, but we need to get first things first. Don’t think that I am going to write these things and then leave you without direction. I care too much to do that to you. The book called, *Heart-training!* will help you to direct your heart to trust God enough to drink from Him. The book called, *Come and Drink!* will help you to understand how to draw near to the Lord. It will also give you an important foundation for faith so that you are able to believe that when you draw near to God, He WILL draw near to you! Try to be patient, that will come. For now it is best to keep going with the direction of this book. By that you will be much better prepared for what follows later in the series.

**Caution!**

My recommendation is that you wait until you have entered the throne room before you try to open up to the Lord.

If you aren’t able to confidently trust you are before the throne and in His presence, you may be opening yourself to unseen spiritual enemies. Work with your heart until you can believe that you are before the Lord—here and with your whole body. *Heart-training!* will help teach your heart to believe confidently that being before God is a greater reality than the material world around you.

If you are afraid to draw near to God in this way, don't worry about that for now. Repentance will help you find freedom to believe. That will come!

Repentance needs to come before drawing near to God! Remember that repentance is that which makes
God your God. Putting repentance first will help you to better trust what you receive from Him as your refuge, your glory, and your strength.

I want to encourage you to wait until you have been applying the principles of repentance for at least a few weeks before you try to enter and drink. Repentance will increase your spiritual sensitivity and your ability to receive from God.
Part Two:
Learning to Recognize the Practical Evidence that You Want God
Introduction for Part Two

You want God and God wants to draw near to you. Your desire for His presence never decreases and God never stops wanting to be closer to you. You get distracted by earthly things, but God doesn't get distracted. Ever.

The big picture is that God must be allowed to dwell more intensely with we who are His church. The first step in actually directing your heart toward God is to learn to recognize the evidence of your need and desire for God. Learning to observe evidence of your desire for God will help lay a foundation for learning to welcome the presence of God all the time, no matter where you are or what you are doing—not just on special days of worship—all during the week too.

Our motives, cravings, and our behavior all demonstrate an overpowering need for the presence of the Holy Spirit to be here with us. You can trust God to give you enough of His presence to keep you wanting to feed on Him rather than having to substitute human glory for His presence. Anything less won't be enough.

We Christians already have Christ abiding inside us. But Jesus command was that we also abide with us inside Him (John 15:4). One of the most important practical steps toward “abiding in Christ,” is to learn to recognize the evidence of your desire for God—in everyday life. Doing so, will help lay a better foundation for learning to welcome the presence of God all the time, no matter where you are or what you are doing—not just on special days of worship—all during the week too.

It is much easier to turn and receive God's presence—when you recognize that your motives, cravings, and behavior all demonstrate an overpowering need for the presence of the Holy Spirit to be here with you. God designed us that way! The practical evidence suggests strongly that anything less than an “abundance” of His presence won't be enough. God is God and that there is no end to the abundance of His grace. It is right for you to trust that God can and will supply what is needed to quench your thirst. The practical evidence will help you trust God.

You can learn to trust God to give you enough of His presence to help keep you turned and wanting to feed on Him. You don't have to go through life trying to substitute human glory for His presence. Thank the Lord right now that you can trust His abundant grace!

God designed you to want Him, but also with the power to choose to meet your need by earthly means. When you can recognize your need for God is constant and never leaves you, it will be much easier to turn to God—without hesitation and without condemnation.

Let me remind you again that it is by God’s intensional design that your thirsty need is strong enough to overpower you at times!

By the information in this section, you will be better able to observe your desperate desire for God revealing itself in some unwanted behavior or earthly pursuit and then turn to God immediately—without feeling like you have to wait to turn to God until after you have punished yourself enough to earn payment for what you did wrong.
Materialism and Possessing

One of the most important practical steps in actually directing your heart toward God is to learn to recognize the evidence of your desire for God—in everyday life. Materialism is one of the many examples.

We call them possessions. But is it really just the clothes, the car, the house, the toys? Something more is involved.

I like toys. I especially like my mountain bike. It was a nice bike when I got it, but the newness has worn off. I still ride it, but it isn’t shiny anymore. It’s dented and the paint is worn off in several places. In my mind, I can easily justify a new bike. The frame is old enough now that many replacement parts are incompatible.

But what about my heart? Why do I want a new bike? Why do you or I want anything new? Why do we want the best? Can you see our longing for more of God in this?

God is always new. He is never boring. God doesn’t get old. Unlike our earthly possessions, God’s glory is always new and “shiny.”

Getting and Having

The thrill and joy of “possessions” can be broken down into two parts: getting and having. Part of the fun is in acquiring. We also enjoy ownership. Whatever it is that we long for, we want to get it and call it ours.

We could call it an “energy toward ownership.” But if it isn’t God that we are possessing, the Bible calls it “coveting.” In one sense, the longing to possess is very selfish. Some people steal and hurt others to try and satisfy their desire. Coveting is sin when it is directed toward earthly things or other people.

But in another sense, your desire to both “get” and to “have” is a powerful tool for spiritual growth. It is by God’s purposeful design that we have the desire to acquire and possess. These are desires that never leave us.

But rather than allow earthly things or other people to be our god, God wants to be our God. You just need to harness your desires by turning your heart toward God and then learning to allow your longings to “get” and to “have,” to run wild.

You can fill your longings with God. You just have to learn to trust His grace. Repentance is a process of
learning that you don’t have to hold back when you turn to God! You can trust that God will keep giving you enough of His Holy Spirit for you to continually thrill yourself with getting and having His presence. It will help you greatly to turn your heart to trust the grace of God for quenching your thirsty desires.

**God as Your Greatest Possession**

It will likely sound strange at first, but I think we need to learn to enjoy possessing God. By this I mean we need to learn to “have” Him in a way that satisfies our covetous cravings. Doing so, in part, is what it means to call Him our God.

Think about the countless hours and energy you spend on wanting. Sometimes the desire to possess can be so strong that it hurts inside. How would your life be different if you learned to harness your “energy to own” and direct it toward acquiring and enjoying the presence of God?

Instead of possessing “other gods,” it is right that we possess the spiritual kingdom of God. This next verse is my favorite in all the Bible: “Let your collection of idols deliver you...But he who takes refuge in Me...will possess My holy mountain” ( Isa. 57:13). You don’t have to love earthly possessions because you can possess the mountain where God lives! Take “refuge in Him” by possessing the mountain of God! Look it up if you want to see the whole thing.

Two verses later Isaiah wrote, “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’” ( Isa. 57:15). God dwells on a high and holy mountain, yet He also dwells with those who make His presence their refuge. He can do that because we can possess the heavenly dwelling place of God.

Unlike acquiring possessions, don’t think that you have to earn what you receive from God. If you had to deserve what you receive it wouldn’t be called grace. Humble yourself into trusting His grace.

**We Want to Possess God**

Think about relationships with people. Isn’t part of why we want new friends that we want to call them “ours.” It is an ugly thing about us that anyone would ever want to “possess” another person. This too is evidence that we want God and are trying to live without His presence intensely close to us.

The longing to “possess” another person is the cause of many forms of abuse. In contrast, when God is your God, you have Him with you. In a very real sense, you possess Him! The Bible says, “But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.” (Dan.7:18). It is right to possess the kingdom of God. Possessing God is a wonderful thing, and the more of Him we “possess,” the better.

Just as it is right to thrill ourselves with God’s kingdom as our possession, it is right to enjoy possessing
the Holy Spirit: “For the kingdom of God is...righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Being possessive with earthly things and relationships can be a damaging thing to ourselves and other people. It is wrong that we cling so tightly to earthly sources. You can cling to God in a way that meets your need much better! The Bible says, “For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and...of Judah cling to Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory; but they did not listen” (Jer. 13:11). It doesn’t have to be that way with you. Repentance is a process of getting your heart to listen and cling to God. Let your heart enjoy Him!

It is right to constantly be getting and having the presence of God. With God, you can let your desires run free! It is good to depend on God in this way. Doing so, deals a death blow to idolatry of the heart and gives you the right to drink from God!

Satisfy your every craving with God. Fight against disbelief. You can have enough of the Holy Spirit of God to quench your covetous cravings. You can possess the holy mountain where God lives! You only need to set your thirsty passions free and direct them toward God.

Even though there is a sinful side to coveting, the underlying desire to “get and to have” is so universal that I think we have it by God’s purposeful design. Ownership is something all people long for. Want and desire, just like getting and having, are a central characteristics of our thirsty desire. Is it a mistake that God designed us this way? It is not. He wants to be what fills our desires.

Wanting Money is Evidence

First, lets think about money. You earn it. You put it in our pocket. If you have what you consider a lot of money with you, it is easy to trust the money to make you feel secure and significant. Think back for a moment. In a quiet-subtle way, maybe there were times when you were talking to someone and some of the confidence you felt in your conversation may have come from the money you had in your pocket. Dependence on money in this way is sin.

The Bible says, “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid...” (Heb. 13:5,6). Being free from the love of money is all about finding reassurance from enjoying the closeness of God. We can be free from the love of money because we can have God.

If God is to be your God, He has to be closer to you than the money in your pocket. Otherwise, for practical reasons, you won’t experience the thirst quenching element of His security and strength. On a practical level, if you don’t let God come that close to you, you will always feel like you need something more to soothe and reassure you. Your confidence and security then your affections will always be divided. God wants to be your God. You have to help yourself learn to stop hiding, open up, and let God draw near.
In an earthly sense, you cannot glory in something unless you call it yours. The same is true with God. Let yourself enjoy His presence being close to you. When you do, you will find thrill and pleasure in your relationship with God.

**Materialism Doesn't Satisfy!**

Materialism feeds our desire just enough to keep us wanting more. The satisfaction we feel from materialism is only a fleeting illusion.

Our never-ending desire to “get and to have” is evidence of our thirst to constantly be receiving a flow of God’s presence. God designed us this way because of His intention to give us His Holy Spirit in generous portion—enough for a river of the Holy Spirit to flow through us (John 7:37-39)!

Materialism doesn't work! Have you ever wanted something that you most likely will never be able to get? That can hurt.

Anytime you notice your desire for things and money, recognize it as evidence of a deeper desire for God. Use what you observe as a springboard to rejoice in the grace of God to draw closer to you than money in your pocket!

It is because of the abundant grace of God that you don't have to live in bondage to filling your desire for Him with material things! Direct your heart to trust His grace.

I want to challenge you to arouse all the coveting you can muster and direct it toward God alone. Rather than trying to shut down your longing for more, direct your desire toward God and set it free.

Delight yourself with God. Find freedom to turn to God by thrilling your heart about being able to receive and have God's presence because of His grace.
Security, Self-Protection, and Control

Wanting Control is Evidence

Control is important to us. But under the surface there is something deeper—something much more important. The Bible says of God, “He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). We want control because control is directly related to the sovereignty of God and our desire for Him.

What do we have when we think we are in control? Security. Control is not the issue. We need to feel secure. Control is just one of the many ways we try to feel secure. Many of us struggle and don’t move forward in our relationship with God because we think we have to give up control. Doing so scares us so much that we are often afraid to cooperate with Him. But we only want control because we long so desperately to feel secure.

Don’t focus directly on trying to force yourself to give up control! Instead, focus on making God your security. The Bible says, “O Lord, I am oppressed, be my security” (Isa. 38:14). When the closeness of God’s presence becomes your security, you will find freedom to move forward in your relationship with Him. When God becomes your security, you won’t have to demand that God do what you want. When God becomes your security, you won’t have to withdraw from Him because of fear that you might not get your way. It is much easier to obey when you trust that God has your best interest in mind and you let Him be in control. Fight against your disbelief.

I remember sitting in the passenger seat and teaching my daughter to drive. Control would have been nice. There were times when I wanted to grab the steering wheel and take over, but I didn’t. She wouldn’t have learned anything if I had demanded control. She actually did quite well. She didn’t need me to take over. Boil it all down? Control wasn’t what I really wanted. Security was the real issue. I wanted us to be safe. I didn’t want to hurt anyone else. I didn’t want any possibility of her over correcting on a turn and ending up in the wrong lane with traffic coming head on. It is never about control. Wanting control is only a desperate demand for something that will make us feel secure.

Does being in control provide the security that it promises? Does it provide the reassurance? Control does seem to be reassuring at times. But it is based on a kind of security that isn’t real. Is there anything that we can truly control? Not really.

At times, I suppose having the remote for the TV gives me a feeling of being in control. But in reality, I can’t control power outages. Being able to change the channel when a commercial comes on doesn’t provide much in the way of reassurance. I can’t control those times when I am out voted by others in the family who think they know what to watch better than Dad. I can’t even make sure there are always extra batteries for when the remote goes dead. There are demands for batteries in our home that might use up our supply of extras. Drawing close to a God who is sovereign, and having Him draw close to us, has far more glory in it than believing lies about being in control of our surroundings.
It is written in the scriptures that “God is my strong fortress” (2 Sam. 22:33). The same can be true for you. There is hope for those who want out of the battle to be in control—repent so as to possess His presence as your security. Trade what is less for something that is far more. When you make the Holy Spirit your security, you don’t need to demand control. You can rest from the pressure to control when the closeness of God is what reassures you. When you let yourself enjoy possessing the Spirit, the need for security is being met another way.

You can experience God as your security! The Bible says, “He provides them with security, and they are supported; and His eyes are on their ways” (Job 24:23). Experience God as your fortress by unhindered delight in three things—God’s provision for you to draw near to Him, His abundant grace to draw near to you, and by using your eyes of faith to looking at His presence around you as your security.

Don’t settle for having to feed on your own sense of being sovereign. The Bible says we should, “Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10). Remember that He is God, not you. While standing before the Lord and receiving the light of His presence, trust that you are also putting on the humility of Christ.

Try to remember that power and control are important to us because of our thirsty desire to feed on the closeness of a sovereign God. When you see other people in love with their own power and control, remind yourself of your own longing for God. You were designed to experience God. Make Him your security like a child who finds reassurance by wrapping up in their favorite blanket. Draw close and let Him draw close to you.

**Wanting Security and Protection is Evidence**

That we need security is obvious. Many earthly pursuits are aimed toward this thirsty goal.

When we work so hard to achieve in some area so that we can drink from it, we also believe we have to protect the level of glory we think we have “earned.” We suffer great pain and we hurt those around us because of living by faith in ourselves as our source of security.

For some of us our main method of feeling secure has to do with avoiding any and every possible risk. We don't want to be wrong, so we avoid making decisions. We say, “I don't want to talk about it.” When we find evidence that we have protected ourselves from something we feed ourselves with our “success.” Sometimes we feed on it for days afterward by daydreaming about how well we did.

Others protect themselves by verbally attacking others. Often the target is relational adequacy. Common is to build oneself up in the eyes of others and then put everyone else down. Protection by these means is obviously damaging and unloving. Many people—even in Christian churches, are hurt deeply by these kinds of tactics.

Some of us protect ourselves by controlling more, intimidating more, or being more condemning. Still others of us take these same behaviors and turn them toward ourselves. All of these kinds of behaviors are damaging.
Often, it is our commitment to self-protection that keeps us away from God. But the constant pain resulting from failure to feel secure can deepen your commitment to depend on yourself—or, it can be what drives you to God.

The Bible promises a place of safety beyond what most Christians experience.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!’ For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark (Psa. 91:1-4).

It is possible to experience the protection of God the way King David did. The path to experiencing God this way is to make these scriptures become life, hope, and confidence.

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord And to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock (Psa. 27:4 -5).

When we enter and stay before the Lord, God becomes our refuge and protection. It says, “For You have been a refuge for me, A tower of strength against the enemy. Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings...” (Psa. 61:3,4). Like sheep inside a fence are safe from predators, we are kept safe when we stay before the Lord. Let your heart trust what God offers.

David said, “I have set the Lord continually before me...Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely.” (Psa. 16:8,9). Rather than daydreams and pretending we are safe, we need to enter the throne room of God and “set the Lord before us.” The apostle Paul said we should put on the armor of light (Rom. 13:12). The psalmist said it this way,

The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread? When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In spite of this I shall be confident (Psa. 27:1-3).

The passage immediately following talks about dwelling in the temple of the Lord—to behold His beauty. It is by “abiding” in the throne room of God that you experience the light of God as your defense and protection. Of people who walk in the light from Gods face it says that God is the glory of their strength (Psa. 89:15-17). It also says that God is their shield.

By patiently and wisely working truth down into your heart you can find freedom to draw near to God and experience His closeness to you in these ways. Repentance can help you! Determine that you are going to direct your heart toward God.
Chapter 8

Depression, Despair, and Hopelessness

In This Chapter

This chapter shows that depression, despair, and hopelessness are evidence of our strong and driving need for God's presence. These symptoms of our unmet need are practical evidence that you can trust God to draw near to you intensely. If you will direct your heart to draw near and drink, God can and will quench your thirst for Him.

Depression is Evidence

Depression is the result of a chemical reaction inside our body.

Some people have biological problems that make them prone to the chemical reactions that cause feelings of depression. By that I mean their bodies are quicker to produce the chemical reactions that cause feelings of depression.

I believe that depression is seldom the result of biological causes and nothing else. Even in people who have biological tendencies toward depression, it is usually a combination of trying to quench their thirst apart from God together with the biological problem that results in the depression.

A Need to Trust the Cross as Punishment Enough

Much more common is that depression is brought on by a strong intension to punish ourselves somehow. It is like we want to fight ourselves and hide at the same time.

The reason we punish ourselves may or may not be because of sin. It may be just that we feel that something is wrong with us and don't know what it is. In either case, rather than trust the power of the cross of Christ and the cleansing of God—we trust ourselves. Many unnecessary problems result.

You could trust the power of blood of Christ, draw near to God, and let Him wash all your reason to feel shame (Heb. 10:19,22). But instead of that many of us put our faith in our ability to punish ourselves. The more we make ourselves hurt the more we feel justified. Many of us have become so addicted to earning our own sense of punishment that depression has become very familiar to us.

That we sense punishment is needed is evidence of our desperate need to train our heart to place our faith in the power of the cross of Christ and not in ourselves! This series of books is for giving you the background information and showing you how to do this.
Depression, Despair, and Hopelessness

Tributing the power of the cross to make forgiveness possible is vital to growing in a life of faith as a Christian. Doing so will mean that you won’t have to hurt yourself because Jesus suffered that pain for you already. You will be able to trust the forgiveness of God to be powerful enough for your sin.

Depression can also result from a sense that we have lost the possibility of quenching our thirst in a way we would like. If when we lose hope that we might not be enough somehow and then we punish ourselves for it, the eventual result is depression. Here again the problem is that we are trusting ourselves.

A Need to Enjoy Hiding Ourselves in God

We were designed to find refuge inside the presence of God around us. It hurts when we are not depending on God as our refuge and security. It hurts so much that many people are driven into a strong addiction to depression in order to try and kill the pain.

You know you have an addiction to depression when the anger toward yourself becomes a way to stop the possibility of future pain by trying to kill your thirsty desires for something more. That way you won’t want to reach out. You will only want to curl up and hide. When the hard shell of depression becomes a person’s best hope to feel protected, emotional addiction is likely.

It is the habit of trying to find refuge in the cave of depression that must be broken. God is a better place to hide. We need God’s presence to be with us so intensely that it releases us from the tendency to depend on depression.

Without realizing it, some Christians let themselves fall easily to sin because that particular sin makes them angry with themselves and brings on a depression in which they can hide. I did that for years in the area of sexual sin—and didn’t even understand what I was doing. It doesn’t have to be this way! Heart-training can completely change your habit of using depression as a way to feel secure. It did that for me. Train your heart to hide yourself in God.

Again let me emphasize that we should “put on the armor of light...put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:12 and 14). In a practical way, we put on the armor of light the moment we draw near to the fountain, trusting God to draw near to us. In so doing, you become one whom the Bible describes in this way: “How blessed are the people who...walk in the light of Your countenance” (Ps. 89:15).

You can humble yourself into trusting God to give you His presence, without having to punish yourself in the process!

You don’t have to pride yourself with the power you feel from how much you hurt yourself. You don’t have to close up tightly to God because of being so angry at yourself. Thank the Lord that He washes you clean as you draw near (Heb. 10:19-22). It is good, safe, and right for you to let God draw close so you can enjoy a sense of being protected inside a thick presence of the Holy Spirit. You can learn to trust and enjoy God’s presence as your fortress.
Most Christians don’t let themselves be realistically confident that they can make an intense presence of the Holy Spirit of God their refuge. You can change that by thanking God often that the power of His washing you is much stronger than your own ability to pay the price for sin. Get your heart to hear this message: “The protection I need is not by forcing myself into a cocoon of depression as my best hope for a place to hide. Instead of depression I can hide in the presence of God given freely by His grace.” Thank the Lord that “On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God” (Ps. 62:7). Rather than hiding in the hard shell of depression, be like David who said, “The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?” (Ps. 27:1). You can do that. Change your heart’s delight. Thrill yourself with the truth that you can receive God’s presence and enjoy the closeness of His power—and not your own.

If not for purely physical causes, depression is evidence of an unmet need for God. It is also evidence of one who has lost hope for anything better. Thank God that you can hope in Him. Reassure yourself, “Soul...my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God” (Ps. 62:5-7).

For the rest of us who don’t struggle in this area, don’t you dare glory in being above people who suffer from depression! Don’t be condemning toward them—they are already doing enough of that themselves. Be patient. Love them. They need hope that something better is available.

Depression is not our best hope for a place of refuge because you can have God. Be patient with yourself as you train your heart in this area. Be patient, but be relentless also. Turn your heart! Expect some squirming along the way. But don't let up. Let repentance teach you to reassure yourself with the presence of God.
Chapter 9

Intimacy and Closeness

Holding God Close

We are told that we are to cling to the Lord (Josh. 23:8 and Deut. 13:4). We are also told, “There is no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You” (Isa. 64:7). But at another time in history it says of King David that “My soul clings to You” (Psa. 63:8). These scriptures help us to understand better how to make God our refuge. We have to arouse ourselves to take hold of God and, like King David, cling to Him with our very soul: “If we had forgotten the name of our God or extended our hands to a strange god, would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart” (Psa. 44:20,21).

Think about when you were young. Did you have a special blanket? Or did you have a teddy bear? Even when you were young, the evidence of your thirst for God was clear. Is it wrong to let children become so attached to a blanket? Absolutely not! However, the job of a parent is to help our children to make the transition from clinging to their blanket to clinging to God, not to their friends or anyone else. Don’t wait to start when they are a teenager because the transition has already begun. Remind them often that it is only the presence of God that can satisfy. When they get hurt by their friends, encourage them to soothe themselves by enjoying the presence of God.

It is a subtle thing that we do, but even as adults when we trust something for security we draw it in close. We “wear it” around us. It is true with money and clothing it is true with other things also. Whether it is a relationship with another person, a job, or our house, our refuge makes us feel secure.

Depending on something as our refuge, involves drawing it close and wearing it around us. That is how it works. But if we don’t wear it around us, there is no benefit. If we don’t hold it close, it won’t make us feel secure. The same is true in our relationship with God. Making God our refuge requires that we hold Him close. Trust you are near and take time often to think about the radiance of His presence being close to you.

The same is true for the love of God. The love of God can touch your human need for love more fully than you may now realize. In order to more fully enjoy and be feed by the love of God it helps greatly to thrill your heart with the closeness of His love.

The Love and Caress of God

Concerning God’s love, Jesus said, “Abide in Me...abide in My love” (John 15:7,9). Love is more than an adjective that describes God. The love of God is God Himself: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). The love of God here is His presence around us. For now, the thought of it might make you afraid, but take courage: if you want to make God your refuge, the path you must take will lead you to deal with your
fears until you drop your guardedness and learn to stay inside the presence of God’s love. You will have
to come to the place where you submit into believing, “The Lord loves His people” (2 Chron. 2:11).

For love between people it often starts as a feeling. God has feelings for us too: “The Lord takes pleasure
in His people” (Ps. 149:4). But God also demonstrates His love for us. Jesus died on our behalf (Rom.
5:8). If you are willing to recognize it, He continues to demonstrate His love for you in many ways.
Another way God demonstrates His love is in His drawing near to you and holding you in His arms.

When you’re in love with another person you enjoy it when they hold you with their arms around you. It
can be the same way with God, only better. Your desire and longing to be held by another person is
evidence of your need to be held by God. He longs to hold you. Will you let Him? Doing so requires that
you become childlike enough to believe the scriptures and thrill yourself with God’s caress. Jesus told
us,

Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs
to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a
child will not enter it at all.” And He took them in His arms and began blessing them,
laying His hands on them (Mark 10:14-16).

God is still the same as He was then. He still takes us in His arms. Jesus also said, “How often I wanted
to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were
unwilling” (Matt. 23:37). Work with your heart so that you stop holding back. Purpose to believe.

The Bible says, “The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut.
33:27). The more you let yourself delight in His love, the more you will find freedom to believe. The
more you believe, the more you will let yourself be open to experience His presence as He holds you
close.

God can hold us because God’s love has substance. We are told to “keep yourselves in the love of God”
(Jude 1:21). The Bible isn’t saying here that you should make sure God keeps loving you. With people
that might be true, but not with God. Not at all! Instead, we are to keep ourselves inside the substance of
His love. Jesus said it this way: “Abide in My love” (John 15:9). That means we should live inside it.
The love of God is a substance that we can stay inside because the love of God is God Himself: “The
one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). Direct your heart to refuge
yourself in the love that shines from God.

God not only defines love, the love of God is God Himself: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). King David
wrote of the love of God resting upon him: “May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we
put our hope in you” (Ps. 33:22 NIV). Because the love of God is God Himself, I believe David was
talking about the Holy Spirit. Peter wrote about something similar: “The Spirit of glory and of God rests
on you” (1 Pet. 4:14). When you are “in love” with God, you draw near to Him because you want to be
near Him. When you draw near to Him, His love comes to rest on you, the closeness of His Holy Spirit
becomes your delight. Thrill yourself with His presence.

It is right to depend on God for the love you need. Moment by moment, we need a source that constantly
lavishes love upon us. Only God can do that. Reassure your heart that your need for love and to be held
isn’t greater than His ability to supply. Keep thanking the Lord until your heart becomes soft enough to
hear and believe that “great is your love toward me” (Ps. 86:13 NIV).

Love the caress of God. Cling to His presence and hate trying to cling to anything else. You can trust God to lavish enough of His presence to quench your thirsty need for love. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be possible for you to make God become your one and only pursuit. Your need would drive you to keep looking toward people who have the same need for God as you.

Though you can’t see it, the caress of God is something that is real, something you can experience. Draw near to God by trusting you are entering the throne room. Think about being in the throne room and close to God as a reality that is greater than the material world around you. When you draw near to Him this way He will draw near to you because He is a fountain (Heb. 10:19,22; Ps. 36:7-9). Let Him be God to you; let Him hold you. And, don’t be afraid if you become aware that He is pursuing you. Unlike many people you have known, God is good. Reassure your heart that God is not a predator with secret intentions to hurt people: “O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!” (Ps. 34:8). Stop fighting and submit to the truth. It is best for you if you trust Him.

If you are like me you will have to soften the soil of your heart before you find freedom to believe His love for you personally. Do this, by thanking Him for the truth in the scriptures about His love. Purpose to hear. Softening your heart with the truth will make you more open to what God is trying to teach you through circumstances and your experiences in life.

Make it Easier to Repent and Turn to God!

Allow me to say it again. Our need for intimacy and closeness is strong evidence of our desperate need for the nearness of the presence of God. Don't condemn yourself when you see evidence of your need for God!

Learning to recognize your desire for God in your human longings and pursuits makes it much easier to turn to God—without condemning yourself because your need is so great.

God made you with desire. Fill yourself with Him. Your need for God's presence never goes away. Even when you don't think you don't want God, your desire for His presence has not decreased.
Chapter 10

Eating Disorders

In Brief

Our unmet need for God's presence can be so great that we are driven to things that we don't want to do. Eating disorders are among the many symptoms of our lack.

The sad thing is that our unmet need for God can be as problematic for Christians as for unbelievers. Just because you are a Christian, doesn't automatically mean you are feeding yourself with God.

One important step toward freedom is to learn to recognize eating disorders as practical evidence of a desperate and need for God's presence with you intensely, 24 hours-a-day. You can correct and prevent eating disorders by training your heart to turn and feed on God.

Being Overweight is Evidence

First let me say that there are many reasons why people are over-weight. Some of the lesser reasons can include biological factors that contribute to the problem. It is not my intention—nor my area of expertise to cover these things here. I just don’t want to ignore the fact that physical causes can make it more difficult for some people to loose weight.

An unmet desire for the presence of God is much more likely to be the underlying cause for being overweight. You don’t have to live like this. The solution begins by understanding why we overeat.

Many overeat because they have learned that food deadens the pain from their unmet need for God. We were designed for much more of the presence of God than most people experience today. Overeating is one of the many results of trying to live without what is realistic and possible for all of us.

Some of us eat in order to distract ourselves from the pain. Others of us eat for pleasure when life isn’t as thrilling as we would like. Much of the problem is that so many try to find security and refuge in the fat we wear around us. We correctly view being overweight as something other than our deepest selves. But we hide ourselves under increasingly thicker layers of fat rather than face the painful truth that earthly sources will never supply what we need to quench our thirsty desire for God.

It is easier to blame an outer layer of fat than to face the painful truth that people might not accept us for who we really are inside. It is inevitable that we get hurt when we thirst for acceptance and believe we have to depend on people in order to find what we need. The problem is that the amount of acceptance and approval we need to ever be supplied by human relationships. That will never happen.

Trusting the power of the cross is what makes us acceptable to the only one who can lavish upon us all the love, acceptance, and approval we crave. Being overweight doesn’t need to be your best hope for
protection. Abiding in God is better. Let your heart hear how good it is that you will never be enough apart from God. You don’t have to be enough on your own because you can depend on the closeness of God.

The Bible says, “It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefitted” (Heb. 13:9). Foods are of no benefit compared to the presence of God given freely by His grace! God can fill you better because His presence is so readily available. Receiving God’s presence is more pleasurable and more thrilling. Train your heart to believe and rejoice in that truth.

Food doesn’t fill our longing for God—it only distracts us from the pain of sensing we were designed for something more. You don’t have to live this way. Life can get much better. You just have to get your heart to hear that it is safer to turn to God and that His presence is a better way to soothe yourself. He is waiting for you to let Him draw near.

Thank the Lord that you don’t have to depend on food as a way to relieve boredom. Thank the Lord until your heart hears and believes it. The Bible says, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). God does not despise you—thank the Lord for that truth until you rest into believing it! Thank Him that you don’t have to stay away from the throne room because of being overweight. Thank Him that trusting the power of the cross of Christ has made you acceptable (Lev. 19:5; John 1:29; Rom. 15:15,16). Thank Him that what you find in the refrigerator is not your best hope for reassurance and something to soothe you.

Sometimes it can be that a person who has learned to enter the throne room and feed on God has not yet learned to apply the discipline that God gives to the area of food. The most important thing for that person is to stay turned and continue feeding on God. Their enjoyment of God can be so great that He becomes deeply filling. When that happens it becomes an undesirable step down to turn from God and feed your soul with physical food. This is when discipline grows and the ability to say no to overeating is greatly increased. What I am describing here is possible for you. Don’t let yourself think that it isn’t.

Part of what makes overeating a difficult problem is that total abstinence is impossible. We still have to eat. Learning to eat healthy portions is part of what has to be learned. Discipline for doing that grows out of feeding on God (2 Tim. 1:7). It is easier to regain discipline and self-control by turning from earthly ways of feeding your soul and feeding on God.

The reason why most people fail to lose weight is because they ignore that their overeating is an expression of their overpowering desire for God. The only way they know to ease the pain from their unmet need for God is to eat food. When this happens any attempt to stop eating too much is actually an attempt to kill their desire for God. They may be successful for a time. But their desire for God will soon come back just as strong or stronger. When this pattern is repeated over and over self-discipline can become like a distant dream. Complete losses of self-control become normal.

You don’t have to settle for living like that. You can have God with you more intensely and feed on Him. Discipline for good eating habits can return. You just have to take steps to work with your heart so that you find freedom to believe and receive from God—without thinking you need to hold back. This series is for showing you how.
Bulimia is Evidence

Bulimia is a habit pattern of an uncontrolled eating frenzy followed by purging what has been eaten so as to avoid gaining weight. The purging is done by using one’s finger to force a gag reflex and throw up.

Binging on food and then purging is much more common in young women than most people realize. I heard one young person say that bulimia is as common among girls in high school as masturbation is common to the boys.

Part of what can result in bulimia is a history of being able to perform well enough to keep other people impressed. The other part is our right and proper desire to binge on God.

When a person’s appearance and their social skills are impressive humanly speaking the result is to feed on yourself in ways that come so naturally that you hardly realize the dangers involved. People like this are often the ones that are envied by others. The problem is that when someone else becomes more attractive or when social standing decreases it is common to be willing to do almost anything to regain and maintain the status of being “impressive” again.

Many problems result when success is defined as others being impressed with how we appear. Lies, manipulation, verbal attacks become common in relationships. Problems also result when we demand of ourselves to keep people impressed with our physical appearance.

Appearance is held in high honor in our society. Much of the reason for that esteem is because the beauty of God has glory. We value in people what we know deep inside about God. The Bible talks about the glory of a woman’s hair (1 Cor. 11:15). To a far lesser degree than God human beauty has glory also.

Unrelated to what we know about God, our society has chosen to equate thinness with beauty. When a person has learned to feed themselves with the glory of their appearance concerns about weight can become overwhelming to the point of losing self-control.

Over-eating and fear of gaining weight can result in an “experiment” of purging, “Just this once.” But a pattern of bulimia can develop when the behavior of binging and purging are combined with repeated pleasures from feelings of relief that the loss of popularity has been avoided: “If I can eat and purge and still look good why not do it again?” Believing you will still be able to feed yourself from the pleasure of others over your appearance becomes a strong motivation to repeat the behavior.

The problem is that after you purge you are still hungry. When the hunger becomes strong enough for your body to feel like you are starving the reaction can to binge and purge all over again.

A habit of continually losing self control can develop when over-eating and fear are combined with unbending demands to maintain the beauty that has kept you pleasing others in the past. Isn’t it wonderful that we don’t have to settle for such a narrow definition of beauty?
The good news is that you don’t have to eat and then purge in order to keep on feeding yourself with how attractive you are. You don’t have to settle for so little. Get your heart to hear that the Lord is the beauty you so desperately need. You can satisfy yourself with God. Rather than your appearance being your identity—let yourself be “called by His name.”

It should be wonderful news that you don’t have to binge to avoid the painful truth that you will never be able to achieve enough perfection for your humanity. The closeness of God can be the perfection that fills your desire. You don’t have to find the perfection you long for by purging yourself in order to keep your weight down. Train your heart to define success in different terms. Determine now that you are going to take steps to train your heart to trust God as the perfection you need.

The cleansing you need doesn’t have to come from purging yourself when you binge on food. The Bible talks about “When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning” (Isa. 4:4). Let God wash away the dirt you feel. Trust you are drawing near to God and rejoice your heart into letting Him purge you of “filth” by washing you with the “spirit of burning.” Let unreserved thanks and praise become tools you use to ignite your faith in the power of the cleansing of God. Isn’t it wonderful that the cleansing of God is more powerful than our sin—it is pride for us to think otherwise. Zealously use thanks and praise for the truth as tools to constantly increase your faith and love for the closeness of God’s perfection touching you; cleansing you; making you righteous, and complete.

You don’t have to stuff yourself with food when you can be filled and satisfied with God. Instead of eating all of what you find in the cookie jar, the cupboard, and the refrigerator you can draw near to the fountain of God and stuff yourself with Him. You never have to stop. You never have to live with guilt from binging on food and then purging. Thrill yourself by binging on God. Train yourself to stop holding back. Drinking like a branch and letting God flow through you is important for producing spiritual fruit that lasts for eternity (John 15). It is right for you “abide in Him” by continually gorging yourself with God. The Bible says to delight ourselves in abundance (Isa. 55:1,2).

That we can feed on Him without having to hold back is great news for those of us with addictive and compulsive tendencies. Without my learning and living this truth about God I think I would be in serious trouble. Turning and setting loose all my addictive cravings on God is a primary factor in why I have found freedom in areas of personal sin. I love this truth about God! You can learn to do this too.

You don’t have to binge and then purge yourself in order to relax. God can fill you and He can soothe you far better than food. You don’t have to be forever preoccupied with planning the next time you can be alone so you can binge and purge. Thank the Lord that you don’t have to agree with the pressures you feel to make binging and purging a substitute for Him. Admit your need. Don’t hide from it.

Even though you may not know all the details of how you can repent and turn to God you can begin the process now. The Bible says,

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, (2 Cor. 10:3-5).
You can take thoughts of binging and purging captive to the obedience of Christ. Your attitude will need to be to “destroy” the habit patterns of thought that keep you looking toward overdosing on food for what you need. Thank the Lord out loud, assertively, and with great joy in your voice that you don’t have to binge on food because you can draw near and binge on God. Starting this process now will help to soften your heart and prepare you for a repentance that changes you.

Binging on food is evidence of our overwhelming desire to draw near and stand before the fountain of glory. It should be viewed as such. If your struggle is in this area don’t let yourself feel that you are alone. You want God and so does everyone else with this problem.

You don’t have to be obsessed with food and be angry with yourself. You can turn from being irritable and withdrawn from other people who love you. You can train your heart to turn and face toward the fountain of the Lord. You can turn from living in secrecy and guilt. Thrill your heart into hearing that “The Lord is my God—I don’t have to depend on me.”

The heart-training has a section specific to the area of bulima. Just remember that for any symptom of sin many related areas also need to be addressed in order to train your heart to turn and keep on feeding on God.

Anorexia is Evidence

Think of anorexia as self-willed starvation—an extreme kind of diet that never stops. The difference between bulimia and anorexia is one of control. Where bulimia is based on a lack of self-control, anorexia is maintained by self-discipline—enough discipline to be reason for great pride—enough pride to keep you dull in your desire for God.

Struggles in this area do not bypass Christians—especially young Christian women where the pressure to be popular is strong. The reason we work so hard at drinking from our popularity because that is what provides a basis for faith in our own desirability. Popularity gives us something to drink from. That we want to be popular is evidence that we want God even more. The problem is that we have substituted thinness as something we think “deserves” being wanted. The problems here are a definition of success as being thin together with a strong commitment to earn and deserve what you want to drink from.

Anorexia is not about being thin or popular. Anorexia is a desperate attempt at being perfect. You don’t have to stay in bondage to societies definition of being “perfect.” Turn your heart to trust God as the perfection you need.

Human perfection will never be enough—whether it is being perfect enough to deserve being loved or whether it is being perfect to just feel good about ourselves. The standard is God and we know it! That is why trying to glory in our own perfection is so futile.

Feeding yourself with your own perfection won't work because we are forever disappointing ourselves. We need something better. Get your heart to hear that you don’t have to glory in the perfection of your humanity. Let God draw near and praise the perfection of Him who is close to you! Enjoy Him as your
Eating Disorders

God—not yourself.

Anorexia is deeply harmful to a persons freedom to drink from God by His grace. The goal of anorexia is self based pride from self-effort—what the Bible calls “works.” The pride is from how well you control how much you eat compared to others; how thin you are compared to those who are the most popular. The result of these comparisons is you tend to stay forcefully committed to trusting yourself for the perfection and the righteousness required for drawing near to God. The problem is that none of us will ever perform well enough to “achieve” the perfection or the righteousness required for drawing near to God. We have to depend on God for that. We have no choice but to trust the grace of God for what we need.

Thank and praise God for the truth: “I don’t have to prove my worth by controlling yourself into starvation.” You can turn from trusting how good you look and you can turn to trusting God as the God whose closeness is your beauty. Thank Him until your heart hears that you don’t have to punish yourself with exercise until you achieve the standard of having the perfect shape. If you must, thank God for that truth with every breath you take while you are exercising. Your heart will hear. You can find freedom from bondage to those vague and lofty standards that always keep getting higher.

Thanks and praise for the truth can help you change. You don’t have to pride yourself with how little you eat compared to others. God can be your glory. You don’t have to set your thinness on display to others as a reason for pride. The presence of God can be your glory—your reason for bold confidence. Thrill your heart into enjoying that you don’t have to love the glory of being thinner than everyone else in the room.

We were designed to make God our refuge. When we don’t do that self-willed starvation can become a way of being able to hide better because we are so thin. The smaller you are it can seem like it is easier to go unnoticed and feel protected. The problem is that the standard of thinness you achieve now won’t be enough two hours from now.

The anorexic person is right about self-denial. It is just that self-denial isn’t about food for the body. The self-denial that God wants is denial of the earthly ways we quench our thirsty for Him. That we should carry our cross is about self-control in regard to food for the soul. The two are related but not at all the same.

Another thing that has spiritual parallels is that an anorexic person can feel dirty when they eat food. If that describes you then you need to let your heart rest into trusting God as the One who makes you clean. The reason you feel “dirty” is because you know deep inside that you were designed to enjoy something much more than food. The Spirit of God is teaching you and drawing you to Himself. You were not designed to feed yourself with earthly things and you know it. Food was not meant to feed our soul. We were designed for God anything else is second best—less than what is realistic for here and now.

Self-willed starvation is about worshiping our own control and power rather than God. We were designed to glory in the one true sovereign God—not ourselves. The good news is that you don’t have to be a god yourself. Use thanks and praise in order to give your heart reasons to be thrilled about God as the Sovereign—not yourself.

Isn’t it wonderful that we don’t have to quench our thirsty soul by how well we fit into societies mold?
Isn’t it freeing that you don’t have to measure up to societies definition of perfection. Thank the Lord that you don’t have to hurt yourself when you feel undesirable because of your weight. Thank Him that you don’t have to agree with earthly pressures to define success in terms of fat.

It ought to be wonderful news that you don’t have to settle for the glory of losing weight in order to feed yourself with being more desirable. Thrill your heart into desiring God. Let your heart enjoy being desirable to Him. You don’t have to settle for the pressures that go with being popular because the presence of God as your reason for confidence. God is the one who justifies you—He can be that to you on a very practical level too. Let the presence of God be what settles your heart into not being so frantic or nervous about how well you maintain your social status.

Isn’t it wonderful that you don’t have to define success according to whether or not you are losing weight. Thank the Lord that, “Trusting the grace of God can quench my thirsty desires far better than anything I could ever achieve by being thin.” The presence of God doesn’t make you irritable or tired—anorexia does. God doesn’t make you want to withdraw from the people who love you the most—anorexia does.

That Christians struggle with food addictions of any kind is evidence of how much we need the presence of God close to us. Salvation is vital—especially in the light of eternity. But, on a practical level for here and now, it is the presence of God that we need. Anything less and we are doomed to lives of addictions and compulsive behaviors that are deeply damaging.

Repentance can help you far more than starving yourself into perfection.

**In My Case**

Food has not been my biggest problem area but it is still an area of concern for me. Let me share with you some of my own history in this area.

When I first learned about how to repent and then began to apply the heart-training concept, I learned very quickly about my need to find refuge and security in the Lord and not in food. Eating for reassurance had become a habit.

Even though my weight didn’t show it at the time, I went after this area by applying principles of repentance. The result has been that Heart-training has changed me greatly. The presence of God has become my first refuge of choice. The key is that my delight toward God in this area has stayed high enough that reassuring myself with food hasn’t been a problem for quite a long time.

But what I am seeing now at the time of this writing is that something I thought was dealt with earlier, I am now having trouble with again. I guess if we relax in some area, God always brings us back to that area later. After the recent holidays, I find I have gained about 15lbs. Now the issue is to try to understand where the problem is and then to turn my heart to God in that area. Let me explain.

What happens is that after almost 25 years of marriage, my wife knows what I like and she makes food
that I really enjoy. I think my problem this time around has to do with my thrill and pleasure coming from food. By that I mean that not enough thrill and pleasure is coming from God to change the size of food portions I take. I know that I need to take steps to increase my delight in the grace of God and His presence in order to change my behavior.

Today my wife is thawing out one of my favorite dishes for tonight. And, I have already thought about what we are having tonight a few times today. What I am doing is to “take those thoughts captive” by thanking the Lord out loud that “The thrill and pleasure I need is not from food.” Another way I am saying it is this, “Lord, I praise You that I don't have to take big portions because Your presence is my thrill and my pleasure - not food.” Because I have done Heart-training in the past my heart is soft and is hearing it. I already sense the beginnings of my thrill and pleasure toward God on the rise.

But if my behavior doesn't respond soon, I will get out the Heart-training and go through the section about food. Then, if that doesn't work I will add more statements in the Heart-training that are more specific to thrill and pleasure coming from God. I know I will follow this path because I have been down it so many times in the past and seen how well it works in other areas.

If you are new to these things don’t expect that you will just be able to repeat a few sentences and be done with it! There is much more to what I am saying than that. After you have been applying principles of repentance for a while it gets easier. That is why down the road you will be able to do the same thing. For now, you need to keep reading and plan on using the Heart-training extensively. That is how I started. You shouldn’t think you will be able to do any less.

Also, it may help you to know that it helps me to move forward here because I am absolutely convinced that what the Bible says about how to repent works. In my mind, it is what the Bible says so it has to work. What I will do is just keep heart-training until I see fruit. I will do that because I really don't have any other hope for being able to change.

In time, you will find that repentance is very much about recognizing the “benefits” we are receiving from our earthly ways, and then turning our heart toward God and finding from Him a similar, but greater benefit from enjoying God’s presence with us. You can do that!

But I want to encourage you to not think about repentance as just being about food. I find that if you don't think about it as turning in every area, repentance just doesn't work as well.

No Other Options

Truth that is loving, hurts sometimes. When you feel insecure, do you run to the refrigerator sometimes? I have. If you have to soothe yourself with food, this too is idolatry; “whose god is their appetite” (Phil 3:19). Oh, but there is hope! I love where it says, “...it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefitted.” (Heb. 13:9). God’s grace is abundant for drawing near to His people. He wants to feed you with the Holy Spirit’s presence (John 7:37-39a). It also says,
The afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none, And their tongue is parched with thirst; I, the Lord, will answer them Myself, As the God of Israel I will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights And springs in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water And the dry land fountains of water (Isa. 41:17,18).

Are you willing to wait until your eating disorder gets worse? Or, are you willing to take steps to correct the problem? The verses above say that God wants to feed you until you become a spring and a fountain of the Holy Spirit.

You can either go on like you have been or you can teach your heart to take God at His word. The longer you avoid what Jesus commanded about coming to Him and repeatedly “drinking” the worse your eating disorder can become (John 7:37-39). Just because you are a Christian that doesn't mean you are continually receiving the river of God's presence like He promised. You can find freedom to do that!

Don't ignore your need and don’t ignore when you are hurting or lonely! Your need to continually receive and enjoy God's presence never stops. Your thirsty desire never goes away. What other options to you have, but to admit that you have an overpowering need that has to be filled! You can replace the damaging ways you are trying to fill your need with something better! Feeding yourself by drawing near and experiencing God's presence intensely is your birthright as a Christian!

This series can help you learn to change your feeding habits so that you feed on God's presence. You can direct your heart to receive God's presence. You can find the pleasure God designed you to need because of His closeness being lavished on you. Anything less has too many unwanted side effects.

Part of why you can trust that you can draw near and receive God's presence is because the evidence of your need is so strong. The other reason you can trust God to draw near to you is because of God's provision and His grace. God doesn't want you to fill yourself from what you get out of your eating disorder. You can learn how replace that by continually receiving God's presence! You have to do that because eating disorders and other unwanted behaviors are your only other option.
Chapter 11

Lust and Sexual Pursuits

In Brief

Our unmet need for God's presence is often so great that our desperation drives us to do things we don't want to do. In some of us our unmet need reveals itself in extremely strong sexual desires. It did for me.

Lust and sexual pursuits are evidence of our need to experience the presence of God intensely—24 hours-a-day. The longer you avoid what Jesus commanded about coming to Him and repeatedly “drinking” the worse it can get. Your sexual desires can just keep getting stronger and stronger. This can be as true for Christians as for unbelievers. Just because you are a Christian it doesn't mean you are continually receiving the river of God's presence like Jesus promised (John 7:37-39).

Part of why you can trust that you can draw near and receive God's presence is because your need for freedom sexual sin is so strong. God designed you with those urges, but God also wants to be pleasure to you. By repentance you can teach yourself to replace the benefits you find from sexual pursuits with an intense enjoyment of God's presence—lavished all around you by His grace.

Don't ignore the fact you have an underlying need that is so driving and over powering that it must be met. The honest truth of the matter is that God can meet that need so much that sexual pursuits just aren't as desirable anymore. It becomes almost easy to just say, “No.” What the Bible says about repentance will work for you.

Of Lust and Sexual Desire

What is it about sex that makes it so attractive to us? I’m not talking, of course, about sex between a husband and wife. I’m talking about sexual things outside of that relationship. Why is lust and sexual sin so attractive to us? Is it purely biological? I don’t think so. Our unmet need for God leaves us desperate and wanting. I am convinced that drives and desires—related to our unfulfilled need for the presence of God, contribute more to our sexual urges than biological causes.

Lust and sexual pursuits are a way of reassuring ourselves by feeding on the human glory of another person. A woman’s hair has glory (1 Cor. 11:15) and the glory of human beauty and strength are both attractive. Glory is always attractive. However, the glorious beauty and strength of God are greater than any earthly glory you or I could ever see, feel, taste, hear or want. We can feed ourselves with God because His presence can be intimately close and is readily available. You only have to get your heart to hear and believe it enough to act on your belief, draw near, and open up to letting Him draw near to you.

When Adam and Eve sinned, even our gender was marred in the fall. Our unmet need for God leaves us feeling so desperately wanting that lust and sexual sin have become ways we try to reassure our fallen
maleness or femaleness. At times, sexual sin can seem worth the price even if we might have to pay severe consequences later. You don’t have to live this way.

A twisted sense of power from lust and sexual sin can feel reassuring, especially for men. The intimacy of sex can make both men and women feel wanted and loved. Having someone desire you and being pursued can be reassuring. But meeting your need this way is far short of what is possible with God. Rather than through lust and sexual sin, you can learn to reassure and soothe yourself by taking refuge inside an intense closeness of the Holy Spirit. Jude wrote, “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 1:21). You can redirect your affections by nurturing faith to enjoy the intimacy of God’s love wrapped around you. Doing so is vital to the purity of your walk with God.

Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, But trusted in the abundance of his riches And was strong in his evil desire. But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever (Ps. 52:7,8).

If you want freedom from sin, then drawing near to God is not an option. Along with that, you have to drop your guard enough to enjoy the Holy Spirit as a refuge that reassures you. Otherwise, it won’t matter whether it is sex, or money, or any other earthly thing that you allow to reassure you: the result will always be an overall decrease in your resistance to sin. When you look to earthly sources in one area it paves the way for others.

**Lust is Evidence of Your Desire for God**

Sometimes we try to quench our desire for God by lustfully feeding ourselves with the glory of how other people appear. Lustfully feeding on the appearance of other people is a form of stealing. The robbery that happens make us the predator and them the prey. Afterward, we reassure and pride ourselves on how well we took advantage of them without getting caught. But God always knows. It hurts Him deeply when we feed on sexual things because we could have so much more, something so much better.

Sometimes we feed ourselves with daydreams about the lustful ways we think other people look at us. At times it might feel reassuring, but this too is only pride. Don’t settle for so little as to substitute your desire for God with a longing for lusty-glances from other people. Learn to quench your thirst with God: “Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face continually” (1 Chron. 16:11). Reality is this: there is coming a day when the Lord plans to “defile the pride of all beauty” (Isa. 23:9).

Our passion to be intimately close to beauty and strength is evidence of our need for the presence of God. We were designed to love intimacy with beauty and strength. However, the beauty and strength we long to draw near will never be found through lust. We were designed for something better. You don’t have to fill your need for God by lust for human beauty or strength because “God... gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God” (Ps. 68:35)!

Work it from both sides. Pray that God would increase your hate for personal sin. Thank the Lord that you don’t have to make earthly substitutions for His presence.
Thank God that you don’t have to look at someone and then wonder if you are “enough” for them to want you. Whether the answer is “Yes,” or “No,” temptation will be strong to try and find reassurance through some form of sexual sin. The problem is your unmet need for God. That is what makes you feel insecure enough to wonder about questions like these. Thank God often that you don’t have to feed yourself from how well you measure up; you can have God.

If you draw near and purpose to keep drinking, you can be confident that God will give you enough of His Holy Spirit to keep you wanting Him and able to resist temptation. The Bible says, “Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary” (Ps. 96:6). We don’t have to try and fill our need for God with the beauty of other people because “Around God is awesome majesty” (Job 37:22). You can experience God drawing near to you (James 4:8). Trust you are looking at Him and thrill yourself with the beauty and strength that you see by faith (Ps. 63:1,2). Listen to your praise toward God until you believe His glory and delight in Him.

Purpose to Find Thrill and Pleasure in God

Set your heart to find the thrill and pleasure you need by enjoying God. You have to think about it this way because lust and sexual sin appeal to us on a basis of lies about power, thrill, and pleasure. Still however, the power from sexual sin isn’t real because it is only lies about the power of rebellion and self-exaltation. These things are a false sense of power because we have to keep pursuing more or the sense of having it goes away.

Some people have learned to love the power they feel when they take advantage of others. This too is a lie. Dominating someone by lust is not power at all. It is only a twisted feeling of power from rebellion against God. Don’t expect to reassure yourself with the presence of a powerful God if your heart is set on getting what you need from the feelings of power you feel through sexual sin. Keep thanking God that you don’t have to feed on the power of rebellion toward Him. Thank Him also that you don’t have to love the feeling of setting yourself in a dominant position over someone else. Doing so, is to love lies. You are not strong because of these things—you only feel strong for a brief period of time. God is the standard of strength and power. The standard is not your ability to dominate another person. Purpose to stay turned toward God so you can keep finding the thrill and pleasure you need from His presence close to you. Love the closeness of His power—not your own.

If you are a Christian man don’t let your main thrill in life be the hunt for the next woman you can turn your soul toward and feed on through looking. You can do better. Enter the throne room and develop the habit of looking at Jesus. Rather than pursuing the glory you see in a woman’s face or body, get your heart to believe that the glory of God is far greater: “Seek His face continually” (1 Chron. 16:11). Enjoy the strength and the power of God. Believe the greatness of the beauty in the sanctuary of God (Ps. 96:6). You can satisfy yourself with the thrill and pleasure of the Holy Spirit flowing through you.

The attraction there is in sexual sin and lust is also about possessing another person. Learn instead, to enjoy possessing God. Our desire to pursue other people is evidence of a strong drive to experience the presence of God. You don’t need to want other people in sinful ways because you can have God. He is the one who designed your desire to be powerfully strong. Set your heart to meet your need with God. If
you humble yourself in that way, you can be confident God will give you the Holy Spirit freely. He can meet your need!

It is a lie to delight in the power we feel when we take advantage of someone by lust. King David had it right when He said, “I love You, O Lord, my strength” (Ps. 18:1). Don’t settle for the lie that lust lets you “hold” another person. Hate that kind of sin. Nurture a love and delight for God that makes you able to say honestly of Him, “My soul clings to You” (Ps. 63:8).

The way I see it, we can’t hold back. We have to find all the thrill and pleasure that we need, in our receiving and possessing the Spirit of God. We have to delight ourselves in the abundance of the Spirit that God gives. We have to nurture believing the transcendent beauty and strength radiating from our Lord is better than anything we can experience here.

Purposely listen to your own thanks and praise for the truth about the presence of God being readily available to you. In this way you can stir up your obsessive and compulsive desires and direct them toward freely loving and enjoying God. His is the only power that is real. God’s is the only beauty that is worth possessing. In doing so, you will find, just like I have, that standing before the Lord and thrilling yourself with His presence meets your need. What I say here is not an exaggeration. It is the truth. We want God. Set your heart to find great thrill and pleasure in each and every one of His attributes. Nothing less will quench your thirsty soul. There is no thrill that is greater.

But let’s be honest here. It has to work. You can be confident that it will. The Bible says, “Put on the armor of light...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:12 and 14). You will strengthen yourself against the lust of the flesh if you put on the Light God radiates upon you when you draw near. Hate sin in yourself. Delight in God. Love His power close to you. Love His beauty. Love His holding you. Reassure and soothe yourself with God. Doing so is to apply a powerful principle for cooperating with God: “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). But, the reverse is also true: If you don’t put on the armor of light—if you don’t put on the Lord Jesus Christ—you will be making provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Is Pornography a Problem?

All of the principles you read on this page apply to solving problems with pornography.

The important thing is that you learn to look at sin -- and ask yourself, “What am I trying to get out of this and how can I get it from God?”

When asking those questions about pornography it becomes clear of our need to face toward God and look by faith at the greater beauty of His shining beauty and extreme majesty. Focus all your lust into enjoying the beauty of God.

God is using the pain from sin in order to corner you into giving up on empty sexual pursuits and getting what you need from God. It is time for you to cooperate.
"Press in" and Bury Yourself Deeper

The principle of "pressing in" is one of the most effective things I know for avoiding sin -- in any area. I also call this "burying yourself deeper into God."

When I talk to men about this principle I illustrate it by standing about two feet in front of them. Without moving our feet, I have them lean my direction while I lean into them. I ask them to press themselves into me and to note what it feels like to be leaning my direction. I encourage them that just as much as they want to draw near to God He wants to draw near to them (James 4:8).

We then stand up straight but I stay standing close and right in front of them. Next I ask them to remember back to what it felt like to be pressing their chest into mine. Then I ask them to lean into me—but to do it without moving their body in any way. I explain that what they are doing is a spiritual activity that is the same as what it means to "press in" to God. By trusting the scriptures that they can come before the Lord they can reapply this same principle of leaning into God.

It is powerful to apply this principle whenever temptation comes. By leaning into God you are burying yourself deeper into Him and are dying more deeply to the sin. Burying yourself this way is effective because it is so enjoyable. Pressing in becomes addictive after a few days of intensive re-application to God what you are doing when you lean into someone. Enjoy it.

A Personal Note

Lust and sexual sin are very poor substitutes for the reassurance that comes from wearing the presence of Almighty God. I still have to be careful in this area, but in general I will say that my greatest weakness has become an area of strength.

Don’t get me wrong. I have a truly wonderful relationship with my wife. I can’t imagine anything better. I am only saying that even the best human relationship is a poor substitute for God. Quenching my thirst with God has made me much stronger in my ability to resist temptation. Sexual sin just isn’t attractive like it once was. The same can be true for you.

Whenever I find myself looking at a woman with even a possibility of desire, I remember my need for God—without self-condemnation. More specifically, I trust I am turning toward God and looking at His beauty, His love, His closeness. In so doing, I have already agreed with God about sin, turned, and am trusting the blood of Christ to be cleansing me. The Bible says,

> but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:7,9).

Either I can be vulnerable to lust and sexual sin, or I can turn my very soul toward the Lord, open myself
up to Him, and let Him come near. Either I drink the Holy Spirit in a way that reassures me deeply, or I will be left weak and wanting. For me, it comes down to a choice to keep nurturing my ability to believe and have freedom to keep enjoying God. If I don’t, sexual sin and lust will eventually become attractive enough that, out of painful desperation, I will try to reassure myself apart from God.

The thrill and pleasure of allowing the Holy Spirit to continually flow is a wonderful thing. In my desire to remain strong in this area, I soothe myself with God by thinking about the closeness of His beauty, power, and love. It is right to depend on God in this way. It feels good too. I think doing so is what it means to depend on Him as your one and only God.

How to Increase Your Love for God

To me, it wouldn’t be right to talk about freedom from lust and sexual addictions without also talking about how to increase your love for God. It is by loving God more and by enjoying the thrill of His presence that long term freedom becomes reality.

It is important to follow King David’s example when he said, “I love You, O Lord, my strength” (Ps. 18:1). The response of your heart will be to love God more if you note your fears and reassure yourself with the truth about your access to God and His glory, goodness, strength, and love.

If by thanks and praise you nurture believing the greater glory of God’s presence as a thing to be grasped and enjoyed, you will increase your pursuit and delight toward God and will decrease your desire to fill yourself by earthly means. The more effectively you rest into believing, the more you will love Him and be free to enjoy receiving His presence. By nurturing your faith in this way, you will learn experientially that “...The Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11). In time, you will find that, like David, your very soul will cling to the Lord: “My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me” (Ps. 63:8).

Enjoy the Love of God

God loves us because He loves us. God is love. God loves us because love is who He is. Living according to grace means the pressure can’t be placed on us. God is loving and He takes pleasure in His people. We only need to cultivate the soil of our heart until we hear and believe this wonderful truth.

Soften the soil of your heart by thanking God for the truth of the verses below. When you pray these scriptures make sure you are listening to what you are saying.

“The Lord loves His people.” (2 Chron. 2:11).
“Love is from God.” (1 John 4:7).
“The Lord takes pleasure in His people.” (Ps. 149:4).

Remember this: God’s love is God Himself. God’s love is much more than an emotion that He has sometimes. God’s love has substance. The substance of God’s love is His Spirit. When God is loving us,
He comes close. In spiritual realms, He is pouring His Spirit onto us (Rom. 5:5).

We need to learn to say and believe with the psalmist, “Great is your love toward me” (Ps. 86:13 NIV). Doing so requires that we recognize our need for love. We also have to recognize what we do with love when we find it. In the natural realm we hold it close. When somebody loves us, we hold their love so close that we wear it around us. We make it our identity, our reason for feeling secure and confident.

In a very real way, we are trying to “abide” in their love. We try to put their love around us and stay inside of it. God has a better way. Rather than trying to “abide” in love from earthly relationships, Jesus told us to “abide in My love” (John 15:9). People can never love us enough. Their love doesn’t have the substance God’s love has. That we are commanded to abide in His love is the guarantee that He will give us enough of His love to be able to stay inside it. Train your heart to trust His grace. Delight in the love that radiates from the fountain of God. When you do, you will be abiding inside God Himself. “God is love, and the one who abides in love, abides in God” (1 John 4:16).

I believe abiding in God involves trusting that we are before Him. We put on His love, just like when we come to Him in order to receive grace. When we stand open before the Lord receiving the Spirit, the substance of His love shines at us from His face.

Putting on His love this way means we are abiding inside His love. It means that we are abiding in God. When your hope and joy is to abide in God’s love this way, you won’t feel you have to look for love anywhere else. Put your hope in Him and nurture your faith enough to enjoy the presence of His love. “May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you” (Ps. 33:22 NIV).

When I finally came to believe in my heart that God loves me, the issue of my worth didn’t seem important any more. It didn’t begin that way. I started out trying to believe my worth. It seemed like I needed to believe I was worthy of God’s love before I could rest in His love. But that didn’t work. There were always doubts. Believing that I was worthy of God’s love seemed to require that I had to pride myself somehow. I didn’t want to do that because it didn’t fit with what I knew about pride and humility before God.

Instead of trying to believe my worth, I worked to soften the soil of my heart with the scriptures about His love. I thanked the Lord for the truth even though my heart was fearful to believe it. In my case, before I actually found freedom to believe His love for me personally, I first learned to stand before Him and let His love shine down upon me. I did this because I felt it was important to obey the command to abide in His love (John 15:9). After that, God used some difficult experiences, to teach me to believe His love for me. Your path may not be the same as mine. But if you are struggling in this area I want to encourage you to begin now to soften your heart with the truth about God’s love. If I hadn’t done that I may never have heard what God was trying to teach me though circumstances. I suspect you will need to soften your heart too.

Some of you may need to do what I did; you may need to draw to the throne of God even before you find freedom to trust His love for you personally. You will need to keep reassuring your heart with the truth about God. Calm your fears by thanking Him often for His kindness, goodness, and love.
The Problem of Making Comparisons

It is especially important to guard your heart against making comparisons. Avoid even slight attempts to determine how well you measure up. Use these comparisons as reminders and opportunities to turn to God. Let me explain.

Don't let yourself look at a woman -- or a man, and ask yourself if you would be enough for them. Don't let yourself look at another person and ask if he has more or less to offer sexually than you do. Other people can put you into comparing yourself because of the way they look at you. Note that these kinds of comparisons are seldom done with words. They happen very quickly with fleeting thoughts or with just a look at someone.

When you are trying to guard your heart against these kinds of comparisons don't try to watch for words you think about. Watch your feelings. The emotions you feel will give it away.

You may be driving or walking along and see someone. You look at them and they look at you -- sizing each other up. Inside you know a comparison has been made when you suddenly feel an increase of confidence or a sudden despairing sense of not being enough. These feelings may be slight but they reveal what is happening in your heart. They reveal that you are thirsty for God but are wanting to feed yourself with sexual pursuits.

The problem is that these kinds of comparisons reinforce a life of living according to how well you perform -- what the Bible calls a "works." The result is a subtle level of insecurity that powerfully demands reassurance. The problem there is that because you are already in a "works" mode you end up reassuring yourself in ways that are not right. The solution is to get out of that works/achieving kind of mode and begin to live by faith in the grace of God for the reassurance you need.

Whenever you sense comparisons are being made erupt inside with rejoicing that you don't have to compare yourself with others in order to try and decide if you are enough. Let your heart hear it. Thank the Lord that you can turn and reassure your maleness--or femaleness, with closeness to Him. Face toward the Lord and trust you are touching His presence and that He is close and touching you.

Deliver Us from Evil

The battle inside our own heart is the most important battle for us to win. The Bible says, “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (James 1:14). It also says, “…let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light…put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:12,14). Even as Christians, we are our own worst enemy.

But there is another battle that cannot be ignored; that battle is an enemy outside us; the devil and his hordes of demons.
The churches I grew up in didn't talk much about the devil. If they did, it didn't sink into my brain enough to stay with me. Up to that time I hadn't studied the scriptures for myself in that area. As a result I was ignorant about how much Christians can be affected by demons.

The painful reality was that I was being destroyed by constant failure and had to find a way out. My wife was hurt. The Christian life seemed impossible.

During a time of extreme desperation I remember hearing a message titled, “Deliver Us from Evil.” I didn't hear very much of the message because I was to taken back by thoughts that maybe I needed to be “delivered from evil.”

The next two weeks were miserable. I was caught between an inaccurate, unstudied theology, and nagging sin. I didn't believe, or didn't want to believe that my problem might be caused, or at least partly caused by demons. The implications scared me, “How much more might I be wrong about?” I tried to avoid the subject, but was haunted by Jesus words, where He prayed, “deliver us from evil.” I had to address the possibility that I might need to be "delivered from evil" and I couldn't ignore it any longer.

It was a Saturday night and no one else was home. Cautiously I knelt down in the living room of our apartment and began to pray; “Deliver me from evil Lord! I hate lust; I renounce lust and masturbation" Loudly, I rejected and renounced specific sexual sins. Then, with all the courage and commanding tone I could muster, I said something like, “In Jesus name I command you demonic spirit of lust and sexual sin to go!”

As soon as I said that I physically felt something lift off the outside of me. My eyes widened in amazement. I remember being surprised that it left and that there was so much power in that kind of prayer.

After that, a lot changed, but not everything. Prior to that prayer I was having physical symptoms of arousal several times during the day and at night. I had come to believe that this was normal. I learned it wasn't because physical symptoms of being sexually excited stopped happening unless there was a known reason. I surprised about this change, but those symptoms have never returned.

Even though I had been "delivered" as Jesus talked about, I still had many of the same old struggles. But it was very different in that I wasn't nearly as driven. The guilt still hurt just as badly.

My conclusion was that I wasn't done. Addressing the demonic issue wasn't the only thing involved. I had won a battle on the outside of me, but I still had to change the internal habits of how I had learned to reassure myself by sexual sin.

It is ineffective to go after demons and ignore our need to feed on God. In the same way, we can't go after God and totally ignore the our enemy in the process. It is the truth that we do wrestle against demonic principalities and powers (Eph. 6:12). God has given us what we need to win.

In time, the battle with our own heart gets much easier. When that happens the enemies attacks decrease also. That is when staying pure from sexual sin becomes more of a maintenance issue than something that is destroying you. The battle doesn't totally go away, but it becomes realistic to have many years of continued success with little or no failure.
Nurture believing that Jesus has won the battle and that He has given you authority to tell them to leave. Then do it!

But if you are at a point where you aren't even sure if you want to tell them to leave then you have some other work to do first. You have to get your heart to hear, believe, and love that it is better for you to depend on the closeness of God than to feed yourself with sexual sin. Of course you know that in your mind, it is just that our heart is often times a long way from our head. Start thanking the Lord now that “I don't have to believe their demonic lies. I CAN and WILL get what I need from God.”

An Important Assignment

Practical evidence tells us that we need the Holy Spirit close and intensely present so that we can depend on Him—and not be pulled away by lust. Thank the Lord often that you can trust God to lavish His presence upon you because of the scriptures and because of your practical need. Consider even slight feelings of lust as evidence of your need—right then—to repent by turning to God and thrill yourself with His closeness to you. When temptation hits, remind yourself that the twisted nature of sin is only a desperate attempt to find a substitute for God Himself. God has made a way of escape (1 Co. 10:13).

Set your heart to meet your need with God—and not by lust or sexual sin. Let me remind you again that you should, “put on the armor of light...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:12,14).

When you feel you have done something wrong, view it as evidence of your desperate need to reassure yourself with the presence of God. Thank Him that the power of His cleansing is greater than your sin. React to the unwanted behavior by thanking the Lord that you don’t have to condemn yourself when evidence of your desperate thirst for His presence is revealed in your actions. Train your heart to believe that being angry at yourself for drinking by earthly means won’t help you to achieve greater purity. If you purpose to hear your thanks and praise toward God, it will become much more realistic for you to redirect your longings toward the Lord.

Reassure yourself often by thinking about the radiance from the fountain as being what reassures and soothes you. Soothe yourself by think about His being close and all around you. Enjoy the beauty and strength of God. Make it your intention to thrill yourself with God more than the pleasure you find in sexual things.

Please Note...

One section in *Heart-training!* is given specifically to the topic of directing your dependence away from lust and toward the Lord. But here again, as with any other specific problem area, you will have to target this and other areas too.
Our problem of filling our desire for God apart from Him is always bigger than anyone symptom. For dealing effectively with the area of lust or sexual sin, you will likely also have to target the Heart-training! sections having to do with reassurance, thrill and pleasure, adequacy, security. The reason you have to re-direct your heart in these areas also is because these other areas are related to the same problem of drinking by earthly means rather than from God.

Beyond these sections, you may also have to address the sections having to do with confidence to glory in God and sabotage. Pray that God would lead you and keep moving. You may find it most effective to just start at the front of the Heart-training and go one section at a time.
Chapter 12

Justified, Right, and Good

Wanting to Feel Justified

That we try so hard to justify our value to ourselves and to others is evidence of our need for God. But the Bible says that if you have trusted Christ for salvation you are already justified in Him, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (Rom. 5:1). It also says that we are "...justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;" (Rom. 3:24). If you are a Christian your value has been justified by the creator of all things and the supreme authority in all the universe.

But what about your experience? That God has justified us should be something that changes our life. Has it? Do you take the approval of other spiritual people as an endorsement that you are ‘Ok?’ If so you are not depending on God as what justifies you. What about at work? You need to do a good job there. But, is it how well you perform that justifies your existence on the job? If so, you are not trusting God to be the one who justifies you.

It was Jesus who "...said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.’" (Luke 16:15). Do you rehearse arguments with other people, in order to practice how you will justify yourself next time? How much energy and focus do you waste trying to justify yourself in your own mind? Where is your faith for being justified? In God? If your justification in Christ doesn’t work on that level it doesn’t work.

It is essential that our justification in Christ be applied to our everyday experience. Otherwise, you will be in danger of putting your faith in yourself before God—however hidden and sudden they may be.

The Bible says, "...you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). It is true that you were “justified” in Christ at the point of your being “washed” by God for salvation. You should use thanks and praise toward God to get your heart to believe it! After that, you should still let God continue to wash you! The Bible says, "...since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19 and 22). The cleansing of God is real.

The Bible talks about the cleansing of God as something that continues after the cleansing we receive for salvation. It says, “but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The cleansing this scripture talks about is more than a theological idea—it is real. Get your heart to trust that you are walking in the Light that shines from God and that He is continuing to cleanse you of all unrighteousness!

The Bible says we were justified at salvation by God washing us with His Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11). God continues to cleanse us after that too. The washing of God is real! Thrill your heart to be able to rest
from having to justify yourself. Thank God that you don’t have to agree with lies that you have to justify yourself apart from Him. He has already done it! But you should also trust that as you are drawing near to God that He is washing you (the scripture in Hebrews above). Keep thanking God for the truth of the scriptures until you believe it enough to rest in the truth about what God does for you.

**Wanting to be Right**

Being right is often necessary for our safety and survival. Accuracy is vital in many areas. But there is also practical relationship between being right and the righteous of God. It is important to understand this relationship so that the truth has opportunity to make you free to drink from God—and not from your having to be right all the time.

Do you know someone who has to be right at all cost? Why is that so frustrating to the rest of us who have to endure it? What about you?

How much time and energy do you give to making sure you are right? Some of that is necessary but how much energy would you save if you were free from having to win all those mental arguments you rehearse in your head? How much release would you have to enjoy God if you weren’t so preoccupied with demanding that others think of you as being right.

Often I observe people spending more time and effort maintaining their status of being right than they ever did checking the details. Something is wrong with this picture. The issue isn’t about our being accurate and right—nearly as much as it is about our spiritual need for the closeness of God as our righteousness. When the closeness of God becomes what you need as your “rightness” you can check the details and try to be accurate—without the emotional need along with it. You can think and analyze without having to be so afraid of being wrong. You don’t even have to hold off making decisions because of fear about the possibility of being wrong.

Some people depend on their doctrine—on what they believe the Bible says. For them, how much they know about the Bible makes them feel justified, secure, and right. When someone challenges what they think they can’t simply discuss the issues. They have to go to war verbally because their sense of righteousness is at stake. Being “right” about the Bible makes many feel righteous. But this is a substitution for the presence of God. The Bible can’t be our God! Accurate doctrine is important but the accuracy of our doctrine can’t be what justifies you before God! Your faith has to rest in God as your righteousness—on the inside and on the outside. The closeness of God has to be your identity—your banner. It works better to trust and enjoy the presence of God as your identity of right-ness. It works far better than to trust yourself. There is no other way.

You don’t have to depend on yourself for the security and confidence that only comes from yourself. The unseen banner you wave in the face of other people doesn’t have to read, “I am right and you are wrong.” Your banner can be the closeness of God’s love and His righteousness. When you depend on God that way the result is a quiet confidence that lets you rest in Him. When God is your right-ness, your love of the truth becomes more important than your being right.
The Bible says that God looks forward to a time when His people make His righteousness their own—on a practical level. Speaking about Judah and Israel the Bible says, “In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, 'The Lord our righteousness’” (Jer. 23:6). I use this verse because I believe the principle also applies to the Church. It says, “…and this is the name by which she will be called: the Lord is our righteousness’” (Jer. 33:16). Being called by that name requires that we turn our heart to trust the Lord as our righteousness on a practical everyday level.

Jesus told us, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...” (Mat. 6:33). But it is important to ask, “How do we do that?” Jesus told us that we receive the kingdom like a child (Mark 10:15). The Bible also says, “But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amo. 5:24). It is by directing your heart into simple childlike faith that you can receive the kingdom and His righteousness rolling down upon you “like waters.”

Let me also remind you that we are told, “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Drawing near to the throne is central to how we are to receive the kingdom and His righteousness. The Bible also tells us, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You” (Psa. 89:14). It is by repentance, drawing near to God and drinking from Him that we are able to enjoy God’s presence in that way.

You can get your heart to believe the radiant glory of your God. You can get your heart to trust God’s provision for you to draw near to the throne. You can trust you are receiving the kingdom and His righteousness because God has promised to draw near to you when you draw near to Him (James 4:8).

I can tell you that you can do these things but repentance is likely going to have to come first. By directing your heart away from having to be your own righteousness you find greater freedom to trust what God pours out from His throne like “an ever flowing stream.” Repentance will help you. The cross of Christ and the cleansing of God are powerful on practical every-moment levels.

You can learn to rest in the substance that is the righteousness of God and feed yourself on that. But here again we have to start by getting our heart to trust the power of the cross of Christ. We have to trust it so much that it makes a difference in our experience. God has made us Christians to be the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). He has placed His righteousness inside us. Our problem is that we also need a righteousness for our humanity. By trusting the power of the cross to be enough for you on the inside you are better equipped to trust God to wash your humanity too. Without the cleansing of God for your humanity you may always cower and want to run from God.

Actually trusting the righteousness of God as your own makes you free from the panic of when you might be wrong on a human level. Even the need to join in an argument decreases greatly. I am not saying you can discipline yourself better to avoid arguments. You can do that but that is not what I am saying. You don’t have to join in the argument because you don’t have as much you need to defend. Inside you are resting in God and loving it.

How long will you let yourself continue to trust the accuracy of what you say as your sense of righteousness before other people? Isn’t it wonderful that you don’t have to settle for so little as to trust yourself? Rejoice your heart into believing that it is time to intervene and direct your affections and faith
toward God.

Take time to consciously think of God as your good and as your righteousness. Encourage yourself with the truth until you are able to trust you are looking at the Lord. Look at the radiance around the Lord and what He is shining onto you. Look at that as the righteousness you need for your humanity. Look at Him but remember that the righteousness you are looking at is His. It is yours because you have made Him your God. But the closeness of His righteousness can’t be reason to turn back and praise yourself. Train your heart to keep the praise going toward God by strongly emphasizing words like, “You” and “Lord.” When you listen to your own thanks and praise toward God it helps you to keep your focus where it needs to be.

It was King David who said, “Oh God, You are my God...My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You...Thus have I seen you in the sanctuary, to see your power and your glory” (Psa. 63:1,2). David was thirsty for God but his thirst wasn’t remaining unquenched. Two verses later it says, “My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips” (Psa. 63:5). It is vital that we look at the power and glory—and the righteousness of our God.

When you draw near to God look at the radiance around Him. Think of what you trust you are looking at as your own basis for “right-ness.” When you look at the Lord that way He becomes your God in a very personal way. By this you don’t have to turn around and feed on yourself. This works very well. My problem is that I sometimes forget to look at the Lord that way.

I have trained myself to stay before the Lord and keep on drinking but I don’t always remember to think about His radiance as righteousness, strength, love, holiness and purity. I have found that if we don’t look at the Lord like David did the emotional benefit isn’t as great and we get insecure again.

Follow King David’s example. Repent by training yourself to stay before the Lord and drink. But be sure to let your “drinking” from Him include looking at His radiance close to you and loving His power, kindness, compassion, strength—and His righteousness.

Wanting to be Good is Evidence

Why is it that when we are kind or good to someone that afterward we feed ourselves with what we did? This too is evidence of our need to feed ourselves with the presence of God and not with ourselves. In contrast, it was David who said, “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge...” (Psa. 73:28).

We should be kind and good. But rather than pat yourself on the back when you are kind to people, you can make the closeness of God your good. You can be even more thrilled by that than what your human kindness can provide.

The Bible says, “Many are saying, ‘Who will show us any good?’ Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, O Lord!” (Psa. 4:6). You can train your heart to do that! You can find freedom to draw near to God and let His face shine on you as your good.
God has made us righteous—on the inside. By receiving the shine from His face—onto the outside of you, you can make the presence of God your good because His goodness shines from His face. The Bible says, “Delight yourself in the Lord...” (Psa. 37:4). If you make God your good, you’ll enjoy His goodness much more than your own.

If you trust Him to wash you with His goodness you won’t have to worry about whether you are good enough to enter the throne room and draw near to God. Everything has to depend on God.
Chapter 13

Boasting and Our Love of Power

Boasting

Boasting in ourselves is evidence of our deeper desire for God. Is all boasting wrong? It depends on what you are boasting in.

All of us need to have something we boast in; it makes us confident. Your thirst drives you to find something in which you can boast. But, people are different. We boast in different ways. For some boasting is loud and overt. For others, boasting is inside to ourselves and very quiet. Some boast with words. Others boast without words, only feelings inside. Even so, all of it is still boasting.

Naturally speaking, my own way of boasting tends to be more quiet. Yet, I have learned that directing my heart to boast in God requires effort applied to being more overt. I have to boast in God out loud. Otherwise, I tend to drift along unchanged. You will likely find the same thing is true for you. Follow king David’s example where he said, “My soul will make its boast in the Lord; The humble will hear it and rejoice.” (Psa. 34:2). It is right to direct your soul to boast in God. David also said, He also wrote, “For You are my hope; O Lord God, You are my confidence...” (Psa. 71:5). Humble yourself enough to boast in God—out loud.

Often the things we boast in are not ‘bad’ things. It would be wonderful if everyone had a good job and a warm house. Only, we are not to drink our sense of being secure from these kinds of things. God wants to be with you enough for you to make Him your refuge, your glory, and your strength. He wants to be your security. Paul was referring to the process of quenching our thirst when he wrote, “glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,” (Phil 3:3).

Wanting Strength and Power are Evidence

We glory in things that are directly related to what God is like. But we can also glory in things that are opposite to what God is like.

God is a God of power, but if you twist things around we can sometimes drink from the misuse of human power. Our thirst is so great, that sometimes people glory in having hurt others. At times, it may be open and confrontive. Other times, it is subtle and deeply hidden.

Why do people do bad things like murder, rape, theft, abuse? I believe these behaviors are evidence of how far down we can go if we don’t quench our thirst with the presence of a God who is powerfully good.

Power and control are important to us because of our thirsty desire for God. We were designed to
experience God as our God, not the twisted and evil glory of hurting other people! The Bible talks about God as, “The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He” (Deut. 32:4). You can trust Him! We Christians must!

The violent misuse of power is destroying our society and our world. We in the Christian community need to act fast. Though we often don’t take advantage of it, we have available to us what the rest of the world craves. Use thanks and praise for the truth in order to redirect the ways you normally quench your thirst. Draw near to God and delight in Him as you freely receive His presence. Then, teach others to do the same!

Consider the strength of God. Rather than quench our thirst with the closeness of God’s strength and His power, we try to ‘drink’ from our own. We should follow David’s example, “I love You, O Lord, my strength” (Psalm 18:1). But not too long ago, I had to laugh at myself.

I remember being in the bathroom after just having taken a shower. I hadn’t put my shirt on yet and happened to glance in the mirror. Now, keep in mind here that as of this writing, I am 44 years old. I like to ride my mountain bike, but I am still kind of flabby. Definitely not anything to look at, especially with my shirt off. But as my eyes raced across the image in the mirror my biceps caught my attention. In my head, I knew that my upper arm was pushed down and my muscles had only “jelloed” out against my side. My arm only looked bigger than normal. Even so, I went, “Hmm.” I thought it looked good. It didn’t matter that it wasn’t really muscle. I knew it wasn’t the truth, but even so, I was still impressed. Silly isn’t it?

Why do we do things like this? It might sound crazy at first, but I think it has to do with our thirst for God. In terms of the strength of God, we need Him close. In my case, I am so thirsty for the glorious presence of God that when I haven’t been ‘drinking’ the Spirit, I will even try to substitute God for prideful lies about how impressive I look. This is both silly and sad.”He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.” (Psalm 147:10)

On the other hand, I don’t think this is too far off from where most of us live. We are constantly looking for ways to reassure ourselves. Friends, we need God close enough to us to reassure us. We need the Holy Spirit more than most of us realize. Rather than what we see in the mirror, we need to boast in the God whose presence we see around us by faith.

Strength is important to us because of our thirsty desire for God. We were designed to experience God as our God. Let Him draw near and enjoy praising His strength, not your own. The Bible talks about people who, “...walk in the light of Your countenance...For You are the glory of their strength...” (Psalm 89:15-17). You can be one of those people! It also says, “O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary. The God of Israel HImself gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God!” (Psa. 68:35). Our response should be as the psalmist who said, “Be exalted, O Lord, in Your strength; We will sing and praise Your power.” (Psa. 21:13).

Standing before the Lord and thrilling yourself with the closeness of the strength of God is far better than having to trust yourself. You will feel more confident. You will also be much stronger spiritually when you go to prayer. Only, keep the praise going toward God. Otherwise, your boasting will turn into spiritual pride and weaken you.
**God as Your Strength—Nothing Else**

We all need something to depend on that will make us feel strong enough to tackle the difficulties of life. But, God wants to be our strength, not ‘other gods.’ Though it is painful to admit, it will help us if we honestly consider our bondage to idolatry.”...they will be held guilty, They whose strength is their God” (Hab. 1:11).

It could be the presence of God. David said, “I love You, O Lord, my strength.” (Psalm 18:1). Like David we take pleasure in and love the sources we depend on to feel strong. We should learn to take pleasure in God, not in the ‘other gods’ of our own strength. Often, God does not take pleasure in those things which we find delight.”He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man” (Psa. 147:10).

It is right that you allow God to draw near to you so that you can wrap yourself in His presence as your strength. Come to Him and drink because anything else is idolatry.

The scriptures carry a strong rebuke for those who trust their own strength rather than the one and only God. But, those whose trust is the Lord will be like a tree planted by water.

Thus says the Lord, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert...But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness... Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord And whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water. That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit (Jer. 17:5-8; see also Isa. 12:2,3).

We know from previous studies that the water spoken of in the verse above is the water of the Holy Spirit. Humble yourself enough to let yourself believe that God is a fountain who never stops giving the Spirit. Then, nurture believing you have access enough to actually draw near to Him. Stand open before the Lord, by reapplying what you do in the shower when you let the water warm you down to the bone. When you do, He will draw near to you. As you receive His presence trust the Holy Spirit coming to you, and His presence with you, is your strength. Think of God that way—not your humanness. Then, you will be like a tree planted by water that flows direct from the sanctuary of God (Ezek. 47:1-12).

I am fully convinced that the essence of what it means to have God as your one and only God is to depend on Him to be what quenches your thirst. Are you?
Chapter 14

Beauty and Perfection

Beauty Is Evidence

Still another place we see our thirst for God to be here with us is in our desire for physical beauty, in ourselves and in others.

You can find freedom from having to feed yourself with physical beauty by learning to direct your heart to feed yourself with God's presence. The first thing is that you need to learn to better recognize your desire for God.

In order to avoid being misunderstood, let me say that appearance is important. We live in a world that values these things. As Christians we have a responsibility to dress nicely and keep ourselves well groomed. We are representing our Lord. But on the other hand, we can’t let ourselves drink from what we see in the mirror. We can’t keep trying to quench our thirst for God by pride resulting from daydreams of how we think other people view us.

Quenching our thirst with how we look is a product of comparison. When we feed ourselves with how good we appear, invariably we feed ourselves with how much better we look than others. It only exalts us as much as it puts others down. But the Bible says, “The Lord of hosts has planned it, to defile the pride of all beauty” (Isa. 23:9). We need God in a way that reassures and soothes us.

Age is catching up to all of us: For, ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off,’” (1 Pet. 1:24). Someday, you will wake up and realize your body just doesn’t look attractive anymore. Rather than your own beauty, trust that you are before the Lord: “Around God is awesome majesty” (Job 37:22). Use praise and thanks to get your heart to believe the beauty and the majesty of God. Let Him cover you with His light. Enjoy His majesty. Thrill your heart by directing praise toward His beauty all around and close to you. “Walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light” (1 John 1:7). Paul said, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14). Rather than your identity being tied to your human appearance, enjoy wearing God’s beauty as your identity. Then, if you keep in mind that “God is Spirit” (John 4:24; see also 2 Cor. 3:17), you won’t be afraid to praise His presence when He is close to you.

The Bible says we should “ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in holy array” (Ps. 29:2). Put on holy array by trusting God to draw near when you draw near to Him (James 4:8). By this, the presence of God Himself becomes your “holy array.” Ascribe glory to the Lord by using thanks and praise to nurture believing the attractiveness of God’s beauty and majesty over your own. Depending on God this way is far more enjoyable and far less stressful than having to depend on yourself. Doing so will awaken love and delight for the Lord.

Try to remember that beauty is important to us because of our thirsty desire for the nearness of God. However, we were designed to glory in God as our God, not in how well we compare to the other people around us. Your desire to look attractive is the reason you can trust God to give you the majesty of His
presence. He doesn’t want us to feed ourselves with ourselves. He wants us to feed on Him as our God, not ourselves as a god.

Wanting Perfection is Evidence

What about perfection? How hard do you work to do something well? Then, when you do something well, how do you react? Most of the time, we drink from it as a substitution for our deeper desire, the presence of a perfect God.

As with addictions to beauty, you can find freedom from having to feed yourself with human perfection by directing your heart to feed yourself with God's presence. This book shows how. The first thing is to recognize that your driving desire for perfection is because of your unfilled longing for the presence of God.

Even as Christians, we sometimes work ourselves into a frenzy. We try to find evidence in our lives that justifies us before God. We wonder how well we measure up.

When you go to bed at night, and you think back over the day, what justifies you before God? Did you pray enough? Did you read your Bible? Did you share your faith with someone? Or, did you blow it? Did you fall to temptation? If any of these are questions you are asking yourself, then you may be trusting your actions to justify you before God.

Think of the pressure you feel to ‘perform’ sometimes. There is glory in a good performance, especially when other people are watching. But there is stress also. When there is a possibility we might not achieve, it scares us. That is where fear enters the picture. True, some stress makes us work harder. But, what happens when we feel pressure to perform, and we loose our hope of glory, humanly speaking? Often, the stress gets so great, it affects our performance to where we can’t function as well. Why is this? I think it is because, apart from God, we feel like we have to achieve glory equal to God’s. Then, in a moment of honesty we loose hope. We also loose ability to function well. Rather than glory in Christ, achieving has become our best hope of something to drink from. We were never intended to live this way.

Why is it difficult for us to listen to someone telling us something we already know? Why is it hard to let someone else tell us what to do? Why do we struggle with fear when we might not achieve? Why do we resort to so many harmful ways to try and soothe ourselves? All of these things are feeble attempts to quench our thirst for God, apart from Him.

Rather than your whole basis of motivation being to achieve perfection so you can pride yourself with it, humble yourself. Let God draw near and praise Him rather than yourself.

There is hope for those who want out of the battle to work themselves up to perfection. Get your heart to believe that only God is perfect. Rest into trusting God as your perfection. Be finished with trading the glory of God for the glory of what you think you have to achieve. Drink the Spirit and glory in His perfection, “(for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better
hope, through which we draw near to God” (Heb. 7:19).

**Wanting to Hurt Ourselves is Evidence**

Sometimes our desperate and unmet need for God reveals itself in our wanting to hurt ourselves.

Causing ourselves to feel pain is a complicated mix of wanting to glory in perfection, realizing that we aren’t, and then settling for a twisted kind of control and power instead. We want to glory in the closeness of a loving, perfect, and sovereign God, but instead we have settled for priding ourselves by the power we feel in how much we can make ourselves hurt. Face the truth about yourself. You want power! But, the truth is also that you were never intended to glory in a power of your own.

But don’t get me wrong. You want to enjoy lots of power. God’s presence is readily and abundantly available. You just have to set your heart to make God your power and not to feed yourself with your own. Get your heart to hear and believe that you can stand before the Lord. Let Him radiate the Holy Spirit inside and all around you. Then, thrill yourself with the power of God as your God—not yourself.
Chapter 15

Addictions, Unwanted Behaviors, and Change

The Candy Dish

When I was young my grandmother had a candy dish. Whenever we visited my sister and I would race to see who could get there first. It was always full. We ate lots of candy. We were addicted and had no intention to control our desires. What we did was unhealthy but we didn’t hold back. My parents didn’t like that we ate so much candy—but my grandma loved it. She always made sure there was always more than enough. Earthly addictions are like that. You like what you are doing at the time but afterwards you can feel sick.

Feeding on God is similar because it requires unreserved indulgence. We have to become as little children who don’t hold back (Luke 18:16). The Bible also says,

Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance (Isa. 55:1,2).

God’s candy dish is always full. You don’t have to worry about whether there is enough for you. You just need to learn that when feeding on God you can’t let yourself hold back. “Delight yourself in abundance” as much as you want. Let your repentance “change your mind” so that you become as a child who squeals with delight toward God and who doesn’t hold back.

Addictions and Unwanted Behaviors are Evidence

One of the most important steps is for you to learn to recognize your addictive tendencies and desires as practical evidence that you long for and need God’s presence closer to you all the time. You want God and He wants to be close to you. Your desire for God never decreases or goes away! It just reveals itself differently at various times.

Why do unwanted behaviors have such a strong hold on us? Why do addictions tend to have such a strong hold on us? The habit provides us with something. Often it is reassurance. Addictions can soothe us in some way. Sometimes, we feed ourselves with the sense of power we feel from being in control—even when we know it might hurt us. Sometimes we use the addiction to protect ourselves somehow. The need we are trying to meet is always deeper than the addiction can supply so we keep pushing harder and going deeper into the addiction.

The behavior provides us with an emotional benefit. Our thirst for God is much stronger than most of us realize. Bad habits are evidence of a deeper and driving thirst for God’s presence to be here with us.
Often we find a certain reassurance from the behavior. Sometimes, we feed ourselves from the power of doing something we know is hurting us. Other times the behavior feels like security somehow. The unwanted behavior is evidence of something deeper.

Underlying even chemical addictions is an even stronger emotional addiction. It is our emotional addiction that is evidence of our need for the presence of God.

The good news is that you don’t have to stop any addiction or unwanted behavior without replacing the “benefit” of what you are trying to get out of it! You can fill your longings and desires with God's presence—lavished on you from heaven itself.

Our desire for God is much stronger than most of us realize. Bad habits are often, if not always, evidence of our desperate and unmet need for God's presence here with us. This is true for anyone no matter where you go to church. You need God's presence with you intensely—constantly.

Your thirst is for God—not the unwanted behavior! Take that by faith. Salvation is vital—especially in the light of eternity. But, on a practical level for here and now, it is the presence of God that we need. Anything less and we are doomed to lives of addictions and compulsive behaviors that are deeply damaging.

**Changing Habits**

Most ways people try to change from addictions is to put the focus directly on stopping the unwanted behavior. Over and over we focus on the unwanted activity itself and try to discipline ourselves more. Pure discipline applied directly to the habit is difficult way to stop a bad habit. It doesn’t work very well because we are trying to stop our addictive tendency and the addiction itself. Changing will work better when you learn to focus your effort according to your thirst and the grace of God.

“Just saying No,” can be effective for people with lots of personal discipline. It can be very frustrating for people with a history of addictions. The problem with addictions is that they fill our lives with so much failure that self-discipline is often robbed from us.

The reason saying “No,” can be so difficult is that we try to stop the unwanted behavior and the addictive tendencies all at the same time. You don’t have to do it that way because you are changing your dependence to “drinking” and receiving the presence of God.

The good news is that using your thirst for God is a tool that can help make change and growth much easier. The principle to remember is this: Substitution works best.

Have you ever wanted something to eat and not found anything in the cookie jar? What did you do next. If your like me, you go to the cupboard for some chips or to the refrigerator for something else. Changing from cookies to chips is much easier than denying our hunger and stopping our search. The same is true in our spiritual life. Just like we can’t ignore our hunger, we can’t ignore our thirst. We
can’t “just say no,” because if we don’t get it from one place we will get it from another. There is one place my analogy falls apart and doesn’t apply.

There are times when we may be a little hungry but even so, we shouldn’t eat. When it comes to food, it could be for any number of reasons that we shouldn’t eat. But what about our thirst for God? In this case we shouldn’t shut it down. No instead, we should set it free and feed on God just as much as we want.

If we take a worldly approach to our thirst all we can do is try to shut down our thirsty soul where we stop feeding ourselves with the earthly things and people that are bad for us. But if we approach it spiritually, we can learn to literally turn our soul toward God and feast on the Holy Spirit of our God. It is right that we be obsessive and compulsive about enjoying the presence of God.

If your repentance is only aimed to get you to stop doing the addiction then that is all it will do—at best. Repentance according to grace isn’t like that.

Repentance according to grace is a process of trading our earthly addictions for an even greater addiction and dependence on the glorious presence of God. This way of repentance is much more effective for people with addictions because it doesn’t ignore our addictive tendencies. It only replaces what you are depending on.

Repenting according to grace helps you to stop the unwanted behavior but it does that by emphasizing what you are finding in return for stopping the unwanted behavior. Isn’t it wonderful that you don’t have to stop your additive desires? You only have to trade additions—from earthly things to the presence of God. By this, your addictive desires can be a tremendous help to you for making the trade to God.

Have you been failing at stopping your earthly additions? If you keep trying to feed yourself from the sources that can’t possibly supply, then unwanted behaviors will only tend to become worse.

Pure discipline applied directly to the unwanted habit is difficult way to stop addictions or unwanted behaviors. You have to think in terms of replacing what you are getting out of it with something better. You will do much better at stopping your unwanted behaviors by focusing on replacing the earthly benefits you gain from the behavior with similar benefits from the presence of God.

You don’t have to live in bondage to earthly addictions and unwanted behaviors. Growth is realistic because you can pursue meeting the need that drives you unwanted behavior with God's presence. It works! You just have to work with your heart until you learn to trust God’s grace for quenching your thirst with abundance.

Delight is better than discipline. Don’t try to stop a bad habit without replacing the “benefit” of what you are trying to get out of it with God. Think for a moment of the temporary thrill, pleasure, and the escape you feel from your earthly addiction. Determine that you are going to thrill and pleasure yourself in the presence of God even more. Let your refuge and protection be His presence. Repent by setting your addictions to continually drink the presence of God. God can satisfy you and it doesn’t hurt afterwards.

Apply all the discipline you have toward nurturing delight in God—and not toward stopping your unwanted behavior directly. Ask God to help you understand what you are trying to get out of the earthly addiction. Then, change sources by getting your heart to hear the truth about your being able to fill your
desires with God instead of the unwanted behavior. The need is for you to turn your heart to God.

Be encouraged. You can cure and prevent addictions and unwanted behaviors by taking steps to direct your heart to feed yourself with God's presence!

Decide now that you are going to learn how to repent according to grace. Decide to stay at it until your repentance removes obstacles so that you can draw near to God and also let Him draw near to you. Learn to use thanks and praise toward the closeness of God to help ignite greater delight and love toward God.

If it was control, glory in God’s sovereign power, and keep the praise going toward Him. Your thirst is for God, not the bad habit! Take it by faith that what you need, and long for most, is the presence of the Spirit wrapped around you. Whether reassurance, thrill and pleasure, or a sense of strength, admit you need the ‘benefit’ you are seeking. Then turn away from yourself and toward God. Soothe yourself with the Spirit. Find your thrill in drinking the majesty and beauty of your God.

Apply any discipline you have toward nurturing delight in God, not toward stopping the unwanted behavior directly. Keep asking God to help you understand what you are trying to get out of it. Then, change sources by getting your heart to hear the truth about quenching your thirst with God, instead of the bad habit. In that way you will learn to ‘get’ from God what you are trying to find from the habit. Your behavior will change.

This series of books will help you learn to “get it” from God what you are trying to find from the habit. Your behavior can change! You can find freedom! Feeding yourself with God’s presence is a perfect fit for people who struggle for freedom from addictive tendencies.

More Preventative than Reactionary

Discipline applied directly to our behavior is not effective enough. It is discouraging and spiritually damaging to “repent” over and over again with little evidence of real change. Eventually we wonder how God can love us when we keep having the same problems over and over again. These kinds of reactions are avoidable. But you are going to have to change how you change.

When it comes to our thirsty need, our fears are so great that no amount of misapplied diligence will ever be enough. We need a better way to change!

Our problem is much bigger than all of the individual earthly sources we drink from. Sinful behaviors are damaging and wrong, but the cause is deeper than our outward actions. That is why simple discipline, aimed directly at our behavior, doesn’t work very well. We have to get at the heart of the matter. To do that we have to change the ways we focus our effort—and when.

Your repentance has to be more preventative than reactionary. It works best to addresses your tendencies to wander from God before the unwanted behaviors and attitudes occur. Otherwise, you will only be dealing with the symptom and not the cause. Your focus will tend to always be on believing the forgiveness of God and not really on correcting the problem. God does forgive you. He does love you.
You will need to come to the place of believing that. What I want you to know right now is that by concerning yourself with the underlying causes you can change your proneness toward independence from God. You can change from wanting to run the other way. You can change your dependence from earthly addictions to being addicted to staying before God and drinking His presence continually.

For the moment, fear and disbelief may be where you are. You are not alone. These things are a normal part of our spiritual pilgrimage. But, fear and disbelief are not right. Jesus said, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.” (John 14:1). There is hope. You can get through this.

Though we are encouraged to nurture our faith few of us work at it very hard or very specifically. The Bible also talks about, “...applying all diligence, in your faith...” (1 Peter 1:5). It also talks about, “building yourselves up on your most holy faith” (Jude 1:20b). Paul also wrote, “Fight the good fight of faith...” (1 Timothy 6:12). You may be among those who reads your Bible regularly. But, when you read, do you work at hearing the truth, being receptive, and believing what you read? You should.

Changes in our behavior work best when they happen because of changes in our heart. In terms of freedom to draw near to God we have to change what we believe and love.

Decide now that you are going to learn to change from the inside out. You can change your beliefs and loves so that your addition becomes to stay near to God and drink from Him continually. This series of books is for helping you do that.
Self-Esteem and Our Need for God

Self-esteem is a topic that concerns many people today. It is more accurate to understand our need for self-esteem as a strong and driving spiritual need for the presence of God.

Meeting your need with God's presence is powerfully effective. This book is for showing you how to work with your heart so that you can find freedom from your fears to experience God's presence to that degree.

I am not saying that we have a need for God in the same sense that most Christians talk about it. People do need God for salvation, but people keep needing God after they get saved. Our need never stops!

We have a need to continually experience God at a level where the issue of self-esteem is no longer a concern to us. Meeting our need for God to that degree happens only when we experience His presence so intensely and so constantly that we are reassured, soothed, made confident, and made to feel secure because of His closeness.

Experiencing God’s presence intensely and praising His closeness to you is a far a more effective, more practical, and more readily available solution than normal ways of solving the problem of self-esteem. You can do that. This book is for showing you how.

Problems with Self-Esteem Must be Corrected

Self-esteem represents an area of need that must be met effectively or unity in the body of Christ is not possible. We won't ever stop hurting one another unless this problem is solved—powerfully and effectively.

Jesus prayed, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one” (John 17:22). The glory of God is what will bring unity. The glory of God will solve your self-esteem problem.

I know this works because it worked for me. Experiencing God's presence will work for you too.
Understanding Self-Esteem

The word “self-esteem” is a label our society has placed on a genuine and critically important need we all have.

However, the word “self-esteem” can be misleading. Most people today understand “self-esteem” as a description of how a person feels about themselves. It would be more accurate to think of self-esteem as the process by which many arrive at feeling good about themselves.

Rather than thinking of self-esteem as a noun, we should think of esteeming ourselves as an action verb, an activity in which we engage. In other words, the way many people have come to feel good toward themselves is one of “esteeming.”

By esteeming ourselves, I mean that we direct subtle forms of praise toward ourselves. When we do something good or kind, when we know the right answer, when we feel someone’s approval, we esteem ourselves with subtle forms of praise.

Self-directed praise is a natural way, apart from God, to ease the inner tension from our unmet need for the presence of God. But, doing so does not nurture the humility so important for spiritual growth. Praise toward ourselves can only result in self-based pride, something that God resists (James 4:6). Pride hurts us in our walk with God.

Our need is not to esteem ourselves. Our need is to enjoy the benefits of having God's presence intensely close and flowing through us. The process by which we Christians live should be different from that of self-directed praise.

Please understand that I am not degrading the magnitude of our need. Jesus came to preach the gospel to the poor in spirit (Luke 4:18; Matt. 5:3). To belittle anyone’s need in this area would be wrong and damaging.

You Don’t Have to Praise Yourself

You don’t have to meet your need by “esteeming” yourself with praise. Praising the closeness of God is more effective at quenching your thirst. Even in the normal process of quenching our thirst, much of the praise goes toward the source we depend on. For example, consider a car that belongs to you. When you first get it you might say, “Wow this is a nice car.” Here, we are directing praise toward a car that has become a source to us. If the car is not “worthy of praise,” then we find very little emotional benefit. By that I mean, old cars don’t make us feel good about ourselves.

Let me emphasize again that you don’t have to meet your need for God by praise toward yourself. Think about a child who has a big brother for protection. How would the child feel in front of friends at school? If there is praise involved, the child would feel good about himself. By praise I don’t necessarily mean words, but rather feelings that, if verbalized, would say, “Wow! My brother is cool. He is so big and strong.” If the older brother is worthy of praise, and if the big brother is standing close to the child,
the child would feel good about himself! The same is true with God. When we quench our thirst by receiving His presence, He gets the praise and we get to feel confident because of Him.

Think about a nice set of clothes. If they are a style that you like they can be part of your identity as a person. Clothing can also be a basis for pride in ourselves. But how does it work? There is a kind of praise that is toward the clothing but because the clothes are on us the result is that we feel good about ourselves. The praise is toward the clothes because we like them. But the result is a separate thing. The result is that we are made to feel confident because of the praise.

Something very similar can be true of God. When He is close we can praise Him for how great He is and who He is to us. When you think of God that way and you let yourself enjoy His closeness for who He is to you the result is that you feel confident. God becomes your identity — your, “I AM.” That is the way it should be! God gets the praise and we are made to feel confident because He is our God.

The psalmist wrote, “O Lord God, You are my confidence” (Ps. 71:5). What is the principle? We only have to praise that from which we are drinking. You can quench your thirst when your praise is directed toward God. You can boast in Him and feel confident too. At a minimum, you only have to believe He is close to you and that He is worthy of your praise—at least as worthy as a new car or a big brother. On a practical level, if praise isn’t involved, then we can’t drink from anything. We only need to reapply to the Holy Spirit what we are already doing toward earthly sources.

**Bless Yourself in God**

Is it wrong that we feel good about ourselves? No it is not wrong. When we “drink” from earthly things and relationships, how do we feel? Natural chemicals (endorphins) are released in our brain and we feel a brief surge of energy and pleasure. When you feel a sense of well-being it is because of the way God designed you. He wants us to enjoy quenching our thirsty desires! It was true even from the time when we were very young.

Imagine being a child in first grade again. The teacher has just asked a question and you know the answer. How do you feel? You would feel excited. Your hand would shoot up and wave wildly, while saying, “I know, I know!” Now, when you answer the question right, how do you feel? You feel important. You feel strong. You feel good about yourself. That feeling comes from “drinking” in from the satisfaction of knowing the answer. Let your heart hear this: God designed you to feel pleasure when you “drink” from something.

You could say we are “blessed” when we drink from something. Listen for the heart of God in this next verse: “The nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will glory” (Jer. 4:2). We need confidence. We need security. Desperately. Someday, rather than esteeming themselves, entire nations will bless themselves in God. Rather than the sense of pleasure resulting when we drink from earthly things, we will drink the Holy Spirit. And Christians won’t shut themselves down inside when they catch themselves drinking from earthly sources. Instead, they will repent by directing their heart toward God and set their thirst free. Entire nations will bless themselves in God by standing before Him and receiving His presence. At that time, love for God and worship toward Him will increase greatly.
Feeling Good about Ourselves

We should feel good about ourselves as a by-product of the nearness of God, not by esteeming ourselves directly. We should feel good about ourselves and have confidence as a result of the nearness of God, but not because of self-directed praise. God has a better way.

The emotional results are similar in that when you trust the nearness of God you do feel good about yourself. Consider King David’s approach to this important issue: “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge” (Ps. 73:28). Like David, enjoying the emotional benefits of having God close to you, means you must intentionally think of the presence of God around you as your good, your security, your strength, your righteousness, your reason for confidence.

David also said, “My soul will make its boast in the Lord; the humble will hear it and rejoice” (Ps. 34:2). When you boast in God alone, you have humbled yourself from boasting for other reasons. The verse above says the humble will praise boastfully!

God as your “I AM”

You can and you should enjoy the presence of God as what makes you adequate. The Apostle Paul said, “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (2 Cor. 3:5). Now let’s consider an Old Testament example of how this works out in real life.

When Moses was in Egypt, he was confident and likely even boastful, too. He tried to free Israel by himself. He killed a man. Then, he left Egypt, because he was afraid for his life. How would you feel?

Later, he saw a bush that was on fire, but was not being burned up. God was speaking to Moses from the bush. God wanted him to go and tell the Egyptian Pharaoh to let God’s people go free. How does Moses react? Basically, he said that he didn’t feel adequate: “Who am I that I should go” (Exod. 3:11). For forty years he had been herding sheep. It was a job that for him didn’t have much glory in it, certainly not enough to keep him reassured and confident.

Moses was just like us. We go through our lives seldom finding enough reasons to keep believing that “I am adequate” or that “I am enough.” Moses responded, “Who am I?” But what did God do? He responded, “I AM,” God knew Moses was inadequate. But it took Moses forty years of herding sheep to give up and believe his own human inadequacy. Just like us, God couldn’t use him until he came to the place where he knew he couldn’t depend on himself.

When Moses said in essence, “I am not,” God said, “I AM” (Exod. 3:14). Please note also that God didn’t encourage Moses with, “You can do it.” God didn’t say, “I believe in you.” Moses needed courage and confidence that was based on something real. Instead of encouraging Moses to trust himself, God was saying, “Take courage, I can do it.” God gave Moses a real basis for confidence when He said, “I will be with you” (Exod. 3:12). In order for God to be Moses’ “I AM,” in order for Moses to find his
adequacy in the Lord, God had to be with him. It is the same for us. On a practical level it is always that way. Whatever we depend on for our security, our strength, or our adequacy, there is something about it that has to be around us, close to us. It is true with earthly sources. It is also true with God.

There is freedom for people who want out of the battle of proving that they are enough without God. God’s message to Moses was the same as it is to you and me: “Believe in Me, I can do it. Let Me be your ‘I am.’ Let Me come and be your adequacy.”

A Caution About Who “I am” in Christ

Common ways of applying who “I am” in Christ greatly increases our sense of confidence and security. That is a good thing. Many would say that it is a confidence that is from God and I would agree with that. But is it a confidence and security that is from the presence of God around us? It is not.

The emphasis today of who we are in Christ has greatly helped a lot of Christians. But there is a danger. The danger is in not having a clear understanding and application of what it means to be “in Christ.” Being in Christ is far more than another way of saying that you are a Christian.

Being in Christ means that we are inside the presence of Christ. Fish are in water and water is in the fish. That is how we should think of being in Christ.

The problem is that religious pride results when a person declares who “I am” in Christ and they only think of being in Christ as being in some kind of special club. We have “Christianized” the worlds version of self-esteem. God as the “I AM” who is with us is a completely different approach from the emphasis today on who “I am” in relation to Christ.

Who we are in Christ is powerful! Who we are in relation to Christ holds profound and deep truths that have been a source of great preaching down through the centuries! You can spend your whole life focusing on who “I am” in Christ and go far. I am only saying that the way we apply it falls far short of what God intended.

What I observe is this. Many — if not most Christians who focus on who “I am” in Christ become so confident in themselves that the need to abide and drink from God appears to actually be diminished. I believe that the cause is because the emphasis placed on who “I am” meets a need for confidence that stunts our need to actually abide in Him.

Think of it from a motivational standpoint. The practical motive for abiding is a driving emotional need to find refuge, a sense of strength, and God as our glory. When our focus is on who “I am” in relation to Christ the emotional need to abide in God isn’t there because the need is being met by confidence in who “I am.” Yes it may be a confidence that is because of God but it is not a confidence that is from the presence of God as our “I AM.”

There is another problem. Emphasis about who “I am” in Christ puts the pressure of faith on us and not on God. What happens when life gets difficult? If you have been trying to believe who “I am” the critical
point of faith is on who you are and not on who God is to you.

In contrast, when the emphasis is properly placed on our being “in Christ” we are made confident and strong. But it is a humble kind of confidence because it is not about who “I am.” It a humble confidence because our being “in Him” is clearly the cause.

Our confidence must be from who God is to us, who God has made us, who we are because of what God has done! If not then it is religious pride. Our heart-training needs have a conscious and planned focus on the presence of God and who He has made us or our heart won’t hear it.

When preach to yourself about who you are in Christ your confidence should get stronger because the kingdom of God is here. God is close and He is your “I AM!” That is much greater reason to be confident than who “I am.” Without a direct and conscious effort to train our heart to hear about who we are because of what God has done we won’t get it. The problem is because pride in ourselves is too easy.

When preaching to yourself about who you are in Christ please take the extra time it takes to focus on who God has made you, who you are because of what Christ has done. Then pause for a moment to enjoy the closeness of God! During that moment let yourself feel confidence because God is close. If you do this, your motivation to stand before the Lord will increase because the emotional need for God won’t be diminished by spiritual pride.

**Self-Esteem before Coming to God?**

Many people feel afraid draw near to God because they don’t feel worthy. Is answer that these people need to “esteem” themselves until they come to the place of believing they have enough worth to come before God? They should not. That would only result in a sense of worthiness based on human pride. If we trust earthly sources the result is always pride in ourselves. Pride dulls our thirsty desire for God. The Bible says, “...God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6).

Consider something even less obvious. What would happen if a Christian came to the place of feeling good about themselves based on what they do for God, or the kindness they show toward hurting people? What would happen? These are good things to do, but we cannot allow ourselves to base our sense of goodness on anything other than the white robe of righteousness in God’s presence.

The Bible says, “I said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good besides You’” (Ps. 16:2). If our sense of being good is based on what we do, even what we do for God, we need to unlearn it. We need to humble ourselves until we put on the Light that comes from God. We need to humble ourselves until we believe our good is the Spirit of God touching us.

The Bible says we should “be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9).

The danger is the possibility of coming to a transcendently holy God while thinking that we are good
enough on our own to stand before Him. We are not. Our confidence can’t be in ourselves when coming
to God! The Bible talks about “…the gospel of God, so that...the Gentiles may become acceptable,
sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:16). It is our having been washed with the Holy Spirit that
makes us acceptable to God. We need our confidence to be in that!

We don’t have to build ourselves up with confidence about our righteous behavior before we come to
Him. That is pride in ourselves. The Bible also says, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we
have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by
the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,” (Titus 3:5,6).

God as our Good

If you have the righteousness of God you have His acceptance (2 Cor. 5:21). If you believe you have
God’s acceptance then you also have His pleasure (Heb. 11:6). Remember again that as Christians we
have been changed on the inside. The old is gone (2 Cor. 5:17). But at the same time, our body is still
waiting to the full adoption. Our body doesn’t get “saved” until we get a new one when we go to heaven.

When you draw near to the Lord here, you are standing before Him with an unredeemed body.
Therefore, it is vital that when you come to God you need to be trusting God to give us His light so that
you can trust His presence around you as our righteousness, even for your humanity. Don’t trust the good
things you do as evidence of your being righteous. The Bible says, “…all our righteous deeds are like a
filthy garment…” (Isa. 64:6).

Instead of ourselves we should depend on the nearness of God. Humble yourself into trusting God to
freely give you the Holy Spirit so that you can refuge yourself in His presence and be able to call Him
your good. David said, “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my
refuge…” (Psa. 73:28).

Soon many people will trust God to give them the Holy Spirit freely because there is coming a day when
many people will trust God as their righteousness. The Bible says, “In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the Lord is our
righteousness.” (Jer. 33:16).

Too Many Negative Side Effects

It is a practical approach to depend on the presence of God in order to meet the need that most people
call “self-esteem.” The Bible says, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man” (Ps.
118:8). Acceptance and approval from friends isn’t always clear. People aren’t always impressed. We
can’t always drink from what we do because circumstances don’t always cooperate with our goals. We
shouldn’t even drink from how much we know. Sometimes our analysis of the situation proves itself to
be wrong. Self-esteem has too many unwanted side effects. Too much pain.
It is different when you glory in the Holy Spirit of God. He is always there. God is always ready to pour out more than we can open ourselves to drink: anytime, anywhere, every time we come to Him. It is practical to depend on God because feeling good about ourselves only requires that we boast. Boast in the presence of God.

Hope for Those Who Want Freedom

There is freedom for people who want out of the continuous battle to build up their own self-esteem. Experiencing God as I describe makes you feel secure and confident. Though it comes about indirectly, when the nearness of God becomes your good, you feel good about yourself.

Because of what God offers freely you can thank the Lord for the truth about your humanity. You don’t have to avoid the pain of admitting that your humanity is inadequate. You don’t have to push yourself until you perform at a level where your humanity is worthy of praise. You can quench your thirst with God. You can relax knowing that apart from God, you will never be enough. You can relax because the presence of God can be your identity, your significance, your security. You can rest because of His grace.

Your human glory doesn’t have to measure up to God’s glory, or to that of the other people around you. Because you can quench your thirst with God you can rejoice that your humanity does not have to measure up in order for you to be “OK.” Thank Him until your own heart hears and believes. It doesn’t matter because you can “drink” the Holy Spirit. You don’t have to be what quenches your own thirst! Trust the Holy Spirit to draw near and follow this example, “I said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good besides You’” (Ps. 16:2). Keep thanking Him until you find freedom to welcome the presence of the Spirit of God and trust what God gives as that which makes you “OK.”

The presence of God can be what makes you feel courage, confidence, a sense of being loved, accepted, secure. Thank the Lord that you don’t have to worry that you might never be enough, because God can be your glory. You don’t have to keep living with the pressure of having to keep justifying your existence because “God is the one who justifies” (Rom. 8:33). Rather than exalting yourself, exalt God as the One who makes you “OK.” You don’t have to prowl around for reasons to believe you are a good person. Follow the pattern in the scriptures: “The Lord is our righteousness” (Jer. 33:16). You too can say, “as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge” (Ps. 73:28). It is right to trust His grace. An intense closeness of God's presence works better than self-esteem. You can experience God more fully.
Chapter 17

More About the Price We Pay

Trapped and Full of Pain

God made us “spiritually aware” of His glory, but we have reacted wrongly to the law that reminds us the glory of our humanness is inadequate compared to God. The result is that in terms of drawing near to God, something terrible has taken place. We are trapped in a prison of disbelief.

“Who is...so blind as the servant of the Lord? You have seen many things, but you do not observe them; Your ears are open, but none hears. The Lord was pleased for His righteousness’ sake To make the law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and despoiled; All of them are trapped in caves, Or are hidden away in prisons; They have become a prey with none to deliver them, And a spoil, with none to say, ‘Give them back!’ Who among you will give ear to this? Who will give heed and listen hereafter?” (Isaiah 42:19-23)

God wanted to make the law great and glorious, but we have reacted with a life long habit of “drinking” by how well we keep people impressed, maintain their approval, and work hard enough to achieve our goals that keeps us in bondage to fear.

When it comes to God we believe very deeply that we have to do the same. In our minds, we know we should trust God and not ourselves. But, it is so deeply ingrained in us to live by faith in ourselves that we don’t hardly realize that we are approaching God the same way.

In the church today, many, if not most of God’s are trapped and hiding.

Much more that we realize we “servants of the Lord” are trapped because of our disbelief. We are cowering in our own little caves and prisons. We are trapped and hiding because we equate drawing near and receiving the presence of God as a goal that is too high and lofty for us. That we think at all of drawing near to God as a “goal” means that we think of receiving His presence as something we have to “achieve.” This view is pride and a blinding sin.

The church today wants God’s presence but we are terrified by the thought that we might not be able to perform well enough.

It is far too easy that we accept the feeling that we should have to ‘deserve’ God’s presence before He will draw near. Such pride! Our disbelief is sin and it keeps us in deep bondage. Like the verse says above, our ears are open, but none hears. It is time that we let our hearts hear and believe about coming to God according to His grace.

How long will God wait for us?
We know God is holy, but we act like we have to achieve purity apart from Him. We are wrong. We need to come to the place where we trust the power of the cross and God’s ability to cleanse us enough to find freedom to draw near. It is time for the church to repent of having to punish ourselves until we feel like we have earned the forgiveness of God.

Some Christians are so unaware of God’s provision to cleanse us when we enter the throne room that they are afraid to draw near for fear they might die. They look at Isaiah and say along with him, “Woe is me” (Isa. 6). But they ignore the fact that God’s solution for Isaiah was to touch him. Even worse, we ignore the fact of God’s provision to touch us with His presence by washing us inside and out anytime we draw near (Heb. 10:19,22).

It is a sorrowful thing that our disbelief and our lack of understanding are great enough to keep us away from God. We are destroyed for our lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). We cannot trust ourselves to be righteous enough apart from God. We dare not. But, we don’t trust God either.

The result is that many Christians are caught in the middle between wanting to draw near to God and feeling helpless to do anything about it. We act like we have heavy weights shackled to our ankles, or tied to our back. We tend to think, that even if we did enter the throne room and draw near to God He wouldn’t give us His presence freely. We feel ashamed, hopeless, and traumatized by fear.

It hurts to know that our humanity falls short. The truth is that we will never be enough—without the presence of God. Avoiding this truth results in great and unnecessary pain. Life won’t ever be perfect here on earth. Still however, the main reason for the amount of pain we feel in our struggles is because of trying to find substitutions for God that are ineffective and hurt us. The church today is deep into idolatry of the heart and we are afraid to face the truth and deal with it.

I am writing to show you how.

It is time for the church to wake up and admit that we haven’t been depending on God for the righteous we need. We have been trusting ourselves. It is time for the church to turn from having to jump through spiritual hoops in order for God to bless us with His presence.

It is time to accept the truth about our inadequacies! We will never be enough to quench the thirst of the world and we should stop trying to lead people to God by increasing their dependence on ourselves.

The problem of our disbelief can be solved. The obstacles can be removed. We don’t have to settle for lives of secretly hiding our disbelief and independence from God. Repentance will help you.

Veils of Pride

The Bible says, “...as Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away” (2 Cor. 3:13). When Moses was on the mountain with God, his face was shining. But the Bible says that he covered his face after he came down from the mountain, because the glory started to fade away.
In many ways, we have learned to live according to the Old Covenant. We work to “achieve glory,” but after we do, it quickly fades away—just like it did with Moses.

Human glory always fades away. We work hard to achieve a sense of having glory humanly speaking and when it fades we feel inadequate all over again. What to we do? Just like Moses we cover up our sense of lack. We hide behind “veils” that keep our short-comings from being exposed; to ourselves; to others; to God.

The Bible says, “But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted... whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart” ( 2 Cor 3:14,15). Figuratively, the law in us is like a constant reading of the Old Covenant to us. Every time something happens that reveals our inadequacies, the law is right there, reminding us over and over that we are not God, that our humanness does not measure up. But how do we react? We veil our inadequacies and we hide from God. Instead of facing the truth about our humanity, we hide behind hard veils that we think protect us. We push ourselves to achieve more glory for our flesh or, we bury our sense of lack and live in denial.

The Bible says, “but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Cor. 3:16). Turning to the Lord can feel like death—but only when your deep down intention is to hide your inadequacies from God. Learning to delight in the cross, requires that we can’t keep running from the truth about the sin of our humanity. We are not enough. The good news is that God wants to be our God. We don’t have to depend on ourselves. Turning to God requires that we humble ourselves and remove the veils that hide our inadequacies. We have to run to admit the truth about our hearts with a ruthless kind of delight.

The Bible says, “‘I will fill the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people will be satisfied with My goodness,’ declares the Lord” (Jer. 31:14). Rejoice your way into believing the goodness of God to fill you. Disbelief that God can or will satisfy you is to doubt the goodness of God. Humble yourself into believing the truth. Your only option is a life that is focused on two things—dying to earthly sources and building a faith and love toward God that lets you drink from Him.

It is time to turn our hearts from constantly trying to ease the pain from the truth about us. Get your heart to hear and believe that God will fill you as He promises in His word. Humble yourself by joyously thanking God that He can and will quench your thirst for Him. Let your heart believe that God is wanting to fill up your lack.

**Christians Hurt Each Other**

Christians hurt each other. The misuse of authority and power are rampant in Christian churches today. Sometimes it is from the leadership but most often it is from those who attend the church.

It is sad, but it happens often that one Christians glory is another Christian’s pain. When we have to quench our thirst for God by substituting our own human glory we easily turn on each other with vengeance because the same glory we think we have achieved, we think we also have to protect. It is a
sad statement about the condition of the church today that so many of us put each other down in order to make ourselves seem more important. The Bible says,

As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats. Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet? As for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!

Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them, ‘Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad, therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another.’ (Ezek. 34:17-22).

It is wrong that we push each other around the way we do. Some of us even feed ourselves with a subtle sense of pride because of how well we hurt other people. God is watching. He knows who is being hurt and who is doing the hurting.

It doesn’t have to be that we develop such skill at controlling people. It doesn’t glorify God when we think we have to dominate people in order to achieve what we think God wants. The anger of man will never achieve the righteousness of God (James 1:20). It grieves the heart of God that we settle for so little. It is time for this to change!

Terrible things happen when the church secretly thinks we have to feed ourselves with the glory of our humanity. We hide behind veils of self-protection that shut us off from the glory of God. Jesus promised something much better.

It was while Jesus was praying to the Father that Jesus said, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one” (John 17:22). It is the glory of God given freely to us by His grace that will make us one. Nothing else will keep us from hurting each other.

The next verse says, “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (John 17:23). It is the oneness that comes from the glory of God will make the world know!

It is wrong that the accepted best in the church today is that we push the glory of our humanity on other people in order to sell our Christianity. We say we are trying to get them to believe in God—but is that really true. Aren’t we working hardest at how we appear in order to impress them into believing? This is wrong. It a sin that is rampant and unchecked in the church today. We are our glory and it is time for change! The glory of our fleshly humanity will never be enough. We don’t have to settle for so little.

Repent and believe the grace of God. The church today is crying for God to pour out His presence on us. We would do much better to draw near to God and trust Him to draw near to us—in abundance (James 4:8; Isa. 55:1,2).
Our Pride Keeps Us Away From God

We have difficulty believing God because of human pride. We don’t want to live by faith in God because we have grown too comfortable living by faith in ourselves.

A lifetime of practice has made us skillful at manipulations that serve to build and maintain our pride. Relentlessly we work at finding and feeding on evidence of our human power. We quench our thirst with what we know—not the truth about our having the mind of Christ (1 Co. 2:6). Rather than thrill our heart with the nearness and the goodness of God, we pride ourselves with our acts of kindness. We get angry when the evidence in our relationships suggests that we are not sovereign. We feed on that rather than drink from God. Instead of finding delight in the beauty and majesty of God, we puff ourselves up with the glory of how we appear.

Faith in ourselves is what we seek first—not the kingdom. Our bondage is deep enough to greatly damage our faith about drawing near and drinking from God.

We are in such bondage that often we think that we have earned the right to drink from earthly sources. When we have finished some big project or earned someone’s approval we should be able to pride ourselves by subtle forms of internal praise. We should not think this way. In so doing, we trade empty human pride for filling our desires with God (Jer. 2:11-13). The care and feeding of pride in ourselves has become our first love.

It is a disease of epidemic proportions that we Christians try to quench our thirst for God by pride in what we earn and achieve. Seldom however is it diagnosed as a problem serious enough to warrant great concern. The result is that we are in such bondage to our own self-effort that we are rendered almost incapable of coming to God and quenching our thirst by His grace.

In our present state of being, the thought of receiving the presence of the Holy Spirit by faith in the grace of God alone, seems wrong to us because we think we should be spiritually ‘deserving’ before receiving anything from God. Rather than humble ourselves and find delight in the abundant grace of God, we prefer to pride ourselves into deserving His presence. Draw near and simply delight ourselves in an abundance of the Holy Spirit showered upon us? It just doesn’t seem right. We think, “It would be wrong to receive that much glory without deserving it somehow.” But, we never will.

Though we are Christians, our human pride keeps us making the same mistake as Israel and Judah, “For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and...of Judah cling to Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory; but they did not listen.” (Jeremiah 13:11). We don’t listen and we don’t cling to the Lord because we are too busy trying to ‘cling’ to earthly sources. We need to rest from our labors.

Dear Christian, it is our birthright as Christians to enjoy an intense presence of God. Continually! Doing so, could be the norm in the church today. We have to approach God on the basis of His delight to freely give us His presence, not on the basis of our own human worthiness to receive. Our self-effort to find reasons to boast, apart from the presence of God, has resulted in great bondage to disbelief and distrust.
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toward God. We have to learn to think differently. It is the Lord who is God, not us (Psalm 46:10). We have to change what we believe.

The pursuit of reasons to find pride in ourselves, keeps us in such disbelief and blindness that we actually want to stay away from God. Even though we are Christians, we act like we don’t want to waste our effort on pursuit of God. We just don’t believe God can or will quench our thirsty desires. In churches all across this land, our pride has made God irrelevant to coping with life.

Pride keeps us wanting to pursue anything and everything except God. The Bible talks about, “...your pride of power...” (Lev 26:19 and also Ezek. 24:21). We pursue earthly power because of the pride it makes us feel. The problem is that God, “...fully recompenses the proud doer.” (Psa. 31:23). It talks about how we sometimes are, “...asserting in pride and in arrogance of heart.” (Isa. 9:9). But it also tells of how God is going to destroy “...the pride of all beauty...” (Isa. 23:9). Another place is says that God is going to make “...the pride of the strong ones cease...” (Ezek. 16:56). Wanting what makes us feel pride is what keeps us from wanting to drink from God.

The problem is also that God has to resist us until we turn our heart away from pride as a means of filling our desires. The Bible says, “...God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6). You don’t have to live for so little!

Learn to use thanks and praise as tools for humbling your heart. Rather than finding pride in your humanness that will help make God your confidence. Thanks and praise for the truth can help you humble yourself into trusting grace so that you freely receive God’s presence.

How do we know when our faith is in our own efforts to pride ourselves? We are living according to our works, if we are worried at all, that we are not enough somehow and that God doesn’t want to pour His Spirit upon us abundantly, freely. Our worth is not the issue here. How well we perform doesn’t add or take away from the grace of God to draw near to His people. It is all about God’s grace and our willingness to believe it, apart from what we do.

We are living by self-effort when we try to hold up evidence to God that we are “righteous” enough to deserve being given His presence. Trying to believe that we are ‘worth’ God giving us His Spirit is an approach that is based entirely on our work to earn God’s presence—and not on His grace.

The problem is with us, not God. The force with which we demand to have pride in ourselves results in a strong disbelief that prevents us from experiencing God coming to us freely without hindrance: “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” (Psalm 84:11). We are the ones holding back, not God.

In churches all across this land, our pride has made intimacy with God irrelevant to coping with life. We have lost hope in God. We act like we don’t want to ‘waste’ our effort by pursuit of God. We simply don’t think He can or that He will quench our thirsty desires. The glory of our earthly pursuits tastes just enough like what we long for, that we keep looking in all the wrong places. We stay away from Him because our thirst is so great and because we can hardly imagine a better way to fill our longings and desires.
Our Fears Keep God Away From Us

Earthly sources are undependable and they hurt us. When we settle for our own glory instead God’s we set ourselves up for fear. We are afraid to believe and trust God because of the regularity with which we are hurt when trying to quench our thirst by earthly means.

The result is an overgrown jungle of complex fears and subtle forms of self-protection. We ask, “What if He doesn’t accept me?” Or, “What if God doesn’t love me enough?” And, “Why should God want to forgive me again?” Fears and distrust toward God are the direct result of being hurt so often by human ways of trying to reassure ourselves, find confidence, and feel secure, apart from God.

Even though we long for reasons to quench our thirst with human pride, some of us aren’t very successful. We just don’t believe we have strong enough reasons to feel pride humanly speaking. The result is that we avoid God because we think we just aren’t ‘impressive’ enough spiritually for God to want to be with us. So, we hold back from Him and try to find refuge in despair and hopelessness.

When we were young we were more trusting, more open. When we got hurt we held our blanket, close. Or, we drew near to our mother or father and let them hold us until we felt better. But then, as we grew older, we found that life hurts sometimes. Circumstances didn’t always cooperate. Fear increased. Inside, we close up by hardening our heart. Some of us learned to cope by lashing out in anger. Others, learned to cower and hide behind the hardness.

If we try to glory in what we do, then we worry, “What if I can’t do it.” Or, “What if they get in my way?” So, we protect ourselves by hardening our heart inside toward every circumstance and everybody. We demand sovereign control. Then later, if things get done, we reassure ourselves with subtle forms of praise for how well we overcame the obstacles and controlled the situation.

Deep patterns have developed that affect our relationship with God much more than we realize. The Bible says, “...Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.” (Hebrews 4:7). But, do you trust the power of the cross and the forgiveness of God? Or, would you rather punish yourself until you can trust that you have felt bad for long enough. Self-condemnation hardens us. Ask yourself honestly: “Have I learned to protect myself by closing up inside and hiding underneath a hardened heart?” Doing so, closes us off from God by keeping the Holy Spirit from coming to us freely.

We can’t keep holding to lies that protect us from letting God come to us freely. The Bible says, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in man.” (Psalm 118:8). Here again, we need to learn freedom to believe. Rather than self-protection that hardens our heart toward God, we need to become like children again (Matt. 19:14).

Pain in Our Relationships

Early in our marriage, I read several books on husband wife relationships. Most of them addressed the importance of loving our spouse by meeting their needs. That information was good as far as it went. But, problems developed because I somehow got the impression it was right for me to depend on my
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wife to meet my own needs. I was wrong. It created a lot of unnecessary stress in our home and hurt our relationship. It wasn’t until years later that I learned my dependence on her was selfish and idolatry.

It is right to love our spouse and meet their needs as best we can. That is right for us to do. But, the needs we have to be loved and feel secure are symptoms of our need for God. As a result, meeting the needs of your spouse, to the full extent, is far beyond the ability of any human being. We are only capable of giving our spouse a little taste of what it is like to have those needs met by God. Our desire for His presence is just too great.

Without drawing near to God and wrapping ourselves in His love, without enjoying His presence as our security and strength, subtle forms of selfishness run rampant in relationships. Without depending on God to meet our own needs, I don’t know how it would be possible to love others as we should. Our own needs are just too great.

Pain From All of Heaven

Many people become Christians because they wanted something more. They knew something was missing. And, to a large degree, God has filled that void. But, do you slow down sometimes and get quiet enough to hear yourself cry out for something even more? Do you hurt inside? When you stop long enough to be quiet and contemplative, do you sense inside that something is wrong? The truth is, something is wrong, but you’re not alone. There are many people just like you.

We have considered parts of this verse previously, now see it in context: “Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit. ‘Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate,’ declares the Lord. ‘For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.’” (Jer. 2:11-13). When we try to quench our thirst with earthly sources God says the heavens should be “appalled and shudder.” I believe this explains the sense that many of us have that something is wrong inside.

Something is wrong. When we have not yet turned toward the fountain of living waters we feel the pain of all heaven as a result. The heavens are appalled and shudder when we drink from earthly sources that, “don’t hold water.” Deep inside, we too are appalled because of it.

Don’t interpret the pain you feel as rejection from God! You may have to fight against those feelings with heart-training. God loves you and doesn’t want any of us to keep hurting. He wants you to draw near and drink from Him. You can confidently trust God to give you an abundance of His presence. God wants to keep you feeding on Him rather than having to substitute your human glory for His presence.

I want to assure you that you can find meaning and joy on an everyday level—without having to define success in terms of exalting yourself! Meaning and joy can be from exalting God even when nobody here sees. The Heart-training! book is designed to help you do this.

You can change from quenching your thirst by faith in your “works” You can change to quenching your thirst by trusting you are before the Lord and by drinking from the fountain of glory by His grace.
Chapter 18

Of Repentance and Drinking From God

In This Chapter—A Brief Over-View

Now that you understand your desperate need for God on a practical level it will be important to follow up this understanding with scripture.

What follows is a brief explanation of the concepts you will find in the remaining books in this series. I want to strongly encourage you to read the verses referenced below. Let them sink deep down into your heart until they become a basis for strong faith.

I also want to encourage you to keep going working through the material in this series. What follows may seem far from you right now but let me assure you that it is much closer than you think. You need to learn how to turn your heart toward God. You need some specifics about what to do. You also need to know how to draw near to God and “drink.” The books that follow in this series are for helping you do that.

Drinking From God—All Boiled Down

First let me say in review that all of us are needy people. We have desires, needs, and longings to feel accepted, secure, confident. Most of the time we call these longings psychological, emotional, or self-esteem needs. Misunderstanding these needs can keep us needlessly in bondage to our earthly ways. The Bible calls our desire a “thirst” for God. The blend between our being needy people and God wanting to be our only God is perfect—for us and God.

The problem is that we have obstacles of fear and earthly distractions that keep us from quenching our thirst with God. The books that come later in this series are for helping you work through these issues so that you can apply the principles in the fourth book called, Come and Drink! Before we consider a boiled down version of how to repent. Let’s first consider a how you can draw near and drink from the Lord.

Since we receive the Holy Spirit by faith (Gal. 3), we need something to confidently believe about God and our relationship with Him that allows us to receive of Him continually. The essence of all of that is boiled down for us in one verse: when we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8). You will need to come to understand why you can believe that. You will also need to grow to the place of acting on that belief. Repentance can do that for you.

The Bible says that we are already seated with our Lord in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). But it also tells us to enter and draw near to the throne of God (the theme all through the book of Hebrews: Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22; 12:1,2).
King David said that his soul was thirsty for God and his body “yearned” for Him (Psa. 63:1). David quenched his thirst by entering the heavenly sanctuary of God and “seeing” His power and glory (Psa. 63:2). It was the heavenly sanctuary and not the earthly temple because only priests could enter into the holy of holies. Many passages in the book of Psalm support the conclusion that it was the throne room of God that David was talking about (Psa. 91:1,2,9; 92:12-14; Psa. 95:2; Psa. 96:6-9). By entering and looking at God with his eyes of faith David said that “My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips” (Psa. 63:5).

The act of “drawing near to God” means we enter the heavenly throne room of God and stay before Him—in all His glory (Ezek. 1:27,28). In order to do that you will need to come to understand and believe God's provision for your "access" into His presence (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). You will also need to understand that God is the one who brings you (Deut. 32:11). You will have to work with your heart until you can trust Him to do that.

Faith isn’t enough by itself. You also have to act on that faith. The more your heart finds freedom to believe the more it will be important for you to take time to trust that you are drawing near to stand before God. Think about drawing near while also seeking to confidently trust that God has made a way for you to enter with your whole body (Isa. 57:13b-15). As time goes on you won’t need to enter every time. You will be able to confidently trust that you are already there. All of this can and should be done without your having to engage in soul travel (Rom. 10:6-8).

Since we receive the Holy Spirit by faith it is also important that we believe God’s radiant glory so that when we draw near we also have a basis for faith that He will draw near to us. You can drink of God by confidently believing you are before Him with your whole body and that He is washing you because of the radiance of His glory (Heb. 10:22).

Books that come later in this series show you how to nurture faith to believe your access into His presence. You will also learn how to develop your spiritual skills of being before the Lord and of drinking from Him. When applying these principles it is sometimes that the heavens open up and you feel very exposed. It is not uncommon to have similar feeling to Isaiah when he said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined” (Isa. 6:5). I heard one time that some have called this experience the “trauma of holiness.” In Isaiah’s case he was only able to stand without cowering after God touched and cleansed his human body. The same thing is effective for us today. The *Come and Drink!* book explains how you can apply principles that let you stand before God so that when the heavens open up and He “appears,” you won’t have to cower or want to crawl under a rock (1 John 2:28).

Again let me emphasize that any sense of hopelessness that you may feel about drinking from God is not from Him! Feelings of despair are common. They are the result of our deeply held belief that we should have to earn God’s presence. It is our self-reliance that is the very essence of what we need to repent from.

Take time to nurture your faith about your access into His presence. Do that by thinking and listening to you thanks and praise to God about the truth in the scriptures about your access. Praise God for your access and intently focus on letting your own heart hear what you are saying. Take time to quietly trust that these truths are going down deep into your heart. Then, take time to trust you are actually entering and are drawing near to the throne of God. Let Him do the work of getting you there, but think about actually drawing near and standing before Him. The veil that separated us from Him has been torn from
Understanding Yourself and Your Desire for God

Top to bottom. It may help you to trust that you are entering through the opening in the torn veil (Heb. 10:19,20).

Think often also about the volume and the intensity of His radiant glory all around you—but be sure you are thinking about His radiance as the Holy Spirit Himself. It may help to walk. With each step you take trust that you are entering more deeply into oneness with God Himself. If you don't seek greater unity and oneness with God, your drawing near can become quite mechanical and you won't hear from God as easily.

Nurture these skills when you are sitting, laying down in your bed, on a walk, waiting somewhere, at the store, during a quiet time at work, anywhere, anytime (Psa. 89:15-18). The more make it your habit to develop these spiritual skills the better. Repentance will help you do that more—not because of duty or drudgery but because of delight toward God.

Make God your God. Refuge yourself in the radiance of His presence (Psa. 36:7-9). Thrill your heart with God’s presence as your strength (Jer. 17:5-8; Psa. 62:5-7; 1 Chron. 16:11; Ps. 96:6; Psa. 18:1). Delight yourself in the abundance of His glory (Jer. 2:11-13; Isa. 55:1,2). By directing your heart to cherish God in these areas your heart will become set to drink from God and you will find yourself receiving His presence even while you sleep. You will know you have been doing that when you wake up in the middle of the night and often sense His presence is all over you. When that happens let it be evidence to you of how easy it is to experience His presence. It is all about learning to rest in Him.

Address your fears with truth. Thank God that you can learn to apply principles of repentance that strongly direct your heart into His being the refuge, strength, and glory that you passionately love.

Repentance—Boiled Down to the Essentials

Repentance is a process of changing your mind about God and about the earthly ways you try to quench your thirst apart from Him. Repentance is a process of removing obstacles and distractions so that we can turn to the Lord and drink from Him with unhindered freedom.

Knowing how to enter and drink are vitally important. But it is repentance that will help you to enter and then to keep on receiving His presence—24 hours-a-day. Repentance helps you receive from God more constantly because repentance helps to make God your treasure and not other things.

One of the most common ways Christians try to repent is by self-condemnation. Doing so is a kind of repentance that is NOT according to the will of God (2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Cor. 3:9).

Repentance is about changing from the earthly ways we try to quench our thirsty desire for God to drinking from Him alone. Because God defines other gods with words like refuge, strength, and glory it is important to focus our repentance and turning to God in those areas (Deut. 32:37; Hab. 1:11; Jer. 2:11-13). The Heart-training! book is designed to help you do this.

Our heart has learned the ways we 'drink' from earthly sources. Our heart needs to be retrained so that we
are no longer determined to quench our thirst by achieving a sense of having refuge, glory, or strength—in areas related to what God is like, through self-effort and "works." We need to change from works to grace.

Repent and turn to God by listening to your own assertive thanks and praise that you don't have to quench your thirst for God by praise toward your own human power, beauty, wisdom, sovereignty, kindness. Target anything that is related to the attributes of God or to His direct opposite. Complete the second half of repentance by 'hearing' and believing your thanks and praise that you can draw near and quench your thirst by praise toward the closeness of all who He is.

The result of our works approach to filling our desire for God, is that we have many obstacles of fear and distractions from God that must be removed. The more they are removed the better.

We have fears because we don't feel secure or protected about something. Repent from obstacles of fear by addressing your fears with audible thanks and praise for the truth. Rejoice your heart into hearing and believing the truth that by your access to draw near and by His grace to draw near to you, He becomes your reason to feel secure, loved, righteous, protected...

In essence this means that we have to get our heart to believe, love, and enjoy the radiance of God's presence upon us as our refuge, our glory, and our strength. We have to do that because these are the terms that God uses to define idolatry (Deut. 32:37-39; Hab. 1:11; Jer. 2:11-13). In today’s terms that means His presence needs to become our most loved reason for having confidence, security, reassurance, and what soothes us. His presence needs to become our identity. That will help you to love God more.

For distractions repentance boils down to getting your heart to hear that the glory of God is greater and more available than the glory of earthly pursuits. State the distraction and then thank the Lord with great assertiveness that His glory is far greater and much more readily available. Be sure to listen to what you are saying or you won't 'hear' and be changed from the heart.

Does your obstacle have to do with shame to come before the Lord. Begin by thanking the Lord about the acceptance you have because of the power of what He did for you by salvation.

Then rejoice your heart into believing the power of the cleansing of God for whenever you draw near. The Bible says that whenever you enter before the throne of God your heart is sprinkled clean and your body is washed. You can be confident that this is true because the Old Testament temple had a bowl called a "sea" that was a copy of heavenly things. The sea was for the priests to wash in. The same thing is true for us today. God cleanses us with the river and the sea anytime we draw near to the throne. Repent of your fear about drawing near by rejoice your heart into believing and receiving that cleansing.

The best thing I can tell you about repentance is to use the Heart-training! book and the shorter versions with diagrams. That will help you to understand more about what to do in order to remove your obstacles and distractions.

It is also important to take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). One practical and effective way you can do this is to observe the things in life that could result in self directed praise and then offer those as a sacrifice before the Lord (Heb. 13:15). Doing this is a sacrifice of praise to God.
because self-directed praise toward our own human glory is part of what we normally do to “drink” from earthly things.

Let me give you some examples. If a circumstance arises that could make you angry, don't respond with anger and then with praise toward yourself about how well you controlled the situation. Respond by trusting you are taking the possibility of drinking from anger and holding it in your hands before the Lord. Then it down before Him as a sacrifice of praise. Rejoice that when you do this you are purchasing His presence - without cost (Isa. 55.1,2), without self-effort and by His grace. "Delight yourself in abundance” by rejoicing in His radiant grace (Num. 6:25).

I also apply this principle when I see a woman where I might be tempted to feed myself with the glory of her beauty. I trust I am presenting the possibility of feeding on her before the Lord and then I avoid looking at her with lust by rejoicing my heart into enjoying the greater glory and availability of God's presence.

Let me tell you also about another way you can repent. After you are standing before the Lord and have nurtured the spiritual skills of receiving His presence. Trust that you are looking at Him. Then tell Him of some area in your life where you need to change or need healing. Stand open before Him and wait while confidently trusting that He is doing the work. Some people call this “Holy Spirit repentance.”

My observations are that most Christians today seem to want to start with Holy Spirit repentance. The problem with this is that most people aren’t to the place of being able to do that. They have to start further back in the process. The other problem is that the Bible speaks far more about our need to takes steps to direct our heart toward Him. We must do our part. We must also trust God to do His.

**Don’t Stop Here**

What you have just read may be enough to get you started in repentance and drinking from God. You may even be able to experience God’s presence intensely by applying these principles. I want to council you that your approach should always be that more is always better.

Try to avoid priding yourself by thinking, “I’ve got it” just because of reading this short over-view. You may. It is just that our repentance can always be deeper. We can always learn more. We can always experience greater oneness with God. No one will ever be able to say they have fully arrived.

The other books in this series will benefit you. I don’t ever want to stop learning. I don’t think you should either. More is always possible.
In Conclusion

Trade Up

Are you one who struggles to live the Christian life but who is more acquainted with failure than victory? The failure you experience is because your thirst for God is strong and you haven’t learned how to “drink” from the Lord.

Even though your thirst may be focused on earthly things right now, God is drawing you to Himself by the strength of your thirsty desires. The desperation and the pain you feel is part of what God wants to use to help you to turn to Him. Are you ready to cooperate more fully with God? Doing that is about learning to trade earthly glories for God’s presence.

Christians are living far below the level of what is realistic for here and now. God is with us. He lives in us and never leaves us. But the Bible also says that when we draw near to Him He will draw near to us (James 4:8). More is always possible.

First we need to understand the depths to which we have fallen. The Bible says that unbelievers have exchanged the glory of God for the glory of earthly things (Rom. 1:23). But it also says something similar about us.

“Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate,’ declares the Lord. ‘For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:11-13).

Most Christians today have resorted to quenching their desire for God in earthly ways. The problem is that most of us don’t realize what we are doing. The scripture above says that by quenching our thirst with earthly sources we have “changed gods.” We have forsaken the “fountain of living waters” and are trying to drink from rain barrels that aren’t even capable of holding water.

Unbelievers have “exchanged” God’s glory for earthly things. But after salvation we Christians have “changed” back to other gods. Which is worse? God says about His people that all of heaven should be “appalled” and “shudder.”

The good news is that you can change back and “drink” from Him.

God has made a promise to quench our thirst. It is a promise that is similar to trading an old broken down car for a new one—for free. God’s promise is that you can trade in your earthly ways of trying to “drink” from earthly sources and quench your thirst with Him. Let your heart hear His promise. Thank Him that “this is for me.”
“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David” (Isa. 55:1-3).

It is significant that God’s promise to quench your thirst is a covenant “according to the faithful mercies shown to David.” David is the one who said that his soul was thirsty for God in a “dry and weary land where there is no water.” David was thirsty for God but he didn’t stay like that. The next verse says, “Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory” (Psa. 63:2).

David quenched His thirst for God by entering the heavenly sanctuary of God and looking at God’s power and glory with his eyes of faith. Repentance can help you find freedom to do that.

Did drawing near and looking at God’s glory quench David’s thirst? David tells us that it did. Two verses later he wrote, “My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth offers praises with joyful lips” (Psa. 63:5).

God is a covenant keeping God. He was faithful to quench David’s thirst. He will quench your thirst too. Thank God often that more is possible. Let your heart believe it.

You can be sure of God’s promises that He will draw near to you (James 4:8). By turning from earthly sources you are positioning yourself you drink from God. You are “buying” from Him “without cost.” By turning from “what does not satisfy” He lets you “delight yourself in abundance.”

Repentance that lets you trade in your earthly glories for God’s far surpassing glory is a wonderful trade. Thank God that He has made a covenant—a contract, “in His blood” to quench your thirst. Then take steps to help your heart believe it enough to find freedom to draw near and drink from Him.

**A Time for Action**

Let me remind you again that Jesus warned, “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?” (John 5:44). Our problem is that ‘drinking’ from earthly sources keeps us from believing and trusting God. Our disbelief keeps us in bondage to achieving rather than drawing near to God and simply receiving enough of His presence to quench our thirsty desires.

It is time to take action. We will stay in bondage to earthly sources until we take action to direct our affections, pursuit, and dependancies away from earthly sources. Doing so, will reduce our pride and fear and increase our capacity for faith and trust toward God.

I am convinced that God is reaching out to all of us, passionately. He wants to help us. Only, He will not demand His way with us. The problem is that we don’t realize just how forcibly committed we are to our
earthly ways of doing things, without God. While it may not be pleasant to admit, I think most of us Christians are further from God than we realize. This can change!

Our problem is a systemic commitment to self-effort. The cure must address the problem as a whole—not just surface symptoms.

The disease of pursuing earthly ways of quenching our thirst is systemic. Therefore, the cure must address the cause as a whole. By that I mean directing our heart toward God won’t happen if we only focus on repentance in one or two areas. We have to change from dependence and faith in the glory we achieve to dependence and faith in the glory we receive.

It is a time for actions that help to increase our faith. If we keep our focus on changing our behaviors we will never be changed deeply enough. Radical change requires a radically different approach. We have to repent as the scriptures describe.

**A Complete Repentance—Not Legalism**

Our repentance has to run deep and it also has to be complete. It is idolatry to derive the confidence, security, or the adequacy we need by earthly means. But please understand the spirit in which I am making this statement.

God understands our neediness. He designed us this way. He also gave us each other to help us in these areas—even though our neediness is far greater than any earthly source can possibly supply. If we have to depend on others in the body of Christ—or our families—we will always be ministering to one another out of neediness. We have to turn and depend on God. But our attitude should not be to get legalistic about what is sin of the heart and what isn’t.

Our intention should be to pursue God’s best by taking our repentance and dependance on Him as far as possible.

Don’t let yourself be preoccupied with whether you are in sin because of drinking in wrong ways. The forgiveness and cleansing of God is abundantly available. God is Light and if we walk in that Light—even as He is in Light—He cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5,7). Let yourself be preoccupied with trusting the grace of God to draw near to you. Work at maintaining a faith that strongly believes that—because of God’s abundant grace—you are walking in His Light and are “drinking” from that.

Don’t get bogged down in legalism about whether you are drinking by earthly means. Take it by faith that you are. Concern yourself with turning to God as deeply as possible—and then with staying turned to Him. Let it be your thrill to turn your heart to God at the slightest hint of evidence you are trying to receive by earthly means. Get your heart to hear that legalism doesn’t achieve the righteousness that you desire. Only God can do that.
Live With Extremes

It is not disapproval from God that He wants you to repent and move forward in your relationship with Him. You are going to have to learn to live with the extremes of God’s acceptance of you, together with His relentless desire to have you turn from the ‘other gods’ in your life.

The Holy Spirit doesn’t point out areas where you need to grow and then condemn you because you need to grow in those areas. It is not His desire to maintain separation Himself and you in order to “keep you in your place.” The Bible says, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies;” (Romans 8:33). God isn’t waiting around to slap you or point a condemning finger and scold you. He does want you to look closely and admit the truth about the sin of your hearts!

I have struggled often on this point and have had to reassure my heart often with the truth about God. He loves us—even when He is pointing out something that needs to change. He points these things out in us, because He loves us. It is not because of disapproval like what you would expect from an earthly parent. Reassure your heart with this: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19). It is right to be zealous about repentance and not hold back.

God wants to correct you. But He is also there to help you heal. The Bible says, “Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us” (Hos. 6:1). The pain from when God corrects us is a good thing. It hurts! But what we get in return is worth the price. Get your heart to believe that.

You are not alone. The Bible says, “But know that the Lord has set apart the godly man for Himself; The Lord hears when I call to Him” (Psalm 4:3). When God points out some area of sin He is setting you apart for Himself. When He does that He doesn’t leave you alone and stop listening to your prayers! The process of becoming “godly” is one of being “set apart.” The Holy Spirit has to reveal sin. That is central to what He does in our lives. Just remember that you are not alone. When God sets you apart He points out sin—but when He does that He run away from you and close His ears to your cries for help. You are not alone. God is good. “The Lord hears” when you call.

How Should We View Others?

How should we view others who struggle? Chronic behavior problems should be viewed as the painful result of our desperate and largely unmet need for the presence of God. Whose fault is it that we struggle as we do? How should we view others who have not “achieved” in the Christian life?

It should be obvious by now that the rest of us should not be feeding ourselves by internal comparisons of ourselves to them. When people do that, many who are sensitive feel put down because they can feel the comparison happening and they take it on themselves.

Never forget that the gospel is for the poor, the afflicted, weak, and hurting. They are very people for whom Christ died.
In Conclusion

I am not one given to blame but I would argue with anyone who says it is the individual’s fault who is having the difficulty living the Christian life. I would say that it is not their fault even when they sometimes appear to want to do the wrong thing. Certainly they are responsible for their behavior. But God has placed in the heart of all Christians a deep desire to do the right thing. That desire is there even when they get discouraged and to the place of running away from God.

I believe the “condition” of those who struggle is because they have not understood God’s provision for meeting the need that drives them. They have not believed they could experience God’s presence enough to keep from finding earthly substitutes for God. They have not believed because they have not had instruction and they have not had example closes to them that could show them how. How can they believe when they have not had a preacher (Rom. 10:14). My question is how can the preachers believe when they themselves have not had a preacher?

The enemy has blinded all of us (2 Cor. 4:4-7). So don’t blame hurting people for their own struggle and don’t blame your pastor. Let’s be done with feeding our own pride in those ways. Doesn’t our tendency to want to blame someone show how much we need to repent?

It is time to break free of our blindness by taking steps to direct our heart to depend more fully on God. The church today must begin to relate to God as our security. Many do that already. We need to do it more. The presence of God as our refuge of security and as our strength needs to be preached all over this land.

The Need for Examples

Repentance has led me down a path of deep and steady closeness to God. But I believe there are many Christians out there with a much deeper walk with God than I.

Is God your boast? Are you one who has entered the throne room and who stays before the Lord? Has God taught you about repentance through the difficulties of life? Do you walk with God? Is the presence of God the fortress that you hide in for security—even when you are with people? I believe there are many like you.

If that describes you, I hope you realize it is time to speak out. It is not humility to keep your mouth shut about your experience of relating to God. Don’t think it is humility to hide or stay in the shadows! The humble are those who have rejoiced their way into God being their boast and not anything else (Psa. 34:2). Let the light that God has given you shine. It isn’t boasting in yourself to speak up about what God is doing in you. Just be sure you aren’t feeding yourself that way!

Dear Christian friend, it is time to speak up. Those of us who struggle to move forward find it difficult because we don’t feel like we have anyone to talk to about where we are with God. We need you. We need to know how you relate to God. We need your example.
Pray with me that Christians find freedom to receive an abundance of the presence of God without pressure to perform or achieve it somehow.

**An Invitation**

It is vital that we turn our heart from our many earthly substitutions for God. It is just as important that we turn and draw near to God. I want to invite you to come with me as we explore the scriptures that tell us how to do that.

Are you ready to change the ways you feed yourself by earthly means? Just as surely as your heart has learned to “drink” by earthly means your heart can also learn to drink from the Lord. Your heart can be retrained.

I want to show you how you can direct your heart toward God in ways that are similar to the writers in the book of Psalm. Like them, you are going to have to become a teacher and your heart will have to become your own best student. Will you let me show you how?

This series of books is for showing you how you can take practical steps to change from earthly sources. It also shows how you can turn to God, draw near to Him, and how to quench your thirst with His presence.

Are you tired of where you have been and want to change? Purity and quality of character are the result of a fundamental change in one’s sources to God. Any growth that happens in the Christian life can be attributed to that change. Are you ready to face your fears and patiently reassure your heart into being able to change? This series can help you.

Thoughts of taking steps to turn to God may make you afraid and want to hold back. But what other options do we have? Wrestling our heart into repentance and rest are our only hope. Everything else hurts too much. Anything other option falls far short of what realistic and well withing our grasp for here and now.

Repentance is the path you must take. Be comforted that God has not asked us to do anything that He hasn’t also given us the ability to do it. The Bible tells us how. Come with me as we look more closely at the scriptures. But don’t wait. Begin now. Rejoice and reassure your heart into believing that “applying what the Bible says about repentance will work for me.”

Thank the Lord often that you don’t have to be afraid to move forward. You can turn and draw near to God. You can quench your thirsty desire for His presence. Rejoice and rest your way into believing. The remaining books in this series were written for showing you how.