

“On a dark night kindled in love...”
- St. John of the Cross

Journey Into The Night

What 21st Century Western Protestants
Can Learn From the Lives of
Contemplatives and Mystics

J. Todd McDonald

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

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To my wife Angela, who has helped me learn the practical side of a living faith, and to my children, Allie and Tucker, who are constant object lessons of God's passion and desire for His own children.

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Preface

After writing my original preface (over 9 pages long...), I decided it would fit better as the first chapter! So, to keep this short, in the following chapters I want to share a little of my own personal experiences and observations about growing in intimacy with the Lord. I don't think everyone grows to spiritual maturity in identical ways—but I do believe that the process is similar. The LORD gives us the blueprint in Scripture of this process, but it is not necessarily obvious... especially because it is a view of Scripture that we are just unfamiliar with in Western evangelical Christianity. I am a writer by nature—and I had to write things down for myself just so I would not forget some of these lessons of growth. My hope is that in some small way, thoughts of my own journey may help you along yours. If nothing else, I hope to introduce you to some of the “bright and shining stars” that can be found in the “non-Protestant” history of the church. I certainly hope to stir your curiosity concerning the revelation of Jesus as the Bridegroom God and you as a cherished Bride. Hopefully I may offer something that may help you understand your times of dryness, your times of temptation, and your times of trial a little better.

Some in history have already discovered this blueprint of how God brings us to spiritual maturity. The Lord fortunately has given me hints along my journey, but I must admit I would have been a little lost and hopeless at some points without the wisdom from those who have gone before. When I titled this “Journey into the Night”, you may not understand the context of this statement. The title could lead you to believe this is a story about a Christian who got caught in some kind of deep sin and was led into the “night” of separation from God somehow. Although that is a good guess, it's not quite what I had in mind. The night I refer to as the “night of faith” is a subject that I was a little unfamiliar with at first. It is something that you, like me, are going to have to experience for your own self and in your own way under the direction of the Holy Spirit as He leads you into deeper union with your Lord. St. John of the Cross was the great mystical writer who shared his own *journey into the night* with us centuries ago—recorded for us in **The Ascent of Mt. Carmel** and more particularly in the **Dark Night of the Soul**. I don't hold a candle to him, but then again he is gone on to be with the Lord. He never saw the 21st Century or the new millennium (by human calendars). He did not live in our time or our era. I do—so maybe I might be able to frame some of his thoughts in a 21st century context.

This book is not for the spiritually immature and naïve in the Lord either. My thoughts are directed to those who have already been established in the “basics of the faith” and have pursued a life of discipleship within the context of the body of Christ. It is for those who have cried out to the Lord and said “MORE LORD, MORE OF YOU... I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT MORE OF YOU!” Now I would venture to say that the majority of the Western church is NOT in this category. You need to assess where you think you are. I will tell you that most of the writings of the “mystics”, of which St. John of the Cross was one, cannot be understood apart from a heart of passionate love for our Bridegroom King, Jesus. The reason that the *Western* church at large finds so little value in a lifestyle of prayer and contemplation in context of a passionate pursuit of the Man Messiah Jesus is simple. It is the same reason that much of the *Western* church lives a shallow life that is spiritually lukewarm, unstable, and unfruitful. We are content

with what life on planet earth offers us. That is the predominant reason most of us never enter the narrow path of deeper union with God.

I am not a theologian by trade, but what I have to share is certainly a mixture of my own experience in context of Scriptural truth. It includes a round-about discussion of some terms like mysticism, contemplation, contemplative prayer, and union with God. I frame all of these of course with what other folks from Church history have written in this regard and also with my own understanding of what the Bible has to say about it. These are all terms that have a lot of significance when talking about growth in both prayer and spiritual maturity. Most of all, they are terms that are closely connected to growing in intimacy with the LORD.

Be assured of this: God answers the cry of the hungry heart. We are promised that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness **WILL BE FILLED**. Just keep an open mind about the **METHOD** that God chooses to do this. Keep an open mind—framed in the context of Scriptural truth of course. Hopefully what I have to share may be of use to you when the LORD at some point and in some varied way takes you too on a “journey into the night.”

-Todd McDonald

Chapter 1

A New Perspective

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,** having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 10:19-23 (NKJ)

In my limited view, I would guess that many in the Western church, both Protestant and Catholic alike, have very little knowledge about what we call the “contemplatives” or “mystics” of the Christian faith. The term “contemplative prayer” was one I had never heard of myself. I am by no means an expert on what a “mystic” is either. To my surprise, however, the Lord has taken me on a spiritual journey that I think is best interpreted only in the light of the wisdom of some of these “mystics” and “contemplatives.” That story along with my own understanding of how God leads His children to deeper union with Him is what I would like to share with you.

For most Protestants, and especially those of the Evangelical flavor, the word “mystic” probably conjures up visions of Tarot card readers and psychics. I would have pictured some kind of witch in a black pointy hat chanting a spell from a magic book myself. I certainly would have never thought something by that title could offer anything of spiritual value to a Christian living in America. I did have one friend who was at least familiar with the term enough to equate it to the Catholic term for a prophet. My target audience for this book is therefore those who would have such similar notions on the outset—those who are part of the Western Evangelical Protestant church—someone of an evangelical or charismatic or even non-denominational background. Because I share this tradition, I can offer better insight into how this group thinks and how someone might benefit from something of a “mystical” flavor. I hope these insights can also be appreciated by anyone who has a desire or hunger for intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ and spiritual growth in their own Christian life. Though I am not here to expound *primarily* mystic philosophy, I will try to familiarize you with some of the concepts and thoughts that can be found in mystical writings.

Mysticism itself I believe is a phenomenon that people from many diverse religions and cultures are embracing more and more today. God, by definition, created human beings to inhabit two different worlds simultaneously in the context of a body that houses a spirit and possesses a living soul. We are residents of two different worlds: a physical and a spiritual. We are first and foremost spiritual beings made in the image and likeness of God. All of humanity is born alienated and separated from the One who inhabits eternity and the one who created them in His image. By default, humans ignore their relationship to the greater reality of this spiritual realm. The rebellion of Adam and Even, whether we like it or not, has caused spiritual darkness to be transmitted to the entire race of human beings that have come from their lineage. My best definition of a “mystic”, therefore, is merely a person who has awakened to the hunger within their own empty spirits and are seeking a greater union with the great and eternal Spirit who created them—God. A Christian by definition has been reconciled to God by faith in the

Messiah and can relate to God in the realm of the spirit by fellowship and communion with the Holy Spirit. However, not all Christians have been awakened to the narrow road of “contemplation”—discovering the God who lives and dwells in them. Not all Christians have been led down the path of contemplation or union with God. Most have been left by the waysides of church structure, doctrinal knowledge, and emotional experience. Needless to say, there is a vast world of inner exploration and communion with the very Spirit of God, who indwells and seals all those who have put saving faith and trust in Jesus the Messiah.

One way to define *contemplation*, therefore, is a personal awakening and discovery of the God who lives within us through a journey of deeper communion and fellowship with Him. Contemplation is seen as drawing inward to find the life of God that He has placed into our hearts by the new birth (being born again or born of the Spirit) and as a way to find a deeper revelation and satisfaction in God while we live on this side of eternity. Contemplatives look to God in faith, hope, and love above and beyond the typical or traditional or even orthodox methods that we are taught from childhood as the “path to spirituality.” These definitions of mysticism and contemplation can sound awfully New Age, so I need to clarify what I mean by them. It is obvious that people other than Christians and believers in the Bible are seeking and pursuing union with the *divine* in some form or fashion or by some other terminology (channeling, transcendental meditation, Yoga, astral projection, psychic arts, etc.) I believe mysticism and contemplation are only properly defined in the context of established Biblical truth and a personal relationship with the only mediator between a personal God and sinful man—Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. The words, however, are themselves enough to scare most evangelicals away without any further investigation. So, before we go any further, don’t get too nervous about the terms *mysticism* or *contemplation*. It will become fairly obvious from the start on what grounds I base my observations and experience about these ideas—which is the only foundation a man can lay in talking about true spirituality: the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus Christ.

Among Christian circles, a contemplative lifestyle is typically embraced and pursued only by those in monastic orders of one type or another. My vision of those who have led monastic lifestyles in history, in whatever form that took, was traditionally never one of *true* spirituality. The Gospel is clearly a “go *into* all the world” message and not a “shut yourself *off* from the world while you learn to love God” message. On top of that, I have a wife and two kids, a career, bills, church activities, family concerns, friendships, relationships, and all sorts of “other” things that just don’t mesh well with a monastic lifestyle. My thoughts initially as a young believer about monastic orders fell into the category of “deluded and lost”. Even though my judgments became less harsh over time regarding these movements, I still felt these “other” Christians had nothing relevant to say to me in terms of modern 21st century living. What I have learned of course is that those who were and are in the monastic lifestyle are not “deluded and lost”. There is great wisdom that we can glean from the “Desert Fathers”—those who pioneered Christian monasticism—and other “contemplatives” of Church history who for the most part pursued monastic lifestyles. Though I don’t agree completely with everything monastics ascribe to, there are things I can and should learn from them. They can speak to us in many ways about what is MOST important in life to pursue. A life committed fully to developing love for the Lord Jesus (who I will refer to by His Jewish name Yeshua quite often as I write) is certainly worthy of our pursuit as well. There is much wisdom in their approach to

life, whether nuns or monks, but like I mentioned—I would like to be able to benefit from it while being married, with a job, and fulfilling God-given responsibilities for my family. If we take time to listen to the voices that come to us from Church history as well, they speak loudly as to what 21st century Christians should be pursuing...only if we will turn our attention to their voice.

There are indeed some bright and shining stars from some of the darkest periods of human history that led monastic lifestyles or lives of contemplation. They have passed on their wisdom and legacy from many different periods of church history and from many different cultures and countries. In order to enjoy some of these bright and shining stars, however, I had to do something that an evangelical Protestant just doesn't really want to think of doing, even in their worst nightmare. I had to drink from that "black abyss" of history that Protestants would refer to as the "lives of the non-Protestant saints". Many of the great contemplatives and mystics were by necessity Catholic or Orthodox or even Celtic. Church history, after all, did not start when the German cleric Martin Luther (1483–1546) pinned his Ninety-Five Theses onto the door of the castle church at Wittenberg in 1517. There were over 14 centuries of history by the time the Protestant reformation took place (yes, and a lot of it was *bad* history). If God were to use anyone in that time period of history, they were of necessity and by definition "non-Protestant." There is even a vast untapped part of Church history that was distinctly Celtic (not Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant!) and is partially highlighted by the life story of St. Patrick—a true saint who was powerfully anointed by the Spirit of God to bring the message of salvation to the whole of Ireland. Now of course a lot of these shining jewels of history were not well received or welcomed by the "church" of their day or generation. Many of these dear saints did not agree or endorse every single idea of (Roman) Catholic or (Greek) Orthodox doctrine either. In fact, many cut cross grain against the church and were used by God to bring revival in some cases. Many of these jewels of the faith were martyred, tortured, imprisoned, or persecuted. The "organized" Church did not recognize many until they were long dead. The point here is that there are a lot of treasures that are to be discovered if we will only allow ourselves to receive from those who are "not like us."

One of the most liberating truths I have encountered in my own walk with the Lord is that NO ONE is absolutely pure in their doctrine. None of us has what I would call perfect doctrine and no denomination or branch of Christianity does either. You are deceived and puffed up with pride if you believe every thought you have about Scriptural revelation and understanding is correct all the time! All of us must hold to certain truths that are emphatic and foundational in order to be considered part of the family of faith. This would of course automatically exclude some groups like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witness that are just too far from the Truth of Scripture to be included as "Christian". I am talking in general about a family of faith that in general has a certain view and perspective of God—clearly founded on the Scriptures (the Bible alone). This family tends to agree that there is only one God, that He was not and never was a man in eternity past nor did He evolve to become God, and that He manifests His divinity in three distinct persons we know of as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is no Mother God, nor is there any other God besides the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This family also tends to believe that God became a man, fully, in the person of Yeshua and that this God-Man is the only mediator between humanity and God based on His substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection. This family believes, for the most part, that Scripture (the Hebrew "Old Testament" together with

the New Testament) is God-breathed and inerrant—even though God used real sinful human beings to pen the Scriptures themselves.

When talking about differences among the family, though, there are indeed a lot of weird ‘beliefs’ and doctrines that stretch across the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox faiths. This book is not about those differences of opinion within the bounds of Scriptural discussion per se, but it *is* about how we can receive and learn from other people who have impure and even sometimes incorrect doctrine. It is thought of as heresy to even suggest that if a person is wrong in one area of Christian thought that they could be right in another area. The “true” Protestant test of orthodoxy (in the sense of correctness) is to weigh every single word and every single statement a person makes and then look for error. If error is found, then the person is obviously a false teacher! That tends to be the way we judge doctrine in the intellectual Western church. I don’t judge orthodoxy (at least in this respect) like this any longer. I certainly don’t ascribe to every doctrinal idea I have heard of either. I still exercise discernment based on what the Bible says—but I do realize that my discernment is and can be biased by my own tradition and history.

I have come to respect the truth and diversity of expression that different denominations on the Protestant side of the family bring to the Body of Messiah. I also no longer cast EVERY Catholic or Orthodox believer into the category of “false”, though *many* Protestants might. Likewise, there are probably still some Catholics who believe that if you are not part of “THE” one true Church that you may not be going to heaven. Regardless of our differences in this family, there is SOMETHING we can learn from ANYONE who truly loves Yeshua and has given their life to Him in a wholehearted way—whether they are Catholic, Protestant, Messianic, or Orthodox. Unlike Protestants, at least most Catholics and Orthodox Christians are fairly unified in their belief and practice. On the opposite extreme, no one can really define “Protestant” because there are so many variations that are out there. There are even “non-denominations” for those who don’t quite fit into a denomination!

I feel I must mention on the outset of my discussions a part of Church history that I myself am not proud of. To our collective shame, there are many early Church fathers and historical “saints” who had a very un-Biblical views toward the Jewish people and Israel. They missed completely the heart of God toward His covenant people—the physical seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob— and in many cases wound up promoting the outright persecution of the Jewish people by their theology and actions. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, though he had profound insight into intimacy with the Lord in the context of an abandoned lifestyle, also had very anti-Semitic views—in spite of the fact that he did seek to stop the mass murder of innocent Jewish men, women, and children. Even though I will quote him extensively at some points in reference to his view on union with the Lord, he once stated that the whole Jewish people had a “stupidity bestial and more than bestial” and an “intelligence coarse, dense, and as it were bovine”—because they did not follow the Lord. He thought that there was nothing in them that was “not crude and coarse, whether we consider their occupations, their inclinations, their understanding, or even their rites [with] which they worship God.” Bernard concludes that the Jewish people are a “race who had not God for their father, but were of the devil, and were murderers as he was a murderer from the beginning.” [Quoted in Malcom Hay, *The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism* (New York: Liberty Press, 1981), pp 54-56]

St. Augustine, another person with profound insight into spiritual growth and intimacy, was recorded as saying: “How hateful to me are the enemies of your Scripture! How I wish that you would slay them (the Jews) with your two-edged sword, so that there should be none to oppose your word! Gladly would I have them die to themselves and live to you! “[*Confessions*, 12.14] I hope you understand (and maybe you too see nothing wrong with these statements), that their views were FAR from Biblical truth. Many of these folks that I mention may have even prayed to the Virgin Mary... or even believed in the actual intervention of saints in heaven. As I said, if God were to use ANYONE in the first 14 centuries of Church history, they were of necessity probably Catholic or Orthodox, and definitely non-Protestant.

I don't mention these two examples of anti-Semitic attitudes to open up old wounds and cast all of Church history in a bad light (there are other books that I would recommend to further explore this aspect of Church history and our appropriate response today). I mention these examples to show that even all the way back to Martin Luther and the birthing of the Protestant movement, there are many saints and great men of God who have spoken from the heart of the Lord in one area of experience, but have completely missed His heart in another area. And we are no different in the 21st century! I bring them as an example of how even the people that God used in some very great ways, were miserably lacking in other ways. David comes to mind of course—a man after God's own heart but a man who had too much blood on his hands to build the Lord a temple. Yet, David's theology is foundational for understanding the God of pleasure and gladness and his revelation is foundational in understanding the role of the 24-hour house of prayer. We are not going to throw these out because he had too much blood on his hands are we? We don't rip the Psalms out of the Bible because David committed adultery with Bathsheba do we? Of course not, and that is the point. Consider too, just for a moment, that you and I are just as prejudiced and calcified in our doctrinal/denominational beliefs to the point that we miss the heart of God sometimes as well.

We are told through Saul (*the unchanged Jewish name of the Jewish apostle we know in Greek as Paul*): “pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” If someone is calling on the Lord and pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace out of a pure of heart, then I can learn something from them! That is the point. Paul prayed that we would “be able to comprehend with ALL the saints what is the width and length and depth and height” of the love of Jesus. This prayer speaks to the fact that I cannot know the fullness of God's love by myself or in a vacuum. Even more so, it says I can't really grasp all that God has revealed about His love within my OWN tradition or *tribe* of Christianity. It means that God has given revelation of Himself to folks that don't have it all together—either doctrinally or by practice. It means that you can exercise discernment of wrong ideas or truly un-Biblical thoughts while embracing those that are within the panorama of revealed truth.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to pursuing the deep things of the Spirit, and we certainly don't have time to! Comprehending the love of Jesus and the depths of God's desire for the human heart “along with ALL the saints” does not mean that I have to agree with ALL the saints or even join their tradition or church. By no means! It does not mean that I have to be anti-Semitic or say prayers to the virgin Mary (*who should properly be called Miriam*) in order to learn from people who may have held these ideas. It also means that I don't have to be

completely right. I would say that each believer should be expected to exercise judgment and discernment for themselves before the Scriptures. That is why Saul told Timothy as well to “study to show yourself approved.” So, in everything that I say and talk about, I don’t expect to be absolutely correct in everything. You ask the Holy Spirit and study the Bible for yourself—and don’t rely on someone else to tell you what is right or doctrinally correct.

The fact that ALL of us have errors of one kind or another may be unsettling for many to grasp. I am not talking about errors that would separate you from the life of God per se or salvation itself. There are many of those kinds of errors going around that fit that category. Gnosticism and its associated heresies were obviously vehemently combated by John in his writings, just as Saul attacked Pharasaim with vigilance. Keep in mind as well that people in all traditions of the true faith can be irritating and weak in terms of how they possess the truth—including you and I! We all have our pet doctrines and we all have our divisive issues in terms doctrinal differences or practice.

Our problem is primarily that we want every teacher or preacher or saint that we listen to or study to be either “all wrong” or “all right” in everything they say. Jakob (*James, the brother of our Lord*) describes a PERFECT man as one who NEVER sins with his mouth. I know of only one PERFECT man that I know of that never sinned with His mouth and taught perfect doctrine—and He was the Living Word of God. I’m afraid to say it for fear of being stoned, but not even the “Bible Answer Man” has perfect and inerrant understanding of the Scripture either. I would be a little leery of pride myself with a title like “*the*” Bible Answer Man. What we must come to realize is that none of us approach the Bible without some sort of bias. We are all predisposed to reading and studying the Bible from a certain perspective. We all bring some type of prejudice towards the Scriptures—whether they come from our tradition that we were raised in, the tradition that we were indoctrinated in at seminary, or the tradition we learned when we first met the Lord. We are all just as susceptible to spiritual blindness as we are to spiritual deception. Pharasaim could be properly defined as spiritual blindness based on pride of our theological knowledge and our own negative experiences. Gnosticism could be properly defined as spiritual deception based on false knowledge and our own positive spiritual experiences. I believe we are far more prone to the sin of Pharasaim than we are the sin of Gnosticism: and Scripture condemns both equally. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t exercise discernment concerning Scriptural revelation—it just means that we should be aware that “our” discernment is somewhat biased to a particular view or paradigm to start with.

How then do we keep ourselves safe and secure in the faith, remaining steadfast until the Lord returns for us? How do we make sure that we don’t get deceived or get off the right road? The answer is simple. Develop a love and passion for the person of Jesus. Fall in love with Him. Develop a passion and hunger for Him, His Kingdom, and His righteousness. Explore the vastness of the Man Messiah Yeshua, who is the King of Kings, God Incarnate, Emmanuel, and the Son of God. Don’t play religion. Don’t pursue theological knowledge apart from spiritual experience (the sin of the Pharisees)! Don’t get so puffed up with pride that you think you know it all concerning spiritual truth. Develop a love for Scripture and develop a love for serving others. These things will keep us “safe” and on the right path in a world that is indeed filled with all sorts of erroneous beliefs, wrong practices, false religions, deceived cults, and false New Age experiences. Yes, we can truly drink from the “WHOLE” church without a worry that somehow

by doing so we will be duped into worshipping Mary as God or somehow be tricked into thinking we are working for our salvation. At some point we all need to grow up in the faith so that we are not reliant on SOMEONE else feeding us. We need to learn to be fed by our Teacher— as John the Apostle said: “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.”

The Apostle John speaks to us clearly about discerning the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. As he would tell us: faith is all about abiding in Him, knowing Him, practicing righteousness, and letting the anointing of the Holy Spirit teach you as you submit your will to Jesus and pursue the things of God with your life. That will keep you and I safe in any supposed minefield of “spiritual truth.”

That advice is not largely heeded or practiced by the evangelical church of America, however. Western Protestants base our spiritual “maturity” and theological “prowess” more on knowledge of Scripture than anything else. If you attempt to pursue the theological meat of God’s word apart from encountering the Logos—the Word of God Himself—then please be warned! God’s written Word was never meant to be experienced apart from a passion and devotion and pursuit of the Living Word first. You will actually wind up being deceived and cold-hearted toward God if you try to study Scripture just for the sake of obtaining theological knowledge. You might wind up persecuting and fighting against the Lord Himself. Just ask the Apostle Saul. He was “kicking against the goads” and didn’t even know *who* He was persecuting! Yet Saul knew more Scripture and theological truth about the Messiah than you and I probably ever will. It took an encounter with the Living Messiah who is the Living Word of God to open Saul’s eyes. We are no different. We must open our hearts to the Living Word and behold Him as the object of our desire first and foremost—desire even above our hunger for theological knowledge about God. Yeshua clearly said that Scripture bears witness to Him. He is the object of our affection and pursuit—not theological orthodoxy.

It’s not a matter of NOT pursuing knowledge and a wholehearted study of the Scriptures. Far from it—we really are to study to show ourselves approved! It is about putting FIRST things FIRST. Our FIRST love is the Man Messiah Yeshua. He is and should always be our FIRST love. The church at Ephesus had vast theological knowledge and even good works that showed forth fruit. Saul the Apostle revealed some of the deepest theological truths to them in his letter, far more than to any other church that is recorded in the New Testament. Yet, Jesus revealed that the Ephesians had left their FIRST love. All that deep spiritual understanding they were given had not yet produced that fiery passion of love in their hearts that Saul had wanted it to. This is where we must start our journey of pursuing the deep things of God. We must take our cold and weak hearts and put it in front of the fire of the Word of God—both the person AND the written expression.

Hopefully you are familiar with some of what I would call the “meaty” Protestant writers of more recent history such as A.W. Tozer, Oswald Chambers, Watchman Nee, and Andrew

Murray. There were other messengers as well like Spurgeon, Edwards, the Wesleys, Knox, and Warfield who all had the fire of God upon their life and brought sweeping reforms where they ministered. I am an avid reader and have enjoyed the perspective of many different Christian writers, especially these. I am also going to draw from the vast wealth of some dear brothers and sisters of the faith that are however not “Protestant.” These “historical” figures include some of the following: Madame Jeanne Guyon, St. John of the Cross, the Blessed John Ruysbroeck, Brother Lawrence, the Blessed Henry Suso, Thomas Dubay, St. Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, St. Teresa of Avilla, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Augustine, just to name a few. If you are a “normal” Western Protestant, these writers may be foreign to you as well.

There are some “modern” men that have had more recent impact on my Christian life and growth as well: Mike Bickle, Sam Storms, Rick Joyner, Tommy Tenney, Jack Hayford, John Piper, Jack Deere, and Gary Wiens. These may be almost as unfamiliar to you as well depending on how evangelical or non-charismatic you are within the American church. I have really been fascinated, thrilled, and overwhelmed at the revelation given to these men concerning a lifestyle of pursuing God—especially as “friends of the Bridegroom.” I can identify with Oswald Chambers, for example, who writes of the “white funeral” in his devotional writings—*My Utmost For His Highest*. I can also identify with modern evangelicals who tend to speak about “spiritual maturity” or “dying to self”, though in my opinion most frameworks of spiritual growth are extremely shallow and don’t fit the entire panorama of what God intends for the human heart. I have been profoundly impacted by Watchman Nee as well—a man who wrote extensively on the “spiritual man.” Nee had profound insight into the role of the spirit and soul in conjunction with spiritual growth and also had seminal ideas concerning the “death” of the carnal man. More recently, I have been profoundly touched by the mystical writings of many saints from church history—those who speak about an “inner” world of communion and devotion that every believer can have with the Lord. Of those, I have enjoyed Madame Jeanne Guyon (a 17th century French believer) probably the most—she speaks extensively on *inward* believers who have been “turned inward” to discover growth and spiritual maturity as they are joined in greater and greater union with God.

It is sufficient to say that I have experienced and continue to experience a very radical change in perspective concerning my view of the Christian life. I give credit, in large ways, to the mystical writers of history and also to modern writers who are currently writing on topics like developing intimacy with God, finding the God of joy, having passion for God, falling in love with Jesus, and finding deeper union with God through prayer. Mike Bickle is probably one of my favorite teachers on the subject of a paradigm known as the “Bridal Revelation of the Kingdom.” The Bridal revelation is not a new concept to Scripture, though it is something that must be revealed before being embraced or understood. Jesus spoke of the Bridal revelation in His last public message before His crucifixion. He likened the Kingdom of God to a wedding that a Father planned for His Son—and the story can be unfolded from there backwards and forwards in Scripture.

For me, understanding the reality of Jesus as the Bridegroom God has led also to understanding that I am cherished and enjoyed as His bridal partner. Though I am going to talk a lot about the “night” of faith in this book, I must tell you that this *mystical night* does not make any sense apart from the knowledge and realization of Jesus as the Bridegroom God. I have also of late

come to love the imagery and words of the Song of Solomon, the beauty of Jesus that is revealed by the prophet Isaiah, the revelation of the majesty and kingship of Jesus given to John the Apostle, and the songs of spontaneous prophetic worship recorded in the Psalms. I have been personally intoxicated and transformed by this revelation and understanding of God as one who is full of gladness and pleasure—over me! The path to a deeper walk always “begins” somewhere though—just as surely as the road to salvation begins with repentance and turning to follow the Lord in faith and trust. The beginning of the spiritual journey to maturity begins with a “cry”—a deep cry of both agony and ecstasy. The writer of the Song of Songs would call it the “kisses of His mouth.” This bridal kiss upon our soul is the impartation of an intense desire and hunger that will find its fulfillment ONLY in the depths of the person we know as the Holy One. It is an awakening to love in the human heart—love toward the divine. It begins with agony because there is indeed PAIN at the outset of this journey.

The awareness of your spirit being naked, poor, and wretched must come to you at some point before you will ever leave “normal” Christianity in America. The Holy Spirit must awaken love in your heart before you will ever realize that we are living far below what Messiah died for us to have in this life and in this age. When the raw ache of an unfulfilled and starving spirit is awakened in you, it is going to hurt! It was meant to be this way. God made us to truly LIVE only in the context of His embrace and passion for us. The problem in America is that many drugs that are for all intensive purposes “allowable” and “within our rights to enjoy” EASILY cover up this pain. I’m not even talking about “real” drugs like cocaine or alcohol—though these two certainly suffice in keeping the ache in the spirit from ever surfacing in the “lost people” of the world. For Christians, we easily fill that void with movies, food, recreation, sports, second jobs, family activities, and other “allowable” activities. I am not against fun or recreation or even good food mind you—I am just saying that we have hundreds of sedatives in Western culture that keep our carnal flesh alive and our spirits dead to the deeper life that God wants us to have.

We as Christians have spirits that are alive to God, and this is where our problem begins. We don’t feed our spirits—we are taught to be religious, attend church activities, pay our tithes, and be *good* Christian people. We are not taught that it takes effort and time and lifestyle changes to pursue God in a way that will result in the satisfaction of that deep hunger in our spirits—we are in essence never taught the value of *contemplation*. The beauty of pursuing God is that as we pursue Him, our spirits are never really satisfied but yet our “pursuit” of God keeps us invigorated and deeply satisfied overall. Tommy Tenny is known for coining the phrase “The God Chasers” and has even talked about “apprehending” God as “The God Catchers.”

Herein lies the paradox of the “dark night.” When the Lord plans on bringing you to deeper union with Himself, it is very likely that His actions will be along the path described by many of the mystical writers of the faith. It is referred to as a *night* because God must deal shrewdly with our souls in order to lead us forward into “life that is truly life.” It is a paradox for many of us to think that in the first step to light must be darkness. It is a paradox that in order to experience peace, we in many ways must go through unrest. It can be the same paradox that our Lord spoke about: in order to experience life, we must all first “die” to ourselves and live to Him. Yet, this paradox must really and truly be encountered and experienced before we can grow in mature, bridal love for our Heavenly Bridegroom.

The Lord's activity in this regard can be described in many ways, but darkness I believe is one of the best allegories that can be used. It is the idea that in order to be led forth into the light of your spirit, you must first pass through the darkness of your soul. This "darkness" must come because when we are first introduced to the Lord, we are all really and truly "babies". The Lord allows us to live from our "soul" to a point—relying on the discernible feeling of His presence, power, and love to let us know that we chosen by Him and for Him—for all eternity. But the soul life can also be the source of many things that in the long run will ruin our depth and passion for God. It is in the realm of the soul that we can sometimes, wrongly, believe that we are pleasing God but in actuality we are only walking in our flesh. It is this "darkness" that must be overcome in our souls—yours and mine individually—before we can move forward in deeper communion with the Lord.

In his poetical allegory about this night, St. John of the Cross gives a full treatise that describes different "nights" of purgation. John describes these nights as seasons that we are lead into by God Himself. There are things we can do to prepare ourselves for the Lord, but ultimately we can not lead ourselves onward without God's hand and His action. The paradox of this action by God is that we will at first interpret "His action" by thinking that in fact He is doing nothing at all—that we are being pushed further away from God than being drawn closer to Him. This can be a confusing time for some believers—and many questions and doubts may come into your mind when this season of your betrothal comes. Know that God leads believers into these seasons for the purpose of achieving deeper relationship, intimacy, and union with Himself. The most famous mystical stanza in St. John's treatise is known as *The Dark Night of the Soul*, and the first five verses go as follows:

*On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings—oh happy chance!—
I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.*

*In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised—oh happy chance!—
In darkness and concealment, My house being now at rest.*

*In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me, Nor I beheld aught,
Without light or guide, save that which burned in my heart.*

*This light guided me, More surely than the light of noonday
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me—A place where none appeared.*

*Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than dawn,
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!*

Now, if you are like me, this all sounds like some pretty poetry but it makes no sense at all in terms of a spiritual lesson. I don't understand everything that St. John meant and I haven't even yet experienced everything he wrote about in terms of union with the Lord. Having said that, what follows in this writing is my best understanding of what the Lord has done in my own life in regards to this "dark night" and what I have come to learn about its purpose in bringing us to deeper union with the Trinity. I want to share about my own "Journey into the Night"—by no means a full expression of it, but something that you might relate to as a 21st century Christian. I have a writer's itch—and for my own self, I wanted to record some things that transpired during a season of my life.

Why is all of this discussion about the dark night relevant? Well, I would postulate (along with most saints of history) that God leads all believers along a similar path in their journey toward spiritual maturity and a deeper union of love with Him. The Song of Solomon is the best source of Scriptural insight into this journey and many of the saints of history have explored its depths in trying to understand the “mystery” of the Great Lover and His dealings with the Beloved. The problem is that I am not from the 16th and 17th century. It’s the same problem we have with reading “King James” English—it was not written for our time! Most of your translations of the mystics will still be written in the language of their day. I would like someone to relate what they are saying in modern terms—if possible. More importantly, Protestants need someone to relate these thoughts in terms and ideas they can relate to. I’d like to try to do this—but I realize this is not a full treatise on this subject.

I hope you understand on the outset that no one, including myself, “arrives” at the end of the journey of contemplation *in this life*. You can never attain full disclosure in this age of the glories of the Divine One. We will not be “fully married” in terms of consummation until this age is over—but we will see in full one day in the resurrection. What we aim for and hope for, though, is the perfection that God will give us by grace *in this life*. What we hope for is the fullness of all that God has set aside and provided for us to have through the cross of Messiah *in this life*. The journey is more about the LONGING AFTER God than it is for the FULL ATTAINING of God *in this life*. I am far from a state of union with God that is attainable in this life by the grace that was provided through the cross of Jesus Christ. But, like Saul, I am straining and pressing and reaching towards the HIGH call. Know too, that His grace is sufficient to lead you and I into a walk of intimacy that is attainable in this life. I can only share how the Lord has led me along this path of contemplation—including my mistakes and my shortcomings.

There is such a vast realm of study in the area of the contemplative life that it can be overwhelming on the outset. There are more modern men of the Catholic tradition who continue to offer us insight as well and would speak to us far better from their own tradition. Thomas Dubay, Thomas Merton, and Henry J. Nouwen are some of the most noted Catholic writers in our time. I want to know and experience some of what these men of contemplation have experienced. Grace tells me that if God did it for them, then He will do it for me! Grace tells me if something was available for them, it is available for me! I just have to do what they did. If God responded with revelation and experience of Himself from their hunger and passion, then that tells me that this would be a good starting place for me.

The point of a majority of the mystical writings is that God *Himself* must lead us on if we are to draw near to Him. It is not our effort or abilities or devotion or spiritual discipline that leads us onward—and that is the whole point! The seeming paradox, however, is that *we* must pursue spiritual discipline, devotion, wholeheartedness, and exert our own effort in order to prepare ourselves for this working of God. God wants us in the place of spiritual maturity, intimacy, and passion. Father God is in the business of training a Bride that will look like His Son and love His Son like He loves His Son. How fantastic to think that He can really so transform us and possess us to be just exactly that. The Father has promised His Son a bride that is equally yoked to Him in love and that looks and acts like Him in character and power—and that is exactly what

He will deliver. He guaranteed it by sending not only His Son to die and purchase us as His bride, but He guarantees it by the present ministry of His Holy Spirit as well. The Holy Spirit is in you and upon you and with you to lead you into this reality and this destiny. Will you embrace His work? Will you be a willing bridal partner for the Son of God? I hope the cry of your heart is “Yes, Lord. Here I am ... make me, mold me, fill me, and send me.” Give me the “bridal kiss” upon my heart... lead me into the Bridal revelation.

Chapter 2

The Bridal Revelation

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:22-32 (NKJ)

What do you value most in life?

What is the reason for your existence on planet earth?

Let me take a humanistic approach to these questions:

Why are you taking up space as a thinking, breathing, and walking lump of clay along with all the other “animals” on this miniscule piece of real estate known as earth?

Don't you realize that you are in essence a fairly insignificant piece of carbon-based life that lives on a very insignificant planet that is just a tiny part of an endless collection of solar systems, galaxies, and stellar bodies circling around the core of an almost endless expanse of universe? Just look at the *beeelions* and *beelions* of stars out there...

Forgive me for being a little tongue and cheek there. I like making fun some times of the limited view we can get if we just only look to “science” or a humanistic world view to explain life and existence to us. These are after all questions dealing with the meaning of our life and the meaning of our existence. Yes, I know there is a difference between metaphysics and science, but science-so-called still nonetheless makes some valiant attempts to answer these kinds of questions. Modern science espouses a very popular fairy tale for grown ups that we are just a cosmic accident part of a melodrama played out over millions and millions of years of genetic mutation and survival of the fittest. This drama supposedly was played out against the backdrop of billions and billions of years of universal “hiccups” that began from the explosion of an infinitesimally small particle of highly dense matter. Where the original “it” came from that is the universe we see today still eludes our best efforts to explain it. Science, in all of its supposed “glory”, still cannot give you the “first cause.” Even if we had the first cause, to say that blind chance and nature directed the evolution of all the life we see on this planet seems to defy both logic and *good* science.

Even though it *appears* everything in earthly existence was designed and intricately connected to support human life, it is much *easier* for “science” to just tell us that it all happened by chance—whether it is the creation of cosmos or the development of species. It is much *easier* for “science” to conclude that we are just one of *many* animals all sharing this planet striving with each other to see who will rise to the top of the food chain next. On a more factual level though, even just the chance of the first original DNA molecule coming together is somewhere in the ballpark of 1 in 10^{200} —odds I don't want to go to Las Vegas with or let alone gamble my eternal

soul with. According to what we know of just *natural* processes of cellular organization and construction, just getting the first cell of carbon-based life to form is impossible. I won't digress here into a full-blown attack on the validity of this fairy tale that has been called a "fact" by the majority of the scientific community any further—though I could. I will say that if we only have the *physical* or *natural* realm to work with, this fairy tale is probably about the best explanation that feeble men can come up with to explain why we exist and how we got here.

I mention these thoughts only because it reminds us of life without the hope of eternity or the Eternal One... life seen only from the purely physical and natural perspective. Though we as Christians would "say" that we believe in the supernatural, it is sometimes hard to prove that belief by our own experience. More than this, we can sometimes live as unbelievers in terms of pursuing only things of the physical and natural realm.

One Thing

No matter how much philosophy or science may attempt to explain our existence or how we should live given a purely naturalistic universe, there is something inside of human beings that cannot be satiated or quieted with mere scientific theories or rational explanations. If we would just stop and listen we would hear a call *inside* of us to *something* greater than us that is *outside* of ourselves. More appropriately, *Someone* is calling to us in a still small voice that if we take time to listen, we can hear. C.S. Lewis describes in his book *Mere Christianity* how there is a witness in the human heart to eternity and that by virtue of that witness we can prove that someone outside of eternity has left His fingerprints upon our soul. God has certainly left His fingerprints—in creation and in us. Fingerprints cannot be seen except by the aid of special dust or light. Our hearts are no different. Until God breathes life into our cold dead hearts or injects light into the darkness of our unredeemed minds, we can be presented with incontrovertible evidence of the Creator's existence and still not care or be moved from our disbelief. We as humans can be so completely oblivious to something so real and existent as God Himself, just as we are to the undetected presence of a very real and existent fingerprint. This stands true for the majority of humanity—even though there is great evidence of the Creator's presence within our ability to perceive Him if we would but just use the correct aids. How sad this life *alone* is, especially when this life is all that we perceive or can know! Yet, we understand that a vast majority of human beings, according to Jesus Himself (Luke 13:23-30), will never come to the realization of who they are, why they were created, or how they can enter into relationship with the One who created them.

The Lord Yeshua also told us that it profits a man *nothing* if he gains the whole world and loses his eternal soul. When we look at the world, even the *Christian* world, we see readily that we spend very little time on the eternal and almost all of our time on things that will not last. When we speak about *this life*, the Apostle Saul (Paul) also warned us of the trappings and value of things that pertain only to *this life*. Saul, at one point in his life, placed the highest value and worth on things like his extensive education, his successful career in Judaism, and his own pedigree and heritage. Yet he concluded that in the light of the knowledge of Messiah, those things begin to fade away. I am reminded of the song:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His mercy and grace

I would call this living with an *eternal* perspective. Saul would call it, among other terms, “seeking those things which are above.” Messiah would refer to it as “life that is truly life” or “life eternal.” Even Hollywood got it right in the movie “City Slickers” when Curly announces that the only thing that matters in life is “one thing.” Yes, Curly knew the secret that you had to find that “one thing” and then latch onto it and run full speed after it in life—thus making it your “reason for being” and the source of your passion and your zeal for life. Although he left that “one thing” open to everyone’s own personal interpretation, I would cast my lot with those in the Word who knew what this *one thing* should be.

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I 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 inquire in His temple.

Psalms 27:4 (NKJ)

And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. “But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10:39-42 (NKJ)

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in [Messiah] Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14 (NKJ)

This “one thing” consists of coming to a knowledge of and intimacy with the One who made us. This “one thing” that defines who we are as human beings is found only in the pursuit of the God who made us for Himself. That is the true “one thing” our hearts were made for and our hearts subsequently long for.

St. Augustine said it this way:

“You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until it rests in You.”¹

A.W. Tozer stated this in more practical terms:

All the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: That He is, what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him.²

Yes, we must all “do” something about God sooner or later. Unfortunately, ignoring something passively is an *action* just as much as hot pursuit is. Many will choose the former and neglect the latter when it comes to dealing with God and responding to His wooing on our hearts. Whether we want to admit it or not, our souls are restless and our spirits are empty until we return home to the One who crafted us in His image. In this regard, none of us can truly make

sense of *this life* until we have a clear revelation of *eternal life* and the *eternal God*. If you are born of the Spirit of God by faith in Jesus the Messiah, life eternal has already begun for you. You don't have to wait until "eternity" to experience eternal life. Eternal life does indeed begin the day that you receive Jesus as your Lord and Master. Unfortunately, many Christians live their lives on earth "waiting until we get to heaven" to experience this life. Evangelicals can be notorious for knowing how to win people to Jesus in a call to salvation but being very ill equipped at how to lead them to a life of loving pursuit and discipleship. A salvation decision is important, but it really is only a door through which we enter into the "life that is truly life." Far too many in the Western Church have stepped through the door but have failed to continue on in the walk of faith on the other side. Many have stepped only half way through the door and even more may have stepped in but subsequently turned and walked away completely.

You were created for the sole purpose of coming to the knowledge of God and finding your pleasure and purpose solely in Him. The famous Shorter catechism is a question/answer statement that captures the essence of our existence and it goes like this: "What is the chief end of man? Answer: To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Sam Storms and John Piper identify with a Christian Hedonist point of view that replaces one word in this famous credo. This view in my opinion expresses an even greater truth in the heart of God: "The chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever."³

The God of Pleasure, Gladness, and Joy

The idea of "enjoying God" and finding "pleasure in God" is in my opinion a more recent paradigm shift that has been orchestrated and revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Western church but that has been experienced by many saints from history. Mike Bickle's writing⁴ on the pleasures of loving and enjoying God is an excellent start for those who have never considered this view of God. Sam Storms has also written two books along this similar vein: *Pleasures Forevermore*⁵ and *The Singing God*⁶. The former is a treatise on how holiness and sanctification are based primarily on "falling in love with Jesus" and the latter is an exploration of the emotional makeup of God as one who "sings over us" with rejoicing and pleasure. S. J. Hill with Margaret Feinberg writes on the significance of the divine romance and our appropriate passionate pursuit of God in return in his book entitled *Enjoying God*⁷. Brent Curtis and John Eldredge do an outstanding job of describing the human and divine drama of love in their book, *The Sacred Romance: Drawing Closer to the Heart of God*⁸.

Obviously there are many, many other works that have been (and will be) written in our generation expressing the same idea and notion that God is a romantic at heart, a passionate lover, and a God of intense emotional capacity and makeup. This view expresses the sentiment that God is not a being that is *primarily* mad, sad, or angry at human beings (though of course He is capable of these emotions in His personality). Anger is only *one* facet of God's emotional makeup and even His anger and wrath are not *primary* emotions but rather "sub-departments" of the *greater* emotion of His passion for human beings. Like David, the man after God's own heart, many in our own generation are discovering afresh that the Supreme Being is *primarily* a God of pleasure, joy, and love. His emotional makeup is *foundationally* one of joy and pleasure toward *us* as His creation. In the presence of God and around His throne you can expect to find JOY and PLEASURE emanating from the very core of His being!

You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalms 16:11 (NKJ)

They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

Psalms 36:8-9 (NKJ)

This is a tough pill for many to swallow. In the West, we have become so used to dissecting and serving up God in nice theological units of information that we have lost touch with the God who burns with fiery desire. Until we see Him FIRST as a lover, every other view we take of God will be tainted with human notions of why and how God does what He does. It is only a logical and valid step to conclude that this lover has an object of His love and affection—you and I! It is one thing to believe God loves but a totally different thing to believe God loves *me* intimately and personally. Likewise, if fullness of joy and a flowing river of pleasure define God's presence, then *who* is the object of that joy and pleasure directed to? *Who* was the river of pleasure designed to flow to? *Who* will be the partakers of the pleasures that are at His right hand in eternity? Until you see that WE are the objects of these emotions, even in our sinful brokenness, then you will struggle trying to find a peace and rest in your relationship with Him. Most believers that are going to make heaven and who understand that we are saved by grace and not by our works still live for the most part like our works earn us favor or acceptance with God. Until God reveals *who* the object of His emotions are, we will continue to work to earn His pleasure rather than resting in the fact that He ALREADY has pleasure over us as we grow and mature. As redeemed born-again people who may struggle with our flesh and our weakness, we can rest assured that God enjoys us now even before we reach full maturity. If we get a revelation of these emotions it cannot but help to move us CLOSER and draw us NEARER to God, even when we sin and miss the mark.

It is so easy, however, for us to see His passionate emotions of anger and wrath and hatred as directed against *us* as sinful, stained, and broken human beings who have rebelled against Him. Think briefly about how you view God and how that view was shaped either in your early years of Christian education/Sunday School or conversely from your years of living without knowledge of the Bible or the good news of salvation. Our first approach at God tends to be one of the righteous judge who is angry with sinners—a theme which Jonathan Edwards immortalized in one of his sermons from the Great Awakening of the 1700s. God is righteous, holy, powerful, pure, and sits immortal, invisible, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent on His throne as the sovereign ruler of the universe. These truths are important for us to know about God, but more importantly these truths left alone can lead us to view God as sterile, distant, unconcerned, disinterested, silent, and void of feelings toward us. The point I want to establish with you is that seeing God as a lover full of joyful eternal pleasures is the first mountain we must scale in order to see the “panorama” of His other emotions and qualities and attributes.

In His basic essence, God is holy. The word holy for us means to be separated from sin or impure things but for God the word holy means “wholly other than.” God's holiness points to the infinite distance between Him and every other thing in creation. His holiness defines the

infinite gap between Creator and created. In terms of His emotions, it gives the qualifier that EVERY single one of His characteristics is “wholly other than” anything we as humans might be able to express, understand, or conjure up with our imaginations. So when we consider His emotions and His attributes, make sure you scale the right cliff—otherwise you may miss out on something deeper that God has revealed about Himself. If you climb Mt. Holy-Holy-Holy you will arrive at a summit called “Eternal Lover of Passionate Joy and Pleasure”. From this vantage point, all the other attributes of God, including His righteousness and wrath, will be seen in a different but more correct light.

Not only is God a God of pleasure and joy, but also consider just briefly that WE as human beings are the objects of His delight and pleasure. In describing and personifying the act of creation, the writer of Proverbs uses wisdom to describe the glorious work of the Son of God during the creative week of Genesis. As a master craftsman, alongside and in daily delight and fellowship with the Father and Spirit, the Son FRAMED the worlds. The delight and pleasure of this one yet triune God during this act of creation was also directed to SOMETHING of very special significance that was PART of the creation. His delight was with human beings- the sons of men- lumps of clay who were fashioned in the very image of God and filled with the glory of God and the breathe of the Holy Spirit. The universe exists for us! WE are the reason for everything in creation that we see. The highest object of His pleasure and delight were His last act of creation, the sons of men.⁹

Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing
always before Him, Rejoicing in His inhabited world, And my delight was with the sons of
men.

Proverbs 8:30-31 (NKJ)

Even in the correction of the LORD in our lives, we are told that it is BECAUSE of His delight over us that He issues correction. In fact the very mark of our sonship is that the Lord disciplines us. As His own chosen and special people, the redeemed are most of all HIS FAVORITE and HIS ULTIMATE DELIGHT- above angels, above stars, above galaxies, above the universe!

For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Proverbs 3:12 (NKJ)

As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my
delight."

Psalms 16:3 (NKJ)

Even when God chose to take on the form of man and “tabernacle” among us, Scripture tells us that He was the happiest man that has ever lived! The 4-part video series by Visual Entertainment, Inc. known as the Visual Bible is I believe a great illustration of this¹⁰. In a word-for-word rendering of the book of Matthew, Bruce Marchiano for the first time played a “real” Jesus in my opinion in Christian film-making. The Jesus he portrayed actually laughed, cracked jokes, wrestled with John, poured water on Peter during the sermon on the mount, used humor while telling the parables, lamented and cried during his harshest rebukes, had tender moments of correction and friendship with His disciples, and showed great emotion as a real human being. For the first time, in my opinion, a movie presented a Jesus that actually had feelings similar to you and I. Most of all, it portrayed a Jesus that matches the description of the

Psalmist: a Jesus so in love with righteousness that He exuded gladness and joy far above any human ever.

You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed
You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

Psalms 45:7 (NKJ)

This paradigm shift from a mean, hard, sterile God that is distant to a God who is glad, cheerful, and full of loving compassionate nearness is at the foundation of another major change in the way we look at and perceive God: a paradigm that is known as the “Bridal revelation” of the kingdom. Let me put you at ease: this is not a new doctrine or theology that derives from sources other than the Bible. It is indeed a foundational paradigm of how God views us and how we should view ourselves before Him. The Bridal revelation is founded squarely on the vast subject of the love of God—only it moves this theological concept into more of a personal vision of what Father wants to do in each of our hearts.

For the love of [Messiah] compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NKJ)

Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

Luke 7:47 (NKJ)

If we feel that we are forgiven little, we will love little in return. When we realize that just one act of our disobedience or independence would separate us from God and put us in an eternal place of destruction created for Satan and his angels, we realize how GREAT the love of God is and how GREAT was our forgiveness. When we behold the GREATNESS of the price for our freedom, our heart begins to open to love because we begin to understand the depths of the love of God—the great Romantic of the ages. This is the point: Father God wants mature Bridal lovers for His Son, equally yoked in voluntary wholehearted love. You and I were made for this reason and human history exists for the sole purpose of producing this Bride. That is in essence the “Bridal” paradigm and something I want to develop further.

Your Paradigm Determines Your Altitude

There are obviously many paradigms or “lenses” that we can view the God of the Bible through. We use paradigms to help us understand God according to a particular set of facts or a particular stream of revelation concerning the character of God. Young believers by necessity begin with certain rudimentary paradigms of God which help frame their transition from a life of sin and rebellion to one of obedience and fellowship with God. Being in the military for over 15 years now, I can recall my “boot-camp” experience from years ago and my first introduction to the Air Force as I went through basic training. It was not fun by any stretch of the imagination, but it was necessary. The military for the most part has tried to perfect or streamline the process of taking a “civilian” and making them into a “military” member. This involves taking someone who has been making their own decisions and doing things their way for most of their life and putting them into an organization where they must follow orders and conform to a prescribed set of standards to reach a common goal. “Boot-camp” for those unaware basically takes EVERY

freedom imaginable away from a recruit and instead “issues” them back as privileges that come from performance or achievement or conformance to the standards of military life.

Before the days of dwindling force structures, one of the primary motivations of basic training was to “weed out” those who did not necessarily have the fitness or proclivity for a military lifestyle. After all, the military brings a person face to face with the fact that they may be ordered to do things that may get them killed or that may result in the death of others—and you are and will be expected to obey! On a lower level, just the fact that you vow allegiance to a Constitution and swear to obey the legal orders of any officers appointed over you is a serious matter that one does not take lightly. In the midst of this introduction, you begin by first being stripped of your self-identity (I never looked good with a bald head and heavy thick military glasses, but I did look the “same” as everyone else). Your identity now is as a military service member. The military gives you a uniform and you learn that you are a part of a team of other folks who have the same goal and who want to serve the same end purpose. You are given rules, regulations, order, and instructions to follow. You are expected to follow them and you are punished if you don’t. You are rewarded, for the most part, if you perform well. As you progress in the military, demonstrated faithfulness in small or insignificant jobs becomes the basis for promotion—to more levels of responsibility or oversight. Other than times of draft, most folks arrive at boot-camp and join the military voluntarily. Sometimes parental pressure or lack of anything better to do is the reason that young adults join the military. Most however find that if they did not join for themselves, it is very hard to stay long term on the basis of trying to please someone else. All during the indoctrination period to the military you are yelled at, pushed to high levels of stress, commanded to perform, torn down, and then built back up in successive stages.

Being introduced to the military lifestyle can break many people—to the point that they no longer continue or drop out. Now I am not trying to make a direct comparison with boot camp to the introduction to the “Christian” lifestyle, but I think there are some close similarities. For example, basic or “entry-level” Christianity says that we must first repent from sin and agree to obey Jesus Christ as our Lord. This obedience could and usually does cost us—family relationships, friends, power, money, property, and maybe even our very life!

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Luke 14:25-35 (NKJ)

Just like the military requires an oath and commitment to obey, Jesus demands that any one who would follow Him must put allegiance to Him above all else. He can demand that because He alone deserves this! What I hope you will soon discover is that this is no less than a plea for bridal fidelity in terms of a relationship with the Son of God. When we realize what God promises us in this exchange—eternal companionship and intimacy at the highest levels of all creation—we would be ludicrous to hang onto our fleeting life with all of its trappings. Going in, however, it appears that the call of Jesus is strict and absolute. Just like in military basic training, we are placed into an Army of believers who have been given a Great Commission and who live by a Great Commandment. We are told to obey the orders of those appointed over us—pastors and overseers and elders in the Body of Christ. Ultimately, just as in the military, our allegiance is not to those over us but ultimately to the absolute standard of the Word of God—both the written version of the Bible and the Living Word of God Himself. We are told to “count the cost” of following Jesus at the beginning—to put time and effort into the decision so that we don’t start the path and then drop out. We are told that we must give up the right to ourselves and fully identify with our death to this world and its systems (military people have certain rules they must follow concerning “civilian” activities such as politics or business dealings). We are told that we must renounce satan and the kingdom of darkness. We are given a “regulation” book as a model for life and conduct to follow. Just like military members wear a uniform, we are told to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness as a garment. Just like the military tries to mold its people into a common image, we are told that we are being conformed to the image of the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit working and living in us. These are all VERY similar to decisions that people make as to whether to continue on with the military as a new recruit.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Matt 16:24-26 (NKJ)

It is important to note here by commentary on the words of our Lord: the soul and the CARE of the soul before God is the MOST important issue of life. No matter what we may profit in this world—financially, intellectually, emotionally, or otherwise—the ONLY thing that ultimately matters is how we carry our soul before the great Judge of all mankind.

In the military, the things you learn in basic training become foundational as you move up in rank and authority. As a Major in the U.S. Air Force, my experience of military life now is much different than those days of my initial training and transition from civilian life into the military. The stress is still there, but it does not come in the form of people yelling at you demanding your attention to very small details in unreasonable time limits. I don’t have to be constantly reminded to do petty little things that appear to have no real purpose but yet are still required for me to do. I don’t have to be reminded constantly about military courtesies or how to wear my uniform or how to salute. As you move up in rank, your relationships also change with those who are below you in rank and above you in rank. The same applies for us as believers. Our experience of the Lord should not be the same as it was when we first were initiated into the Christian life. Our walk should obviously be better but more importantly it should be deeper!

All that is required to enter into the Christian life is a “yes” to Jesus Christ. That “yes” is the first of many “yes’s” that ensue as we follow the Lamb of God and invite the wisdom of the Father into our lives. The Holy Spirit begins as our drill instructor, teaching us to forsake sin with deliberate force and moving us into a disciplined life style full of fellowship, witnessing, Bible study, and prayer. However, the Holy Spirit should not remain *primarily* in the role of drill instructor as you progress through your life of faith. In the beginning, He needs to be. He is responsible for transferring you from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. He seems to be extremely proactive in the beginning because He is helping us forcefully renounce our former life and embrace Jesus wholeheartedly—which is the only hope we ever have of truly knowing God. This all requires God’s grace of course and underlying all these actions of course, the Holy Spirit is lovingly trying to unpry our fingers from things that lead to our death and destruction. He works in our hearts to change our tastes and motives and desires while at the same time infusing the very life of God and conveying grace upon grace to our spirit.

What I have just described to you is an example of a “paradigm” of how we view God. I used the military as basis for drawing parallels to our walk with Jesus the Messiah. Obviously, this paradigm does not cover every aspect of a life of faith or express the depth of the heart of God in developing a relationship with us. Nonetheless, it is a paradigm. We all have one of these as well. You may even have more than one, but there is probably “one” that forms the *primary* basis for how you relate to God. What I would like for you to consider is that many great sermons are preached to folks in churches every week that should no longer apply to them if they have moved on in maturity and discipleship as they should have. The call to forsake all and follow Jesus was designed only to be an INITIAL paradigm of viewing God. The call to count the cost is designed for INITIATES into the faith. For the mature, the issue of cost and laying down your life has already been settled and established. Yet for many mature people in the church, they still view God under the same lens that they did when they first met the Lord. Many people are still immature in the faith because these “basics” of the faith were never instilled in them in their early spiritual development and they have remained carnal believers ever since. As we mature, however, it is necessary that we begin to view God through different lenses and paradigms—with some lenses being better than others. When we talk of someone with a “low view of God” we are referring to the fact that although they have a correct or true paradigm of God, it may not be the highest or best view of God. In talking about different paradigms of viewing God, consider some of the following and then let’s talk more about the Bridal paradigm as God’s highest and best lens by which we can relate to Him.

We are temporal creations
He is the Eternal Creator

We are sinful and unholy
He is Holy, Holy, Holy

We are the lawbreakers
He is the Lawgiver and Judge

We are sick

He is the Great Physician and Healer

We are lost

He is the Savior and Redeemer

We are separated from God

He is the only Mediator between God and men

We are the clay

He is the Potter

We are the branches

He is the Vine

We are hungry and thirsty

He is the Bread of Life and the Fountain of Living Waters

We are the vineyard

He is the Pruner and Keeper of the vineyard

We are the sheep

He is the Chief Shepherd

We are servants/bondslaves

He is the Master and the Righteous/Suffering Servant

We are witnesses of Him

He is the Light and the True and Faithful Witness

We are disciples and followers

He is the Way

We are earthen vessels

He is the Anointed One and the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit

We are the citizens of the Kingdom of Light

He is the King and Sovereign of the Universe

We are members of His Body

He is the Head of the Body

We are covenant partakers of the promises of God

He is YHVH, the covenant making and keeping God

We are soldiers in an army

He is the Commander in Chief

We are a royal priesthood and a holy nation
He is the Great High Priest

We are adopted sons of God and members of His family
He is the Heavenly Father

We are co-heirs and brothers
He is the firstborn among many brethren

We are friends of God and friends of the Bridegroom
He is the Comforter and Friend that is closer than a brother

We are the beloved
He is the Lover

We are His Bride
He is the Bridegroom

All of these are “paradigms” or “lenses” by which we relate to God. Your “core” paradigm will determine greatly the height and depth of your intimacy with the Lord and your happiness in knowing and pursuing God. Like I said, every one of these paradigms is TRUE and is based on clear Biblical truth. It is also interesting that within the context of the Trinity, ALL of these relationships can be expressed and enjoyed in the context of the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Incredible isn’t it? I listed these paradigms as well in a rough order based on my opinion of which paradigm is “higher” in terms of growing in deeper intimacy with the Lord.

For example, the first “lens” that any person must approach God from is the fact that He is holy and pure and righteous. As we perceive Him as the Creator and the Lawgiver, this leads us to obvious conclusions that we are creations ourselves and lawbreakers deserving judgment. As we move further on, though, the Lord wants us to now see Him as a Savior and a Redeemer—a friend of sinners and a help to those caught in the bondage of darkness. It is important for us to view God as our Healer (Jehovah Rapha), mainly because He is. Yet we can have God heal us without ever responding in deeper or greater love or devotion for Him. As we begin to see ourselves in the category of the redeemed, we can begin to see ourselves as things such as clay—molded in the hands of the master Potter. More than that, we understand that we are sheep and that He is the great Shepherd who is leading us home. Sheep and clay, however, do not make for a dynamic identity of greatness. You must go further and deeper than to just see yourself as a tool in the master’s hand. The single largest obstacle in my Christian experience to maturity was saying “yes” to servanthood and discipleship as a pathway of life. Yet, when I did begin to turn from many of my selfish ways and begin to pursue service and good works, I found yet another facet of God’s character was awaiting me on the other side.

As we perceive the Lord in His fullness, we also understand that we as His followers are truly being conformed to His image over time. That image consists not only of His character but of

His power as well. Charismatic believers obviously believe and seek for power from on high and the special enduement of the Holy Spirit that goes beyond our initial salvation experience. It was a huge dividing line for me and it was what I thought at the time a huge leap ahead in spiritual maturity. Well, as I found it, a 5 year old can be baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in other tongues as a result, so seeing Jesus as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit does not mean that you are spiritually mature. In fact, I realized that the same problems of character and fleshly tendencies were still there even after I had such an experience in the Holy Spirit. Yet, there was a distinct enduement of power and anointing that came to me as a believer that I believe has shaped my entire life as I have been filled and overpowered even on different occasions by the “dunamis” or dynamic flow of the Holy Spirit upon me.

It was not until I faced one of the longest “desert” periods of my life and my understanding of the dark night of the soul that the Bridal paradigm took hold of me. When this view of the Lord was put into my spirit by the Holy Spirit, it was almost like having a born-again experience all over again! The reality of a Bridegroom God—one who is full of pleasure, love, and burning passion—is something that goes beyond just an intellectual understanding of Scripture. It truly is something that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to understand and comprehend.

The Bridegroom God

The revelation of the “Bride of Messiah” can be seen throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. Whether you perceive this particular view of God, however, probably depends on how you carry your heart before God. He who is forgiven much (or at least he who understands that though we may not be axe-murderers each one of us has been forgiven a LARGE debt of sin) will love much—Jesus taught this. In other words, the more we realize how extravagantly Father God lavished on us love and grace through the crucifixion and resurrection of His Son and the pouring out of His Spirit in our hearts, the more we will fall in love with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in return.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

John 13:1 (NIV)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

1 John 3:1 (NKJ)

Yes, how great the love that the Father has shown us through the Son! How great the love of the Son in becoming a man and being crushed by the wrath of His Father! How marvelous the condescension of the Holy Spirit who is boundless but chooses to live and indwell earthen vessels!

This knowledge of God’s heart toward us is not neutral and it will touch our heart in one of two ways—it will either harden us or soften us. God would want this revelation to change our entire outlook on life and our entire outlook on Christianity. This paradigm will position us to live a life of faith in Jesus the Messiah out of passion and love rather than living *only* from the position of being indentured servants with correct theology. It will awaken us to emotions in God’s heart

that will in turn change our emotions and the way we look at God, other people, and ourselves. Before the consummation of this age, the people of God will talk about their Messiah in a new and different way. The Holy Spirit is even now working to change our *primary* identity in Messiah from *workers who love to lovers who work*:

And it shall be, in that day," says the LORD, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master.'

Hosea 2:16 (NKJ)

The subject of the bride is so vast that there is no way to do it justice in one chapter alone. Entire study guides, books, and courses can be found that fully develop this theme and its important application in our lives today for this hour of history. I can certainly do no better than to point you to the vast resources of the Friends of the Bridegroom and Mike Bickle's study and exposition of the Bride. Fuscia Picket is another great source of teaching regarding the prophetic unveiling of the Bride in Scripture. I mention the subject of the bride because it is essential to understanding the journey into the "mystical night" and to entering into a life of true contemplation. Most if not all of the great contemplatives of history understood this paradigm as it was revealed in Scripture, especially in the book of the Song of Songs. Those who pursue a life of contemplation and hence a deeper union with God can find no better starting point than at the revelation of the Bridegroom God and His Bride. Though I admit that the Bride is not the only message that we need to have for spiritual health and maturity, it is certainly one of the most overlooked revelations essential for growing in grace and love of the Divine King. This revelation has a power in our hearts when we give ourselves to it in abandon and pursuit. When it does touch our hearts (emotions) and minds (thoughts), it can help give us victory over our weak flesh and help us find a greater pleasure in God than we find in the sinful temptations of the world.

I would like to detail the story of the Bride from the beginning and end of human history, and then we will look at how Yeshua introduced the Bridal revelation during His ministry. If we turn our attention to Genesis, we find a story about how God created or *reshaped* the universe and everything in it about 6000 years ago. The story of creation as recorded in Genesis is distinctly *earth-centric*. More importantly, it is inherently *human-centric*. Humans are the focus and the last of act of God's creative acts during the first week of this age of history. After He created **Adam** (which is both male and female), God Himself observed a Sabbath rest, signifying that His last act of creation was indeed His highest and best! After He finished, He gave a final declaration: "It is indeed very good!" In the account of creating the male Adam and the female Adam we also find some very interesting details.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:26-28 (NKJ)

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. **Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.** And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." **Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.** And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Genesis 2:18-25 (NKJ)

Genesis chapter one reveals to us first the "big picture" of how man was created and then chapter two summarizes some of the major details of this event (they are not contradictory). First of all, God creates the male Adam. When the man awakens, he is given the task of naming some (probably not all) of the animals that were in the immediate vicinity of the garden. Adam realizes that God has made these creatures with both a male and female counterpart. After some period of time during this exercise, Adam reaches a conclusion that there is not one of these creatures that is like him or that is his "equal" or "counterpart" and that he is "alone." The LORD God then announces that it is "not good" for man to be alone. The way that God fills this need is extremely odd. He casts the man into a deep sleep and, while asleep, God forms and fashions a woman from a rib that is taken from the open side of Adam. He breathes the same breath of life into the woman as He did the man—and she becomes a living being. God brings her to Adam who out of his newfound joy declares: "this is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." She is called "Woman" because she was "taken out of" Man. God makes an announcement that "for this reason", a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. God reveals at least initially that the purpose for making "two" different kinds of human beings (male and female) was for the purpose of the two entering into a union together. As they became one flesh, life would be communicated in and through them. This union would be characterized by full openness and transparency (being naked) attended by a corresponding respect, love, and admiration (not being ashamed). Intimacy without shame and the sharing of the deepest levels of emotions and thoughts would be the hallmark of this relationship we would call "marriage."

What is interesting is that Adam did not have a father and mother to leave. In order for him to cleave or be joined to his bride Eve, Adam did not have to leave his house for the purpose of joining himself to this woman. This is rather strange since God is a God of *order* and *symbology*, yet the first example of the marriage relationship does not apparently follow the pattern He establishes. What is even more interesting is that God was speaking to the rest of creation during His acts of creation. God spoke to Himself (Father, Son, and Spirit) when He said "let us make man in our image and our likeness." Yet, the rest of creation heard what God was saying, including the angels and the demons. According to the book of Job, angels sang during this period when they saw the creative working of God during creation week.⁵ Angels saw all that God fashioned during the six days and they understood, especially in terms of the animal kingdom, that God was establishing a pattern for creation. The pattern was simple: first

create an original, then create a counterpart. For example, evening (night) had its own counterpart with day. Oceans had their counterpart with dry land. Sun had its counterpart with the moon as the “greater” and “lesser” lights of the sky. Animals were made both male and female. What must have been strange to the angels during the sixth day of creation is that God made *something* from clay that was “in His image and likeness.”

Let’s just think about this for a moment. Father, Son, and Spirit worked in full unity as One God to create according to a predefined pattern and then all of a sudden they introduce a being that is LIKE them and made in their image. Incredible. The problem here is that God introduced a *counterpart* before He introduced the *original*. God’s *ultimate* plan for this race of beings known as humans was not to be revealed until almost 4000 years later. The reason that we know that man (both male and female) was the “counterpart” is from a revelation of the Holy Spirit given to the Apostle Paul much later. Even Moses was not given this revelation. So what was the “original” supposed to look like? Paul referred to this original as the “last Adam.”

And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The **last Adam** became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

1 Cor 15:45-49 (NKJ)

You see, the “original” to whom God was making a counterpart in Genesis was not to be revealed until the “fullness of time.” The spiritual or last Adam was NOT first in the creative order. The physical Adam—the man of dust—was created first instead. In the creation of man, deep inside the heart of God, was the plan that the “Lord from heaven” would become the “heavenly Man.” The Apostle John describes Him as the *Logos* who became flesh and dwelt among us. He referred to Him as the “only-begotten” Son of the Father. You must come to realize that Yeshua, Jesus the Messiah, was not an afterthought nor even an “adjustment” in God’s plan brought on by satan’s deception of Eve and Adam. The Son was not “created” by the Father in this sense either. He was with God in the beginning, He existed alongside God, and He was God Himself (see John 1). By the act of creating man “in His likeness and in His image”, God was making the first steps toward preparing a “home” for the very Son of God when the fullness of time arrived. Here is where the story begins to truly unfold.

Before the act of creation as seen in Genesis ever began, it was in the heart of God to create beings who would be capable of the highest level of intimacy, purpose, and destiny—higher above even the angels. I am personally not sure whether the concept of a human counterpart in the mind of God preceded the fall of Lucifer and his angels, but we do know that it preceded the creation week of Genesis 1. Of course we know that the omniscient and eternal God is never “surprised” by anything, whether it was satan’s rebellion or Adam’s fall. Regardless of when or how the notion of a human being came into the mind of God, we know that “before the foundation of the world” every detail and turn was seen in advance and the foundational plans were laid for a race of beings different from the angelic order. God had in His heart to create the universe and fashion it along with the earth, sun, and moon to be a place where these “beings” would live, grow, and develop.

One theory of how angels and humans relate to each other is that God wanted a way to replace those angels who rebelled with the devil and left “positions” of power by their absence and fall. The angelic order evidently had some things in common with the concept of human beings, but they were not built with certain capacities in terms of experiencing God Himself. Angels we know are involved in some level of rulership in governing the universe and administering God’s purposes. When satan’s angels fell with him, it appears that they were “relegated” to the domain of the planet earth—leaving vacancies in galaxies or stars or other places of the universe that were possibly under their care or management as servants of the Most High God. Because angels are referred to in Scripture and tied closely to “stars”, some believe that they have a role in governing all sorts of things in the created universe. As spiritual beings that operate in a physical plane, it would make sense that the “new” governmental replacements would be trained in “one” place rather than having access to the universe itself as a playing field. That one place of course is planet earth. It is the battlefield and the stage on which a cosmic drama is being played out. In the end, God will show that He is completely just, honest, true, and righteous and that He honors those things that He establishes by His Word. Therefore, spiritual beings who live in physical bodies could be “localized” in terms of their training and their selection into the Kingdom of God. The earth thus becomes a place where the “choice” to love and obey God is made before “true power” is every conveyed in the spiritual realm.

I believe that we are indeed destined for “governmental” positions in the Kingdom of God in eternity that may indeed be related to the governing of the universe itself. More importantly, humans WERE created with a specific role and purpose that it appears angels were never meant to have. In all the recorded visions of heaven in the Bible and the interaction of angels before the throne that we see in Daniel, John, and Isaiah for example, in no case is the Lord God Almighty ever referred to in terms of “Father” or “Abba.” Angels, even the cherubim and seraphim, declare the holiness and glory of the Omnipotent One, but they are never heard referring to Him in personal, parental, or emotional terms. Human beings in eternity, however, are referred to as children, sons, and co-heirs. We are seen as a wife, a bride, and even have a manner of revelation regarding God as our Father and as our Husband. This begins to explain in some ways what God reveals to us in Genesis 1.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Genesis 1:1-5 (ASV)

Here we see God taking action in the midst of a universe and an earth that appears to be in chaos, darkness, and disorder. I believe Genesis 1:1 begins the detailing of human history and does not necessarily detail the “beginning” of time and space and matter—even though we know that all three of those had a beginning. Genesis 1:2 assumes that an earth was already in existence before God ever spoke in Genesis 1:3. The Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu* describe the condition of the earth as emptiness, waste, void, unfilled, unformed, chaotic, desolate, vanity, nothingness, and confusion. No matter what your opinion, it is apparent that there was an earth in Genesis 1:2

that is never fully explained in terms of the six days of creation as to where it came from. I personally do not believe the earth came into being when God spoke and said “Let there be light”, but rather it was already there when the story begins to be unfolded. If my hypothesis is correct, there was a reason that the earth is described as unfilled, unformed, and dark.

I believe this chaos and disorder and darkness was a direct result of the fall of Lucifer who wanted to ascend to the throne of God and be worshiped like God. Lucifer, whose name means “light-bearer”, was puffed up with pride because of his great beauty and power—to the point that he felt he could challenge God Himself.

Note to self: don’t ever attempt to be God if you are not God and don’t ever attempt a showdown with Lord God Omnipotent!

It is my opinion that darkness and chaos most likely described most if not all of the rest of the universe that may have existed at this point in time. Because of the power, beauty, and position of Lucifer to the very throne of God, his fall and rebellion more than likely caused *spiritual* darkness and *physical* darkness to come over the entire known UNIVERSE. Black holes, quasars, pulsars, super novas, and other astronomical phenomenon in my mind may be remnants or “left-overs” of that angelic fall.

My reasoning of this is based on the fact that two human beings could cause the ENTIRE earth to be cursed and the ENTIRE genealogy of the human race to be born dead spiritually by a single act of disobedience. Take that same effect and apply it to a being who was referred to as the SEAL of PERFECTION and was considered to be the HIGHEST of God’s created beings in the entire angelic order. Think about the catastrophic effects of a being of that order of power and anointing rebelling against God. It would have obviously had effects in the spiritual realm. IF, and this is a big IF that I am not dogmatic about, there was a physical realm of SOME kind in existence (to include the planet earth and some configuration of stars, *possibly* the sun, and other planets), I also believe that this angelic rebellion would have caused UNIVERSAL-wide effects. Why would his fall have this kind of effect? Just consider the fact that God made Lucifer so beautiful and anointed him with such power that roughly 1/3 of the host of heaven evidently felt that Lucifer had a good chance of taking on the Lord God Almighty and winning!

It’s sort of like me getting into a boxing ring with Muhammad Ali back when he was in his prime. I might be crazy, but I’m not stupid. I wouldn’t take any odds on me in that fight. However, Joe Lewis and Muhammad Ali would be a better fight... and the odds on who would win that one are not so clear because they appear to be *very* close. Of course we know that you have to be stupid to believe that you could take on the Creator God and win... yet Lucifer was blinded by pride and his deception convinced a good number of other angels to join him in his rebellion. We also know that the Creator is INFINITELY higher than any of His creation—including the highest angel. However, from all appearances, this distance between Creator and creation was ignored or either overlooked because of the great power, beauty, wisdom, and perfection the Almighty endowed Lucifer with.

Unfortunately, the Lord does not reveal ALL of history to us, especially the history of the spiritual realm itself. The history and beginning of the angelic orders, the manner of their

creation, and the details of satan's fall are not clearly revealed nor spelled out in Scripture for us. Instead, we are given hints here and there so that we know a little about "why" there is evil in OUR world—the root cause of which was human choice influenced by a rebellious angel known as satan.

When God spoke and said "Let there be light", it is interesting to note that "physical" light was not brought into being until Day 4 of the creative week. In his book on God's eternal redemptive plan, Peter Michas explains that the Hebrew in Genesis 1:3 is more expressive than the English version gives it credit. In the original language, the Hebrew word *or* is translated as *light*. In Genesis 1:16, another Hebrew word, *meorah*, is translated as *light* to describe the luminance that comes from the sun, moon, and the stars in the heavenlies. Why are two different words used? I believe it is because the light of Genesis 1:3 is referring primarily to a *spiritual* light that was being introduced into a universe that was characterized primarily as being in a state of darkness at that time. In addition to this, the English word "there" is not in the original Hebrew and is added for English clarity. The Hebrew text actually reads "Let be light" where "let be" is one Hebrew word. This Hebrew word for "let be" is also masculine in construction, meaning that it refers to "him" as opposed to the neuter "it". This could reasonably allow the translation: "Let Him be Light" in Genesis 1:3! Now this rendering would obviously take on much greater significance in terms of the scenario I have laid out for Genesis 1:1-2. It is my opinion that God the Father was making a direct response to the activity of Lucifer as the "Light Bearer".

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: "Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a desert, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?"

Isa 14:12-17 (NIV)

In essence, Father God could have been saying something like this:

*"OK Lucifer, you want to ascend to my throne? You want to raise your throne above mine? You want to sit as king and ruler? You want to be like Me? Fool! You will be brought low instead! Your pride and foolishness has brought about darkness in My universe! I made you to be a light bearer and to cover my throne with worship and praise. Instead, the very earth into which you are cast has now become a wasteland because of you! Let me tell you now what I will do! You will no longer be the light bearer. I will set forth my own Son as the Light in the midst of your darkness. **Let Him be Light!** He is the Word, the Logos, the very reason for being of all that exists! All things were made by Him and all things exist for His purpose! I will take everything that you tried to take by FORCE and I will FREELY offer it to someone else- a Bride that I will prepare for my very own Son!*

What I would like you to see here is that the creative week was both a RESPONSE to the activity of Lucifer and also a fulfilling of something that God ALREADY had planned to do! Somewhere from eternity past, before time, space, and matter, and probably before the creation

of even the spiritual and angelic realms, there was a DESIRE in the heart of God. In the midst of the perfect fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, passion and desire to share themselves with someone was expressed and brought into being by the very act of creation. I believe the creation of man and the universe as we see it today was always in the heart of God to perform. The fact that the highest angelic being rebels against Him evidently does not stop His plan one bit! Instead, it thickens the plot even more. Now the highest goal of His creative working (the creation of man) would be set against the backdrop of another melodrama that had already taken place in the spiritual realm itself.

Notice also that when anyone in creative order transgresses against God that the ordained position given by God is reversed. Lucifer who was the “light bearer” now becomes satan, the adversary of the kingdom of darkness. Adam was given *dominion over* the earth and in his fall would find himself the *slave of* all types of things that come *from* the earth. If you think of it, tobacco is a plant, alcohol comes from grain, and drugs come from plants like coca or cannabis. Mankind has certainly been taken captive under the dominion of the earth—the exact opposite of the divine plan. Adam would also instead of having dominion over the earth find himself suddenly having to use the sweat of his brow to get the earth produce for him.

What John later reveals to us about the Son of God begins to make more sense now:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:1-5 (NKJ)

From eternity past was the Word, or Logos. The Greek word *logos* was used by John because by his day it had become synonymous with the divine wisdom and power that is evident in the running and management of the universe. It perfectly described the Son of God—who had become flesh in the form of the Son of Man. The Son from the beginning was, is, and will always be God. He was the agent of creation—including the physical and spiritual realms. The key point is that IN HIM WAS LIFE. His spiritual life was the LIGHT of men. This light SHINES in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it, perceive it, or overcome it. When Father God set forth His Son as the Light of the World and as the Word of God, the darkness (meaning satan and his angels) did not have a clue what was really going on! This is because God kept most of His plan a MYSTERY for ages until He revealed more and more of His heart through His prophets and apostles in the written word of Scripture.

John directly ties the light shining in the darkness of Genesis 1:3 to Yeshua the Messiah! In addition, the word *logos* carries the meaning of a reckoning or a settling of a score! It is a spoken judgment or an answer with reference to a judgment! Father spoke and said, “Let Him (my Son) be light”—this is my answer to you satan and this is the judgment that will bring about your eternal punishment one day! The Greek word for light, *phos*, is used to describe the light that shines in the midst of spiritual darkness as well. *Phos* is derived from the Greek *phao*, meaning to shine, and can be traced to the Greek word *phone* as well. We use phone today in many words: telephone, phonics, microphone, and so forth. *Phone* incorporates the meaning of the spoken Word of God, the Son, who is also the “shining light” or *phos* of the glory of God!

I will also point out that God also wrote the story of redemption into the very arrangement of the stars and constellations that He made, reshaped, and reformed on Day 4. The moon and sun were created and many if not all of the stars were arranged in a specific order as well at this time. The constellations and decans of the Zodiac were never meant to guide human life—something only God reserved the right for—but they were I believe intended by God to be a declaration of the Gospel written in the vary stars of the universe.

It is my proposal that there are possibly parts of the universe that we can see today whose origins were before the Genesis 1 time period—left over remnants and evidence of the fall of Lucifer. Either way, God makes it clear that the lights in the firmament would divide day and night and also serve as markers for signs and seasons. There are many excellent books that discuss the glory of God as seen in the signs and decans of the Zodiac—the 12 families of stars and sub-constellations that in essence tell the story of the Gospel from beginning to end. This proves of course that God KNEW full well what was going to happen to His human creation, just like He knew that satan would rebel against Him.

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.

Genesis 1:14-16 (NKJ)

As we now relate this full circle to our discussion of the Bridal Paradigm, we can get a very full and amazing picture of the heart of God! When God created man in the beginning, part of the reason was a desire to share Himself with a creation that was not “angelic” in nature but yet was made “in His image.” As I noted before, the creation of human beings represented a departure in the way that God had approached everything during the creative week recorded in Genesis 1, as angels and demons both looked on. Instead of the prototype being created first, the counterpart was created first! In the creation of humans, God made beings who were *in His image* and who were indwelt by the Spirit of God Himself. God made it a point as well that all of the animals were *clothed* by God but that man was *naked* apart from being clothed with the glory of God or by other coverings—a constant reminder to man that we are not *just* or *primarily* an animal!

The reason that humans were made in His image was to allow for the very Son of God to be fashioned and made like unto one of us in the fullness of time. Here we thus see that the prototype or the original would come later or after the “counterpart” was made on Day 6 of creation! More amazing than that, God used the creation of the “counterpart” to illustrate this picture. God made a male first, and then He made a counterpart, a female. We understand from looking backwards into history and from the prophetic word of God written in Scripture that human beings were made with an ability to *cleave* to the very Godhead. We were made not only to reverence and experience the Almighty One as holy and fearsome, but also to see and experience Him as Father and Brother and Husband!

If we relate this to the picture of (the first) Adam and Eve and the first ‘marriage’, we see that in the fullness of time, the Son of God would “leave” His Father’s house in heaven and come to

earth as a man. God spoke with the foreknowledge that the Son would become human Himself in the fullness of time—which I believe would have occurred whether or not Adam and Eve had sinned! Of course we know that any *being* that is given free moral will and choice will sooner or later blow it! As He most likely had the thought of His only *begotten* Son in mind, Father spoke and said this with two different meanings: “It is not good that man should be alone.” He spoke it to the first Adam while also speaking it to the pre-incarnate last Adam as well! It was in the very heart of God to thus create beings in His image for the express purpose of drawing them into the very heart of relationship with the Trinity by means of becoming one of them Himself! How incredible this story! He saw that it would not be good for His human Son, the Word Incarnate, to be alone—or in other words to rule in eternity by Himself without a partner made like unto Him. It is very likely that God the Father was looking at God the Son when He made this pronouncement: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.”

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable [suitable] to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Genesis 2:18-25 (NKJ)

Because of the full revelation of the new covenant in Yeshua, we also realize that the man Jesus of Nazareth did not have a beginning in terms of His divine nature but did have beginning in terms of His human life. The full disclosure of the Son of God who was hinted at in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Proverbs 30:4) was made manifest 2000 years ago at a point in time and space. We have the benefit of hindsight and the revelation of the Holy Spirit to let us see who this Jesus really was.

I am the most ignorant of men; I do not have a man's understanding. I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One. Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!

Proverbs 30:2-4 (NIV)

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they

Hebrews 1:1-4 (NKJ)

But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail."

Hebrews 1:8-12 (NKJ)

Even the author of Hebrews points out that the Son was "appointed" by God as the heir of all things. The connotation again, just like when we said the Father appointed or set forth His Son as the Light and the Word of God in Genesis 1:3, is that there was a clear understanding in this appointment that it involved not only the divine uncreated Son of God from eternity past—after all He already possessed all things as being fully God Himself. The point is that these appointments were made in light of the fact that the Son was to take on the form of human flesh in a point in time and that He would FOREVER be the God-Man, never to shed off His humanity again! That is why all of these pronouncements are so profound! They declare that God would fully dwell in the form of a single man- fully divine and fully human.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Colossians 1:13-20 (NKJ)

In the forethought of the divine counsels of God Himself, the intimation was always and forever that the Son of God (the Word) would become flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of time after the creative week of Genesis was completed and the history of man would be initiated. Who can begin to fathom the depths and heights of the person we know as Yeshua the Messiah? Who can begin to fathom the greatness of His glory, power, majesty, and worth? Yet, Jesus would be put to sleep by the Father—literally—by facing the "sleep" of death on the cross. Just as the first Adam was put to sleep in order that a Bride would be fashioned from his gaping side, Father God literally put Jesus into the sleep of death.

Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

John 19:32-35 (NKJ)

This is the one who came by water and blood-Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the

truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

1 John 5:6-8 (NIV)

At His death, blood and water flowed from an open and pierced side of a dead (sleeping) Jesus. From His death on the cross and from His bleeding open side (symbolic of His blood being shed and His life being poured out), Father God would take and fashion a bride from the very “bone and flesh” of Jesus. In the very heart of God, the Father promised the Son an inheritance as an obvious fulfillment and conclusion of Him taking on the form of human flesh. The understanding would be that humans would indeed transgress and disobey the command of God- and thereby warrant death by their act of disobedience and rebellion! Yet, the Son would voluntarily take the form of man to live a sinless spotless life and be crushed completely under the wrath of God Almighty! It is an obvious conclusion that Jesus’ inheritance (you and I) cost Him the ultimate price—which indicates the height of our value and worth in the sight of God. Jesus, like the male suitor that would leave His Father’s house, also paid a “dowry” for us—by His own blood and life poured out on our behalf.

"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.

Psalms 2:7-8 (NKJ)

We have obtained a fabulous inheritance in Christ Jesus as His co-heirs and brothers. The magnitude of this inheritance that WE have IN HIM cannot be measured adequately until we step over into eternity to see the full panorama and scope of it. Yet, there is also a tremendous value that HE has IN US as His inheritance. That value is that Father God promised Him a people that He would possess from eternity past... that He as the Living Son of God and Risen Son of Man would have beings REMADE in His image who would be wholly possessed by Him and conformed to His glorious image! Paul referred to this as the “riches of the glory of HIS inheritance IN US (the saints).” There is no GREATER POSSESSION in all of creation or the universe than to have you and I as believers who are voluntary lovers of the Son of God.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11-12 (NKJ)

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints

Ephesians 1:18 (NKJ)

Believers in Yeshua who are born of the Spirit are predestined to be not only conformed to the image of the risen and glorified Jesus but also to reign with Him in eternity as an equally yoked partner in love. It would be through these actions that two levels of relationship would be established within the very center of the Triune God.

At the first level, Father God would have a family of children, what Scripture calls the “sons of God”. This would also mean that the Son of God, as the exalted God-Man, would have “brethren” and “co-heirs” of the promises of God.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Romans 8:28-30 (NKJ)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:3-7 (NKJ)

At the second level of relationship, the Son of God would be provided a “bride”, a partner with whom He could “cleave” to and be “naked and unashamed” with. The idea of both *nakedness* and *cleaving* in the divine sense of human relationship can be correctly defined as “full revelation without shame.” The Holy Spirit would anoint, seal, and indwell this family. God would create people who in turn would be invited into the highest levels of purpose and fulfillment in context of the Divine Majesty. We understand from the picture of the first Adam in the creation account of Genesis that not only is this group from human history an “inheritance” but also a “bridal partner.” It would be this bride that would become a “counterpart” and “suitable” companion to the very Son of God who will live forever as the exalted God-Man. The reason that we are commanded to live holy before the Lord is because we are being prepared as this “suitable” companion... one that will voluntarily yield ourselves and our lives to Him for His purposes!

Paul commands believers to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. If this is true for humans in marriage, do you believe that Father God would join to His Son those who are not equally yoked to Him in love? It His express desire to present to Jesus on the last day a group of people who are washed and made pure by His blood and who are filled with voluntary love for the Son of God. Jesus expressed that God loves us like God loves God. As the Father loves the Son, so does the Son love us. Not only that, Jesus will declare to us the nature and character (the name) of the Father so that the love that the Father has for Jesus the Son would be the same love that WE would have for Jesus the Son! When we realize that Jesus embraces us like the Father embraces Jesus and that we are being molded to embrace Jesus like the Father embraces Jesus, our emotions and our outlook on life will change completely! We will understand that mature voluntary love is the ultimate goal of sanctification and growth in grace. God the Father is indeed looking for a partner that is SUITABLE for His Son. Jesus will not be unequally yoked in marriage.. no more than we should be as His followers. It is the express of God the Father to make us to be this helper and counterpart to His Son... and it is a promise the Holy Spirit is carrying out in our lives as we submit ourselves to His leadership.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14 (NKJ)

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

John 15:9 (NKJ)

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

John 17:25-26 (NKJ)

This story itself speaks of a burning love in God's heart that He wanted to share and it is a story beyond the wildest dreams of any romance novelist or science fiction writer. In terms of "bridal" intimacy, the Genesis account mentions that Adam and Eve were "naked and unashamed." Not only would a man leave his father's house to "CLEAVE" and be joined to his wife, but the purpose of that joining was for the creation and propagation of LIFE together in an open (naked) and fully disclosed (unashamed) relationship. Friends, we were made and destined to be cleaved to by the very Son of God so that we could be brought into the deepest levels of relationship with the Trinity! We were destined to be elevated to a position of power and worth beyond our wildest dreams. We were the object of divine passion and affection from eternity past—an intense jealous burning for us as people and as individuals for the highest of purposes. Absolutely incredible isn't it? We are headed for the highest level of disclosure that God will possibly allow in all creation. We are headed for heights of revelation of the personality and emotions of God that no other thing in creation was made for. This is the essence of the "bride" and our "bridal identity" on this earth. When this revelation takes hold of your heart, it is going to transform you in ways you would never dream.

As mentioned earlier, angels were evidently not designed for this purpose or for this capacity—a fact that probably contributed to satan's attempt to grasp a position that God did not ordain for him. Lucifer wanted a position of power and authority over and above what God had appointed him. Above that, what the devil tried to grab illegally, the Bride of Christ will be given with the full intention and support of God! Remember the "I wills" of Lucifer? Our position as a Bride speaks of a plan in the heart of God to not only create beings that reflect His image and bear His likeness but that will be closest to the heart of God in eternity. God was not content to stop with just creating a family of servants. He wanted to create beings that would ultimately be given leadership and authority alongside of His Son, who Himself would become one of these created beings. It is this coveted position of authority that most likely led to the rebellion of Lucifer and probably his primary reason for hating us so intensely as the devil. Of course the last Adam is the "firstborn among many brethren" who will bear His spiritual image and He is therefore the prototype, we are His counterpart and suitable helper. This shows how God first set forth His Son as the *answer* or *judgment* against satan and then subsequently set forth His Son as the *answer* or *judgment* against the fall of the first Adam to restore the human race to full purpose and destiny.

Lucifer was ordained to be the "Light-Bearer". (Isa 14:12)

Messiah was set forth as the "Light" of the World and Creation. (Gen 1:3)

The Bride of Messiah is ordained to be the "Light of the World" (Matt 5:14)

Lucifer wanted to ascend into heaven. (Isa 14:13)

Messiah was seated at the right hand of the Father and all of His enemies will be made His footstool. (Heb 1:13)

The Bride of Messiah is seated in heavenly places with Him. (Eph 2:6)

Lucifer wanted to exalt his throne above the stars (angels) of God. (Isa 14:13)

Messiah was made a little lower than the angels but was exalted to the right hand of God because of His obedience and humility. (Phil 2:5-11)

The Bride of Messiah will be granted to sit with Him on His throne if we overcome. (Rev 3:21)

Lucifer wanted to sit among the congregation on God's mountain. (Isa 14:13)

Messiah will rule over the people of God on Mt. Zion and declare the name of His Father in the midst of the congregation. (Mic 4:7, Psa 22:22, Rev 14:1)

The Bride of Messiah is seen reigning on Mt. Zion on the sides of the North. (Psa 48:1, Heb 12:22-23)

Lucifer wanted to be like the Most High. (Isa 14:14)

Messiah was the express image of God. (Col 1:15-20)

The Bride of Messiah will be conformed to the image of Jesus and we will be LIKE unto Him in our glorified bodies. (Rom 8:28-30, 1 Cor 15:49, 1 John 3:2)

So now we have come full circle from the creation account to the full revelation of the mystery that was kept largely secret for generations and centuries! I hope you see the full scope of the picture—it was saved and revealed especially for us! There still may be some lingering doubt in your mind about all of this though—as though I might be making this whole thing up as just a fanciful idea with no scriptural support. After all, you might say, where do you get off tying the Genesis account of Adam and Eve to our relationship with Jesus as this supposed Bride?

The Apostle Paul gives us the greatest revelation into this “mystery” in the heart of God in his letter to the church at Ephesus. He bridges the gap by revelation of the Holy Spirit concerning God's purpose in Genesis in bringing Adam and Eve together. Not even Moses was given a bridal revelation of the covenant that God gave to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinia—yet Jeremiah some hundreds of years later would clearly reveal that the nation was being “betrothed” to Jehovah at this event (see Jer 2:2). The institution of marriage was not just a good idea but rather it was an explicit picture of His Son and a relationship He would offer to human beings through grace and redemption in the fullness of time:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever

hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:25-32

The *greatest* mystery (in my opinion) that was ever revealed from the heart of God to us through the Scriptures is the mystery of the Bride. The Holy Spirit must lead us to see this view of the Kingdom. This "bridal paradigm" in essence began BEFORE human beings were ever created or the universe was ever brought into being. Salvation and atonement were planned "before the foundation of the world." The reason of "why" we exist can only be explained by a yearning of intense passion in the very being of God Himself. Father, Son, and Spirit—the eternal One Deity who is complete in and of Himself had a desire for something "more" than just the fellowship that they share within their relationship with each other. How incredible to think that the idea for human beings began as a spark of intense burning desire in the counsel of the triune God. Please understand that God is completely self-sufficient and in *need* of nothing. He is complete in and of Himself in terms of fellowship and the desire for love. Yet, we were created out of the most intense and passionate longing ever imaginable—burnings in the emotions and thoughts of the Supreme Being Himself to share His love with someone *other* than Himself. The physical dimension of creation only shows a dim reflection of these emotions and feelings within the heart of God.

Just as the history of man on planet earth begins with a wedding, so too does human history end with a wedding. It is the "end from the beginning" so to speak that so clearly ties our existence and purpose in the universe to the heights of destiny and purpose as the bridal partner to the Son of God. We are only betrothed in this life to the Lord, but we are legally considered to be "the bride" on the basis of that betrothal. In Jewish thought, which is the context of virtually 95% of Scripture, a betrothal was a legal marriage—but yet the marriage was not yet consummated. Breaking a betrothal required a divorce—thus indicating the legal force of the engagement. The actual marriage is still to come, when we will be physically present with the Lord forever. John got a vision of this great event and it will culminate God's dealings (at least in this age!).

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ... " One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:1-11 (NIV)

Just as we began the story of creation with the wedding of Adam and Eve, we now see that the end of creation's account (at least at the point when EVERYTHING will be made new) is that of

a Bride coming out of heaven FROM God. Father will present a bride, beautifully adorned for His Son, and the next chapter of His plan for eternity and the ages will then begin. How incredible! How exciting! To know that I am pursued by the God-Man and the object of the affections of God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit! This is life that is truly life! This is Christianity at its most basic and essential expression. This is what we are destined for and He is who we are made for. As the great prophetic song expresses, "I AM my beloved's and He IS mine."

It is most appropriate that in the life of Jesus Himself, He chose to speak about the Bridal revelation during His last public address in His role as the teacher of Israel, just prior to His crucifixion. It is significant that His first miracle was at a wedding in Cana and that His last public discourse (not His last private discourse with His disciples) concerned the Kingdom of heaven in the parable of a King who prepared a wedding banquet for His Son!

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'" But they paid no attention and went off--one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Matt 22:1-14 (NIV)

The banquet of course is the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb", in which we will be physically united with our Lord in His presence. The point of the parable is that the "primary" invitees to this wedding feast did not respond to the invitation in the proper way. Most were busy with their own lives and others were worried about their crops. Others killed the messengers of the King or mistreated them! Enraged, the King burned their city! In a literal sense, the Messiah of Israel (the King's Son) had come in the midst of several cities and into the heart of Jerusalem and the religious order of their day and given forth a call to come follow Him as the light of the world. Many Jewish people embraced Jesus as a true prophet of God, and even some as the Messiah. The leaders of the religious and political structure of Israel, however, did not. The religious leaders were the ones who cried, "Let His blood be on our heads." Jesus prophesied here that their city would be burned because they did not recognize the day of their visitation—literally! 40 years later, in 70 C.E., Jerusalem was burned and the Roman general Titus destroyed the temple. The bloodshed was horrendous. Many are invited, but few are indeed chosen to enter into the fellowship of the Bridegroom.

I pray that this revelation will stir you to pursue Him in a deeper way, for yourself. Like I said in my opening thoughts, this revelation is the foundational understanding of God of the majority of mystical and contemplative writers in history. It is a profound insight into the very heart of God and the purpose of mankind. As I describe my progressive “journey into the night” from my own personal experience, I wanted to set this as a backdrop first—mainly because it was an essential revelation that has stabilized and assured my heart during this journey into the night of faith. I pray that you will be drawn to pursue Jesus with a wholehearted love and with a full understanding of why you are on planet earth. I pray that this revelation of your bridal identity will excite you, stir you, move you, and fascinate you as it has me. It will change the way you live—and even if you don’t receive another word I say, I will be satisfied if just this little bit of revelation will move you to seek the Man Yeshua Messiah with a greater intensity and purpose than ever before. Even so, let us go from this starting point to discuss the basic cry of the human heart in this age and our response before God as a “betrothed” Bride in this age of human history.

Chapter 3

The Mystical Bride

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 17:20-26 (NKJ)

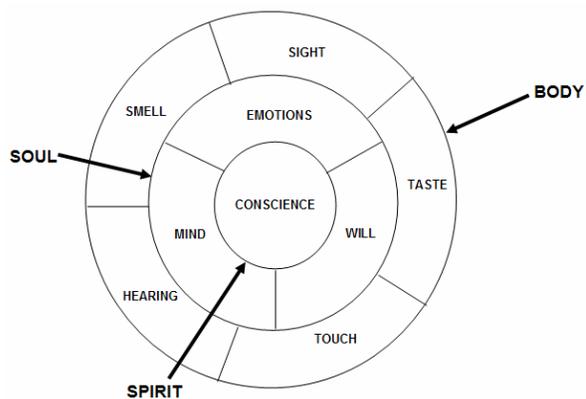
It is one thing to know about the revelation of Bridal love in the Scripture. It is completely another thing altogether to experience and live with this revelation in your inner man. There are a few saints from Church history who can offer us a discussion on *experiencing* the affections of the Bridegroom in this life. When we talk about a mystical view of God, we know that people from all walks of life and culture are today turning to many false methods of spiritual experience in order to come into contact and “touch” this unknowable and indefinable thing Scripture would call the human spirit. Of course the spirit is not a *thing*. Your spirit is really YOU. My spirit is who I am in my most basic point of identification. Human beings are not human by virtue of a genetic set of codes that make us look human. Human beings are intrinsically human by virtue of the fact that we have and hold a spiritual identity which comes from the Father of spirits. It was He who fashioned a man out of the dust of the earth and then *breathed* into him the breath (or *spirit*) of life. We were made as temples and containers of the very life and breathe of God Himself.

We understand from Scripture as well that life is really defined on three different levels. The Greek particularly differentiates these differences. Unbeknownst to many, our English word *life* can have three meanings in the original language of the New Testament. On the most basic level, humans are said to have **physical** life. This is referenced by the Greek word *bio* and is where we get our word *biology* from. On a second level, the Bible speaks about **soul life**, or that which derives from the human psyche. The Greek word *psuche* describes this particular aspect of human life and is where we get words such as *psychology* and *psychotic* from. This life speaks to the combination of both intellect and emotional feelings that are part and parcel of human existence. It is the essence of human experience that we all share. On the third level, there is the life that was **breathed** into Adam. The Greek refers to this life as *zoe*. This word is used in John 3:16 when Jesus says that whoever believes in Him will have everlasting *zoe* or *life*—**spiritual life**. Genesis records that God breathed (from Spirit to spirit) into a lump of clay (a physical body) and that man BECAME a living SOUL or *being* (the Hebrew word *nephesh*). It was the interaction of the breathe of God with a physical body that created the human spirit and formed the human soul. The spirit of man, also called the “candle of the Lord”, is really the “root” of our existence.

It is this realm of life where most of humanity is completely ignorant—or they just don’t care. After all, why do smart apes who lost all of their hair and walk upright need to worry about a spirit? We are just chemical processes and genetic mutations right? Well, Carl Sagan knows now that his assumptions about this were not correct—he has stepped over into the realm of eternity where all the veneer of this physical world is stripped away. God created man with life on three levels and Adam’s fall led to death of man on three levels. In the actual wording of the Hebrew, God told Adam that in “dying you will die” by eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. There was life on multiple levels and there would be death on multiple levels. We live in a world today where people are dead, dying, and living in death. It’s not what God wanted....

Three In One

These three levels of life correspond very closely to three distinct parts of a human being. Watchman Nee wrote on the subject of body, soul, and spirit. He wrote with such authority that even today his ideas stand as seminal in terms of communicating the mystery of *how* humans are made and “put together”. We are first and foremost spirits. We live in a physical body. The interaction of our spirit in this earthly body creates and forms a living soul. We would say that the spirit is *God-conscious* in the sense that we were made to fellowship and live with God in this realm. The soul is *self-conscious* because it is the realm of our mind, will, and emotions that we obtain our self-identity and communicate that identity to others. The body is *world-conscious* because it is the window by which we receive sensual input: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. We are cut off from the world in one way or another when one of our senses is damaged or not working. We are cut off from others by virtue of our soul when we do not communicate what we are thinking, feeling, or choosing to other people. We are cut off from God in the realm of the spirit by virtue of being born into the race of Adam and by virtue of our sinful acts that separate us from our Creator. As we all know, we can and often do come into contact with the kingdom of darkness by virtue of this same spiritual realm. Though God can touch our bodies, influence of minds, and heal our emotions, our will is still *ours*. It is still in the realm of the spirit that we come into contact with the living God.



The natural (soulish) man does not receive the things of the Spirit...
 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJ)

It is interesting to note that the construction of the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon have been likened to the construction of the human being. Messiah Yeshuah compared Himself to the actual temple, which would be destroyed and raised three days later. We know that the tabernacle was **one** yet it was composed of **three** distinct parts: an outer court, an inner court, and the holy of holies. The outer court could be **seen** by all, much like our physical bodies. The outer court contained a laver, where water was used to wash the priests,

and a brazen altar, where sacrifices were placed. Paul tells us to present our **bodies** as the living sacrifice and also that we are *washed* with the water of the Word—all things that have to do with our **outer** life. Inside the inner court, seen by only a *few* people who were of the priestly order, there were three pieces of furniture. Much like one aspect of our soul, a table of showbread (also known as the *bread of the face*) represents our choice and will before God. When the disciples returned from buying bread in Samaria, Yeshua told them that **His food (or bread)** was to DO the will of His Father. A golden lampstand stood that illuminated the inner court, which would be in darkness otherwise. While Paul instructs us to offer our **bodies** as a sacrifice, he tells us to **renew** our minds. Our intellect, without the Light of God's Word, is in darkness as well. Thirdly, an altar of incense stood right in front of the veil that separated the inner court from the Holy of Holies. It was a place of offering and worship—and we understand that many times we are to offer up praises and surrender our emotions as a fragrant offering to the Lord.

Past the *veil* stood the most holy place of all, where the Ark of the Covenant rested. The Ark represented THE presence of God in glory. No one went into this place, except the high priest, and he only once a year! We can't touch our spirits—and though other people can see aspects of our soul by what we say and do, no one knows our hearts or our inner man. No one except our High Priest and God Almighty Himself knows our hearts. This inner court is very indicative of the human spirit—the place of meeting and communion with the very presence of God. The Ark contained the broken law, a piece of manna, and the rod of Aaron. It was the BLOOD on the Mercy Seat that allowed a human man to stand before the shekinah glory of God and not die. Even as we all have broken the Law of God in our hearts, only the Blood of a Lamb can restore the fellowship that was lost in the realm of the spirit and prevent us from facing death.

So by virtue of our trinitarian composition, humans reflect the Trinitarian God who made us in “their” image. When God spoke and said “let us” make man in “our” image, we understand that we are reflections of His glory, His moral choice, His ability to love, and His triune nature. The fact that most of us live only out of 1/3 or 2/3 of our original design does not seem to bother the majority of humanity. It is in the will of the ONE God who exists in plurality that we should follow and BE in His image. God never designed us to live **splintered**. We understand by faith (not by our intellectual understanding) that God has revealed Himself to us as One God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We also understand that the **one** God is not divided nor does He act independently within His own person. The marvel of our God is that He models to us the concepts of family and submission!

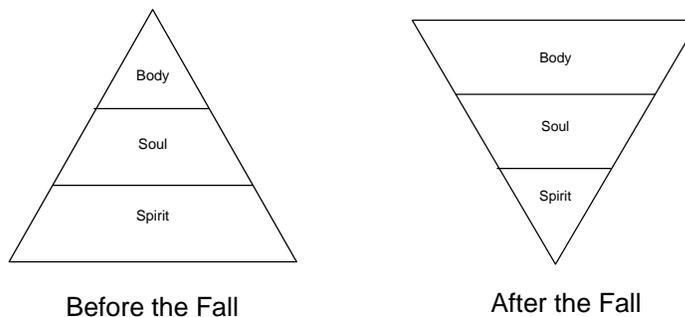
God by virtue of His unity and His plurality exhibits the principle of *how* we are to live. The Hebrew word “shalom”, translated as peace, expresses this nature of God. Yeshua is Himself the Sar Shalom, or Prince of Peace. Paul refers to Father as the God of Peace. The Holy Spirit is the *Spirit of Peace* symbolized by the heavenly dove. The essence of **peace** is wholeness, unity, oneness, completeness, and lack of division. When this One God enters our hearts and we yield our lives to Him, we find that the hundreds of different parts of our life begin to come together and we taste peace ourselves. When our soul no longer wars with our spirit or our body no longer seeks mastery over our souls, we can say that we have *peace* in our lives. This is God's purpose for you and I: unity and submission within our composition.

Just as the Son voluntarily submits to the Father and the Spirit voluntarily submits to the Son and Father, we were designed so that our soul would submit itself to our human spirit, and likewise our body would submit itself to the will of the spirit and soul working together. We were created to be a reflection of the oneness of the Triune God. Yet, most of us, believer or non-believer, do not live out of the potential of our spirit man. Yet it is only in the realm of our spirit man that we can commune and “touch” God. It is *only* in the realm of the spirit that we can find victory over our flesh, passion for God, and life that is truly life.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:12-17 (NKJ)

The sin of Adam turned mankind *upside down* by reversing the direction that we live. Instead of living primarily from the direction of the Spirit of God who communicates and communes with our human spirit, man was relegated to live by the wisdom of his own soul and from the sensory world that his body presents. You don't agree? Just ask yourself, even as Christians, how do you live? Do you make decisions out of your own intellect? How about your emotions? Does your body ever tell you to do something and you obey it? Of course you do, and so do I. As descendants of Adam's race, we *all* must overcome the fact that we have lived our lives primarily not from our spirit. Man's spirit is by nature darkened to the life of God... and our fleshly desires ensure that it stays that way. It is only by turning the Prince of Life that our spirits can be made alive to the life of God. We must be *brought from death to life* in order to experience life as God intended and to receive of the Kingdom of God.



The Bible speaks of one who did not live like this, at all. This person was different from the rest of mankind in some very interesting ways, the chief of which that He was and is the incarnate Deity! Apart from that, this one the Bible describes was directed *fully* by His human spirit under the direction of the Holy Spirit who communicated the very voice of the Father. This person, Jesus, was fully man, and according to Paul, laid *aside* His powers of Deity while on the earth. This should tell us that the miracles and power demonstrated by Jesus were not done *primarily* from His power as the Divine Sovereign of the universe. Rather, these acts were done as a MAN

who was sinless and fully under the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit, walking in the fullness of the Father's will and purpose. Consider the following:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Isaiah 11:1-5 (NIV)

By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

John 5:30 (NIV)

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJ)

Yeshua demonstrated full submission to the Father as a human being, even though Paul tell's us that He was *equal* with Father God and the Holy Spirit in divine nature. This is technically known as the **kenosis** or emptying of the Son voluntarily under the Father's will. Of Himself, Yeshua said that He did *nothing* by Himself, but rather He judged as He heard. Who was He hearing from? He tells us that He acted only as the Father directed and spoke by the Holy Spirit to Him. He could have acted out of His own human understanding and His own position of Deity both! Yet, our Messiah modeled instead servanthood, dependence on the Father, and full submission to the Father's voice and will. Isaiah expanded to us, before Yeshua was born, that this branch of Jesse would be *anointed* by the Holy Spirit, and the fullness of the Spirit would *rest* upon Him. He also reveals that this branch would not *judge* by His own human senses, i.e., what He could see with His own physical eyes or hear with His own physical ears. Just as Yeshua said of Himself, He did only what He *heard* from His Father.

Now we understand that Jesus did not **hear** *audible* voices, except for two recorded instances in the Gospels. Where did this voice come from? Where was it heard? Yeshua was referring to the same thing that Paul refers to in Romans 8. The Holy Spirit *bore witness* with the human spirit of Jesus! Father spoke and the Holy Spirit communicated that message to the carpenter from Nazareth. Jesus "heard" the voice of God in His own human spirit. I don't want to go too far here because really we speak in ignorance about many things concerning the person of Yeshua, but I will say that at a minimum, we know that Jesus was led *fully* by the Spirit of God working and acting upon Him in His *human nature*. That is the point. Yeshua was the only human who has *fully lived* from their spirit. Even His body "cried out" in the Garden of Gethsemane (Jesus sweated blood!) as He agonized in His human emotions over the death upon the tree that was to come. YET, Paul says that Yeshua was *obedient* unto death, and that death was full of unspeakable pain and torture. That is being "led by the spirit" in its truest form.

In His own person, God demonstrates how we are to live. We are to submit our body to the direction of our soul, which in turn has submitted itself to the direction of our spirit. Our spirits in turn are to be led by the voice of God under the illumination of the written Word of God. Within our own person, the spirit is to be King, the soul is to be the governor, and the body is to be the slave of both. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to help us *put to death* the deeds of the body. It is through the operation of the Word on our minds and wills and the direction of the Holy Spirit upon our spirits that we should live. We are to live out of our spirit, with both our body and soul in subjection. This is living *right-side up*. This is why faith is not something that originates primarily in our *thinking* but rather in our spirit. Faith is not mental assent; though mental assent must come before faith will ever take hold in our spirits. We are to live **by faith** (rooted in our spirit) and not **by sight** (rooted in our sensual experience). This is the model that Yeshua demonstrated.

Do you want to be led by your spirit? Do you want to be directed by the unction of the Holy Spirit communing with you? I do. Unfortunately, if you are like me, Paul tells us a very **key** aspect of this type of life that is not all that attractive. It is especially not attractive to our flesh. Paul tells us that we are **not** debtors to our flesh. In fact, we don't **owe** our **flesh** one "stinking" thing. In fact, everything of our flesh **stinks** to begin with!

I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."

Psalms 16:2 (NIV)

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

Romans 7:18 (NKJ)

"NO GOOD THING"

Those are pretty harsh words, but nonetheless true. Everything of our unredeemed and unsanctified nature—which comes from the sinful desires of our body and soul—all that comes from our "own self" is rotten before God. Nothing good dwells there. Apart from the goodness and grace of God, we are wretched! Praise God that He offers us adoption, fullness, righteousness, and holiness in redemption! Our intellect and our emotions are hopelessly tainted with our lower, sinful nature. They are too easily prone to misdirection and deception! Our intellect in many cases tag teams with even residues of our fallen nature still in our spirit to form pride, the *highest* form and the *root* cause of every sin.

Paul tells us, in the context of the same passage that describes our position as adopted sons, that the Holy Spirit bears witness with OUR spirits that we are children and even *heirs* with Yeshua. That means we are part of an inheritance and we ARE an inheritance all at the same time. How does Paul tell us that we can *experience* this sonship and walk as heirs? Very simple—IF we suffer *with* Yeshua. Suffering is a **key** theme not only in this writing but also of those who speak of spiritual maturity—something I am by no means expert on, but yet a subject I am beginning to form a picture of with the help of the Holy Spirit. No one likes to suffer... and our flesh especially does not relish the thought. Yet, I am coming to learn that this spiritual principle is immutably true: there cannot be life without death! This principle has been going since the

creative week and the fall of Adam's race. It was the death of an animal that provided a covering for Adam and Eve after they sinned and it was the death of God's Son that reconciled the entire world to God, for as many who will receive Yeshua. Jesus spoke that unless a kernel *fall* to the ground and die, the plant cannot come forth in *life*. We know He was speaking about Himself, but was He also referring to you and I?? What would be our kernel?? I submit that it is our "self-life", or the life of the flesh. Consider what Paul says again about this:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore [you] do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but [you are] under grace.

Romans 6:8-14 (NKJ)

Paul was telling us implicitly that the law came with **no power** to have victory over sin. When he tells us that we are *under grace*, he is not telling us that we can sin and live the way we want! Rather, he is telling us that the *life* of God's grace gives us a supernatural ability to live outside the dominion of sin. Grace is **ability** or **enabling** given by God to be free from sin and to live holy. Most folks think that grace is a doctrine... but Paul **never** referred to grace in this context. He always referred to it as a free gift from God that must be received and lived out. You don't live out of a *doctrine*. You live out of a source of abundant provision, opened for you in the cleft of the rock. That cleft was an open bleeding side from which "water and blood" flowed out of the body of Jesus on a tree.

How **was** this **life** made available to you and I? By death.

How **is** this **life** received and experienced in us? The same way- by death.

It is only in dying that we live... this is what Yeshua taught and modeled.

The Mystery of Oneness

I gave you just a brief review of how the human makeup is composed—body, soul, and spirit—and if that is a new concept to you, I would recommend further study from both Watchman Nee and Joyce Meyer, who have written much on the area of personal sanctification and walking a Spirit-led life. I started here because the idea of the Mystical Bride, at least from the perspective that I will speak, rises and falls on the understanding of how God created us. More importantly than understanding **how** God created us, we need to understand **why** God created us. That really is the beginning point of discussing what in the world I mean by a *mystical Bride*. We understand that only a few people (relatively speaking) will find the path that leads to life—and that path can only be found in the realm of the spirit. Yeshua has promised that He is the only sure and trustworthy guide along this path. He has stated emphatically that He alone was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is only through Him as the Son of God and His atoning work as the Son of Man that sinful humanity can be reconciled to His Father. We were made to

commune and *live* primarily out of our spirits, yet our spirits are darkened by the prominence of our body and soul. Together, these two parts of our makeup keep us in spiritual death until the Light of Messiah shines in our heart by faith.

I mention this because, as we know, many people talk about mysticism and even contemplation, but it is probably from an eastern perspective of Hinduism, Buddhism, Shamanism, or some form of spiritism. Christians run from the word *mysticism* because of its tie to these very real counterfeits of spiritual experience. The closest thing we have in America to understanding contemplation or meditation is the practice of Yoga and the transcendental form of meditation that is an extension of Hatha Yoga (the physical exercise part). When we speak about contemplation or even meditation in the Christian sense, what we are talking about is the ORIGINAL that was in the heart of God. The things that we see in these other new Age or eastern philosophies are merely a counterfeited COPY to something God really does want with us: communion! Take just a brief look at some common teaching on Yoga from the **Abhidhyan Yoga Institute** (http://www.abhidhyan.org/Teachings/Hatha_Yoga.htm):

In our times, when we speak about yoga, we usually mean physical yoga exercises or asanas. But this is only a small part of tantra yoga—**practical, scientific teaching, the aim of which is spiritual growth**. The word yoga, as well as the word religion, **means the union of the human soul with the Universal Soul, i.e., the union of human being with God**. Although yoga is a product of Indian civilization and has influenced all religions of that land, it is a practical spiritual science that does not belong to any particular region or religion. It brings positive results independent of your belief in its efficacy. We can confidently state that yoga is the technology of ecstasy.

Although **the aim of yoga is spiritual perfection**, it encourages a balanced, all-around development of human potential. We should use all the resources given to us for effective spiritual growth. Therefore, yoga contains in itself specific teachings that lead to bodily health and emotional well-being; it assuredly leads to intellectual, creative, intuitive and spiritual unfoldment. The yogi is a practical person. Therefore he does not consider his body an obstacle or a burden, a jail for his soul, which can be, even should be, neglected or rejected. Just the opposite, for a yogi the body is a temple of the Spirit, a temple which should be scrupulously maintained because, sooner or later, it will host the long-awaited Guest. So, as you might already suspect, this time we shall talk about one of the most important aspects of the spiritual path—physical yoga.

Hatha yoga is mostly yoga that **prepares the body for the spiritual path via physical and breathing exercises, and asceticism**. Hatha yoga is the most superficial component of yoga, the one that is preoccupied merely with the means to the means. It prepares and conditions the body so that the mind can practice meditation more or less without obstacles. Hatha yoga, as a main rather than an accessory practice, is quite a tiresome and roundabout way to enlightenment. Most yogis in India do not pay too much attention to it, and frequently completely ignore it. They think, why perfect the body if it is already working well?

The main component of hatha yoga, which has a special application to the spiritual path, and which we will discuss in more detail, is yoga postures, or, in Sanskrit, asanas. The word asana means comfortable, stable pose. Asanas are exercises of a special kind. The form that they have taken is the result of a thousand years of experience: trial and error, experiments, and scrupulous observation. The yogis have discovered that certain positions of the body can give human beings qualities that they do not have or that are in deficit. Asanas are usually named in honor of their inventors

(Matsyendra), certain bodily structures (a triangle), tools (a plow), birds (a peacock), or animals (a lion, e.g.) and reflect physical or psychological effects that these asanas have on a person. For instance, a snake pose makes the spine flexible; a frog pose helps the body to conserve energy and use much less food and water (like during hibernation); an action pose develops emotional and physical energy

Reading things like this should tell you that even the **dead** human spirit (at least dead to the life of God) has yearnings and longings in it. Religion is a great sedative that partially satisfies this hunger in mankind. Spirituality, a modern revival of which has occurred in the last decade or so in the West, is even more deadlier than religion because now people talk about being centered, living from their **spirit**, and being bearers of **light**. Even Oprah has a short segment on her show titled “Show Your Spirit”—highlighting folks who do good deeds from the heart. People who don’t have a clue about the grace of God even talk about the spirit of Christmas and the spirit of giving. If you look at the meaning of yoga, its ultimate goal is the UNION of the human soul with the eternal Soul, or God—the *union of the human being with God*. Even the aim of Yoga is *spiritual* perfection. Yoga is all about *spiritual* growth in practical terms.

“Wow, I wished God would have thought of this before satan did.”

No wonder Christians (at least those who would claim a strict orthodoxy and conservative belief) would run from writers such as Madame Guyon, St. John of the Cross, Teresa of Avilla, or St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Would you like to know what these folks, along with most of the other *mystics*, talk about extensively? **Union with God, spiritual perfection, and spiritual growth...**

“Hey wait a minute, eastern religions and the New Age and all of these other cults talk about that too! Isn’t that what Yoga is all about? These folks can’t be Christian—and no way are they orthodox!”

Well, I admit, on the surface that would be a valid conclusion. I remember many years ago that I was seeking truth about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and wanting to know about speaking with other tongues. In my readings of *so-called* orthodox Christian writers who were non-Charismatic, I noted a particular disdain for speaking in and with other tongues. Almost every writer that was hostile to *tongues* noted the fact that satanic religions and cults all manifested variations of speaking with tongues. Mind you, they could not mount a reasonable Biblical defense about why spiritual language was not available for every believer from the Scriptures—but they could tell from their own denominational bias why tradition and human understanding does not support it. These writers could also tell you about every excess of charismatic people and the similarities between charismatic practices and false religions. Hmm. My first thought, back then at least, was “Why on earth would God want to copy something that satan was doing?”

“Hello, McFly? Wake up and smell the coffee.”

What I realized of course is that the Kingdom of darkness copies the Kingdom of Light, not the other way around. If there were such a thing as spiritual language (and indeed there is), then the thought originated with God, not with the devil! Likewise, if I can get you to go with me, IF there IS such a thing as humans experiencing union with God, then the one true God thought about and had this in His heart *before satan ever did*.

Our problem is that we've never heard of such a thing in our Sunday School class and we have certainly never heard our preacher talk about it, our priest mention it, nor our bishop refer to it. After all, we have more important things to talk about, don't we? There's all the corruption in our government, all those homosexual activists, all the other false religions to learn about, all the Christian cults we need to guard ourselves against, and of course we have this week's business meeting where we are going to have important discussions about the color of the carpet in our new building project.

"We need to learn about "real" Bible doctrines, not all this nonsense about "union with God." Right? We need to focus on eschatology and hermeneutics and rooting out false doctrine. We're not down here to open ourselves fully to God—that's for when we get to heaven. We're here to get saved and go to church and be good Christians so we can go to heaven and get our mansion in glory one day. And by the way, you had better be a good sheep along the way! You had better be holy or else! The Lord likes His sheep "shorn tight" so to speak. Try not to embarrass the Lord either... you know that He sets very high standards for His people—so please try not to mess up and make His Church look any worse than it already does.... And try to remember that God is angry with sinners like you, even though you are saved. Read your Bible and pray too... and make sure you are in church every time the door is open, with your tithe check of course! Try to witness to all your neighbors and tell them about how Christianity makes logical sense and has good evidence for it and appeals even to smart educated folks. And while you are at it—don't go too FAR. We don't want to make people feel uncomfortable either. After all: this is Christianity at its best!"

Please forgive me... but do you see my point? It is a not-so-well-known fact that without intimacy with God, holiness is near impossible. Furthermore, I would say that almost every single command of the Christian life—to take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow the Lamb—they are **all** nearly impossible without intimacy with God. If you don't enjoy God or even have an inkling of the pleasure that He feels for you, how in the world do you expect to live for Him? Out of your devotion? Give me a break. If you have no passion for God, how do you expect to give yourself to Him in all that He has asks of you in His Word? Out of your own effort and strength? Come on... be honest.

Would you agree that "abiding" is just another word for being intimate with God? The dictionary tells us that "abide" can have several shades of meaning, but for our context it means:

To remain in a place, To continue to be sure or firm; endure. (stay) To dwell or sojourn.

To abide with someone means to sojourn or dwell with them. Can you not live in and share someone's house and not become intimate with them? Isn't union just another facet of intimacy, which is just another facet of abiding itself? Can a husband and wife be intimate and not have union? Can they have union without being intimate? Can man and wife abide with each other long term successfully without developing intimacy or having union?

These are all questions for you to ponder.

Please notice, I didn't say that living the Christian life is impossible apart from intimacy with God. I said it is **near** impossible. Religious determination and duty take most of us a long way.

Working for God will take us to a point, I admit. Walking as a servant and doing the will of God as bond-slaves can certainly accomplish **much** for the Kingdom of God. There is nothing wrong per-se with a worker mentality in the Kingdom. The 80-20 rule tells us that 80% of the work in any given church is done by 20% of the members—so I would prefer a worker any day over a slug! In fact, Jesus taught in parables extensively on stewardship, accountability, and fruit-bearing. The concept I am trying to get you to see is that there is a higher way that leads to greater fruitfulness, less burn-out, and increased productivity in the Kingdom. But—this higher way is based on union with God. It may not be obvious to you, but even after our spirits have been born again and made alive to God, we still have a considerably long path to take until we obtain **fullness** to what God has offered us in terms of intimacy and relationship with Him. This can be directly likened to the steps in betrothal and marriage as well. There is one phase of marriage where both parties have consented and agreed to marriage, have accepted the marriage terms, and living as man and wife legally, but are not yet living *together* as one. Fullness has a lot to do **with oneness**. In fact, I would probably equate them with each other, and I believe the Lord would to. You cannot attain fullness without pursuing oneness, and you can't expect oneness without attaining to fullness. Keep this thought as well... and we'll revisit it later. Let's talk a little right now about the "Biblical view" of oneness.

When we discuss *intimacy with the Lord*, we are not talking about a New Age concept. Likewise, *oneness* is not *just* a New Age or eastern concept either. Union with God is a very clear *Scriptural* principle. Do you trust the words of Jesus? Good, let's start with Him. Let's start with the highest apostolic prayer recorded in the entire Bible:

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.

John 17:9-12 (NKJ)

The point of this prayer that I would like to highlight, is that it was directed originally to the eleven disciples. In a sense, this was the prayer for a group of 11 Jewish followers to be one with each other. This union was to be characterized by the same union that the Father and the Son had. "That they may be one as We are." This is oneness in its most basic sense.

But surely Jesus never asked for **us** to be ONE with each other or with God Himself, did He?

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

John 17:20-24 (NKJ)

Here the prayer was specifically for those who would believe in Him through the word of the original disciples—and we are definitely included as believers in the 21st century! Jesus also asked that WE would be ONE in THEM. *Them* referred to "Father and Son" and implicit of

course in their oneness was the Holy Spirit. Whether you translate it as US corporately or US as in you and I individually, in red letters in your Bible, Jesus asked Father God for us to be *one* with *them*. Jesus was to live IN US and the Father was to live in Jesus—and by virtue of this fact, we would be ONE together. Not only that, Jesus prayed for our *perfection* in our *oneness* with Him and with each other. What was the ultimate purpose of the oneness? That the world would know that Jesus was the one sent by Father to redeem them. What was the other reason? That the world would KNOW that Father loves every believer with the same LOVE that He loves Jesus!

Note a few connections here: oneness with God, oneness with each other, perfection, the glory of Jesus conferred upon us, our witness to the World, and feeling the love of the Father for us—the same measure of love by which Father loved Son.

Now I am not a hermeneutic expert, but I believe that this answers the question of whether we are supposed to be seeking union with God. Not only that, this prayer will be answered by Father! It was prayed by a perfectly sinless man, anointed by the Holy Spirit, in the will of God. What more do you need to have an assurance of this prayer being answered? Oops... I forgot one key ingredient: US! You see, our partnership is required for the answer to this prayer being realized personally as well as corporately.

The thing you need to remember is of course that the Biblical idea of *oneness* is not the same as the pantheistic idea of *oneness*. Our oneness or unity in God is not an “absorption” into the great abyss. There is no “relationship” involved in eastern mysticisms, nor is there the concept of *love*. Their idea of “oneness” is based upon knowledge or awareness or what they would call “enlightenment.” I’ve always wondered what you do when you get to the “top of the mountain” in the eastern world. So what—you wake up (in one of your future reincarnations) and realize *you are the universe and the universe is you*- and that you are both “God”. Who you gonna share your “awareness” with? As you sit atop the universe, lonely and impersonal, what will you sense and know? What’s your prize for reaching the top? Oh—you get absorbed back into the big ocean of impersonal matter and energy. Gee- I look forward to that. You gonna live forever just being a drop of water in the ocean? How sad and lonely—and this is the pinnacle of their philosophy!

I am also reminded of the movie **Contact**, which was loosely based upon a Carl Sagan view of the universe. In this movie, Jodie Foster plays a scientist from SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Life) that gets to “visit” a remote part of the universe to see who sent the earth an answer to one of our first television broadcasts in the late 1930s. When she gets there, she finds out that there are many other races of beings and that humans are just mere “babes” in the evolutionary process. The guy she is talking to (a mere representation of her father in a form she is comfortable with) tells her as well that the human dilemma stems from our lack of awareness that we are “not alone.” Other than getting a breath-taking view of the edge of the universe, she gets to go back to earth with no evidence of her trip and no one believes her story. The last scene of the movie shows her sitting by herself “contemplating” her existence and her special “knowledge” that we are not alone in the universe.

Give me another break... I just can't believe that somehow the fact that one person who knows we are not alone in the universe is somehow going to make *me* feel less alone. Come to think of it, what good did that knowledge or "realization" do for this scientist in the end? There was no relationship—no love—no concern—no healing or hope: nope—none of that! Just hop back in your universal light speeder and go back to earth as the sole human who knows that YOU are not alone in the universe. Big deal! I can sit in my house all alone and contemplate that I am "not alone" on the earth—it doesn't change me or move me or stir me. I don't feel more loving and I certainly don't have to take a trip to the edge of the universe just to know that I am "not alone" in this world. The sad truth is that though we live in a world *full* of people, many of us *are* alone. I guess that's why at least the notion of aliens and other worlds helps to deaden some of the pain of living on planet Earth. In the end, the God of Creation cries out for us to *come to Him* to find out the reason of our existence and find fulfillment beyond our greatest imagination!

Union with God, spiritual maturity, and spiritual growth: these are all things that even the dead human spirit can be energized toward. For the believer, what I would at least like to establish is that the Lord God Almighty has indeed authored all three of these sentiments and made possible a life in the Messiah where all of these can be pursued and attained to. The fact that yogis in India are seeking these same things or people in America are pursuing them in their local Yoga class does not change the fact that God has originated the concepts and called them out in His Word. We have many cultural and doctrinal barriers in the West that really fight the whole notion of these concepts. Madame Guyon in her work, **The Song of the Bride**, speaks directly to the union we can experience with the Lord. She talks about how many are reticent to the notion on the outset:

There are some who say that deep union with God cannot happen in this life. I am confident, however, that your spirit can deeply touch and be united with God's spirit while live in the body. Of course, this union is experienced but not actually seen in the physical realm. There, when you fully enter the presence of God, you shall fully see all that you now touch by faith.¹

Madam Guyon pointed to the fact that for the believer, Messiah IS the fullness of God living in us¹. She echoes the sentiments of Paul:

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man **perfect** in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 1:27-28 (NKJ)

The idea of "perfection" (just like the idea of union with God) is a thoroughly Biblical principle as well—one that Paul labored in prayer for those that he had spiritual influence over. The truth is that ALL we need for spiritual perfection, growth, and union is found solely and fully in the person of Messiah Yeshua- the risen Son of God. The Greek word *teleios* is one strong expression of perfection in the New Testament. To be perfect is the command of Jesus Himself. To understand what that means, however, is another story. It does not mean we never miss the mark or will be absolutely sinless-though by grace we can attain to the very righteousness of the Messiah Himself. Perfection is rather being "whole" or "complete" or "total" in our life and love for God. When Jesus asks us to be perfect as His heavenly Father is perfect, He is telling us to

be rooted in a “full” and “total” love walk with God. It’s a “total” giving of ourselves and our lives to God for His purpose and enjoyment. In return, we get to enjoy and experience Him!

Therefore you shall be **perfect**, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:48 (NKJ)

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be **perfect**, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Matthew 19:21-22 (NKJ)

The command of Jesus to be perfect was at the end of His sermon on the mount- a treatise on living the life of God in a love-walk with Him. Jesus made the point that just “doing” the commands were not enough- that in our very hearts we must embody the spirit of those commands. Just like the Father thinks and acts in perfect harmony with the counsel of His will, our actions must be a reflection of Him. We can’t just say we love and then not forgive our enemies or be spiteful to those who don’t like us. We can’t just not commit adultery and then lust after women. We can’t just not kill someone and then have hatred, rage, or bitterness against them. We must be perfect – just as the Father and just as Jesus –who never violated their nature. That is living “complete” and “total”—for God and in love with God. The rich young ruler needed to be “perfect” in his desire to come after Jesus. Because his devotion was not total and complete, he let his love for possessions prevent him from obtaining the GREATEST TREASURE and POSSESSION in creation! The rich young ruler could not see the eternal perspective—that true riches are only found in the love of God for us and the riches of grace poured out and offered freely to us.

There is no fear in love; but **perfect** love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18-19 (NKJ)

Do you see that he who fears is still not “complete” in their revelation of God’s love for them? They have still yet to feel the total degree of God’s love for them, and therefore fear keeps them back from moving deeper in their walk with the Lord. Perfection in love is the same principle—it’s flinging yourself wildly, completely, and with absolute trust into the ocean of God’s love. No one takes that jump easily—it requires a demonstration of trust and nurturing as we walk with the Lord. “Total” and “complete” love of God will cast away ALL fear in our hearts... we must see Him as the passionate lover of our souls that He is.

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a **perfect** man, able also to bridle the whole body also.

James 3:1-2 (NKJ)

But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be **perfect** and **complete**, lacking [*wanting*] nothing.

James 1:4 (NKJ)

Here again, James uses the idea of perfection to describe the work of patience—that it needs to be complete and total. We don't need to short circuit or try to run from the trials. We are to face them with the grace that God gives us. We are to let trials and tribulations work in us a weight of eternal glory—and mold us to the image of the very Son of God. We can try to circumvent their work, however. That is why James tells us to let them have their “full” and “perfect” work. If we don't, we miss opportunities for growth and sooner or later, we'll be back down that road again until we are transformed like God wants us to be! If we are to be “perfect”, it involves even seeing trials “wholly” and “completely” from God's perspective—from the perspective of an eternal Father who is preparing an inheritance for His Son. Without trials, we will most likely never be conformed in the way God desires us to be. The idea of perfection is all about the “all” of everything we do—every ounce of our being and every ounce of our strength and every ounce of our thoughts—all for Him and directed to Him! James says that if we would want to control “all” of our body that we must first control “all” of our tongue. If we do that, then we will have perfect self-control. Many of us, however, think we can easily show self-restraint in things like food or exercise and yet let our mouths run wild. Sort of defeats the purpose, right? That's the idea.

Perfection is very closely tied to completion and fullness as well. The ultimate purpose of intimacy with God on this side of heaven should be for the “fullness” of all that God will give the human heart NOW—in this age. Another word translated sometimes as perfect is the Greek word *pleroo*, and is used in some cases to describe full and complete:

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works **perfect** before God.

Revelation 3:2 (NKJ)

What Jesus was saying to the churches was their works were not “perfect” or “full” or “complete” before God. The meaning of this word is literally to cram a net or to fill up a hollow. It means to furnish, imbue, diffuse, and influence. It also can mean to satisfy and accomplish. He was saying that His influence through them to the world was not where it needed to be. His power and character had not “diffused” through them to the degree He was hoping. The same word, used in a positive sense, is what Paul used to describe our position in God. He used it to describe the wealth and greatness of the “influence” that we have by the indwelling power of Jesus. A derivative of *pleroo* is *pleroma*. It just means to be replete with something. It is what fills something else. It is the “contents” so to speak. Not just a little either—it's copious, it's a multitude. It describes that which is put in to fill up. Paul uses them both to describe our fullness in God and also the fullness of Messiah Himself.

For in Him dwells all the **fullness** [*pleroma*, 4138] of the Godhead bodily; and you are **complete** [*pleroo*, 4137] in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Colossians 2:9-10 (NKJ)

Our completeness and fullness is linked and tied to the absolute fullness of God in Jesus Himself. You can't get more full than that! There is NO other thing that can fill our hearts either. Our hearts were meant to be filled by only one person—He is the one who was designed to be the “filling” in our lives! In Him dwells ALL fullness and IN HIM we are made complete. We are infused with the very power of God—the very power of deity. We need nothing else but Him!

He is the sum total of what we need. His Word and His Spirit—they are sufficient for every need and for every desire of our heart. We know that fullness and completeness and perfection are the mountaintop of our walk on this side of eternity—in THIS age. Though we will not see the complete picture of these things now, we are on a journey still to attain them and enter into all the fullness that God will give us. Even though many can use these verses and twist them to make us think that somehow we can become God or somehow have divinity in and our ourselves, we need not let that deter us from the truth that God wants us to know and experience!

Yes, satan has many counterfeits out there. The presence of the counterfeits should not deter US, as the people of God, from their valid pursuit in a life founded solidly on Biblical truth and love for Jesus. For us who believe, Jesus is the HOPE of glory—where glory means the fullness of all that God has and that God is. That is glory in its most basic definition. If glory is available in Jesus, then I want it and I am going to set my heart towards it! The misunderstanding that we have in evangelical Christianity in America is that if we just live the “normal” Christian life and to church, union with God and perfection in Christ will happen to us *automatically*. Whew boy... if you believe that, you will NEVER reach any depth in God!

Madame Guyon also speaks to our sufficiency in Jesus and the definition of the Christian life:

The moment you receive Christ you receive all you need to live and enjoy the Christian life. Christ within you is the fullness of God. What I am suggesting ... is not an experience that you need to have. No I am explaining that your spiritual life is a journey toward Christ possessing you more completely... Initial surrender to Jesus Christ comes long before you totally surrender to Him and know Him in His fullness. There is no doubt that when you receive Him you are united to Him, but there is much work that He must do in you to make you perfectly fitted for Himself. The fitting process takes a long time and must occur before God can fully communicate Himself to you... In fact, your goal is to allow God to possess you without holding anything back from Him. True union with God is permanent and lasting because it is inward and spiritual. Complete union with God is our final destination.^[1]

When we speak of Christian mystics, of whom Guyon was one, we are not talking about those who would indeed transgress true orthodoxy. True orthodoxy, in my mind, is anything that derives from a source other than the written Word of God (the Bible) or the living Word of God (Jesus Christ). You will find that although the terms and concepts may be foreign to our Western minds, the principles are thoroughly rooted in Scriptural truth. Thomas Dubay, S.M., in his expository work of St. John of the Cross and Theresa of Avilla—**Fire Within**, states the difference between Christian mysticism and the writings of yogis or eastern religions. He expresses the idea that for those who really study these saints, they are NOT speaking any other doctrine than what the Word of God reveals!

No one may contest the testimony of Ss. Theresa and John unless he has himself been where this woman and this man have been (and where others who follow their teaching also arrive). These two Carmelites have been to the summit of the mountain: they know what it is like and how to get there. Unlike oriental gurus who promise much but product at best an apersonal state of awareness, or at worst immoral chaos, these two saints point to nothing but what the Gospel already promises: “A joy so glorious that it cannot be described.” .. a delight that is complete.. such that “hearts will be full of joy” that no one can take away^[p.5]

Dubay goes on to make another relevant statement about anyone who would study the aspects of the *deeper life* by linking the Christian concept of mystical experience with true joy and happiness in the Christian life.

A book on advanced prayer is a book on advanced joy. It is a love story, a book about being loved, and loving, totally. It is a book on holiness, the heights of holiness, the heights of holiness to which the Gospel invites everyone. ^[p.5]

In almost every case, mystical writers relate deeper union with God to a deeper union with God *through prayer*. It is in the realm of the prayer life, as opposed to the meditations and mantras and positions of the Yoga world, that Christian mystics relate the experience of spiritual growth. One of Madame Guyon's writings, **Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ**^[1], was originally titled "Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer." Mystical writers such as St. John and Theresa of Avilla speak extensively about advanced or *infused* prayer. This is a very important distinction to bring up here as we are discussing Biblical oneness with the Divine. The idea of perfection and maturity is tied very closely to the life of prayer in the believer. Looking at the sad state of prayer in the Western church (whether you are talking about intercession, supplication, or contemplative prayer—all which will be discussed later), it is easy to understand how and why the Western church does not exhibit holiness, power, or passion for God as a *whole*. Now I do believe the Holy Spirit is changing this in our generation—so don't take my statement as a word of despair.

You cannot reach for intimacy and union with God without also at the same time moving toward Him in love and a total giving of yourself to Him—voluntarily. God is the ultimate romantic, and this view of the Christian life will fill your heart with a romance in God that will captivate you and drive you to pursue the One who is pursuing you! This giving of yourself to God will produce in you a holiness and conviction and steadfastness in you UNLIKE any Western program of discipleship could! Many of our American ideas of holiness and growth are precursors and prerequisites to this life of deeper prayer and union—but they are inadequate to move us very far or move us long term.

Madame Guyon, in her work entitled **Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ**, begins by telling us that any believer is capable of a deep experience of Jesus. Even though most Christians do not feel such an experience is possible *for them* or that *they* are called to deep experience, she asserts that we have *all* been called to the depths of an inward relationship. She relates this deep and inward relationship to a turning and yielding of our heart to the Lord. ^[p.1-2] Many of you may think to yourself, "But I thought I did that when I got saved?" Well, we have, but obviously it was not in totality, was it? Yes, we have an expression of love within our heart for Jesus, but it certainly is not mature—not by any means. That is why we must all grow in love... Jeanne tells us further that we are called to pray without ceasing (by Paul) and to watch and prayer (by the Lord). She makes a direct connection to living a life of love and living a life of prayer—and in fact goes so far to say they are essentially the same.

Madame Guyon gives us further insight into "advanced" or "infused" prayer:

Let me ask you, then, do you desire to know the Lord in a deep way? God has made such an experience, such a walk, possible for you. He has made it possible through the grace He has given to all His redeemed children. He has done it by means of His Holy Spirit. **How then will you**

come to the Lord to know Him in such a deep way? Prayer is the key. But I have in mind a certain kind of prayer. It is a kind of prayer that is very simple and yet holds the key of perfection and goodness—things found only in God Himself. The type of prayer that I have in mind will deliver you from enslavement to every sin. It is a prayer that will release to you every Godly virtue. You see the only way to be perfect is to walk in the presence of God. The only way you can live in His presence in uninterrupted fellowship is by means of prayer, but a very special kind of prayer. **It is a prayer that leads you into the presence of God and keeps you there at all times; a prayer that can be experienced under any conditions, any place, and any time.**
[p.3]

Here we have a good working definition of infused prayer and its tie to holiness, love, and oneness with God. Notice that she says “prayer is key” to knowing the Lord in a deep way. But this is not our normal Western view of prayer—far from it. Granted, there are different types of prayer—but she refers to what many would call either contemplative or “communing” prayer as the means for personal transformation. I will dedicate more time to this later—but for now just keep in your mind the connection between these concepts: prayer, union with God, love for God, personal holiness, power, and intimacy. These concepts are explored, experienced, and linked by a large majority of the contemplative writers.

Jesus referred to oneness when discussing perfection and growth in mature love. Moving further in the Biblical view of union, let’s also consider some other important statements from the Word:

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.
 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NKJ)

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.
 Romans 8:29 (NKJ)

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.
 1 John 3:8-9 (NKJ)

And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.
 1 Corinthians 15:49 (NKJ)

What we understand about our new birth in Messiah is that God has implanted the very image of Jesus into our spirits. This image, of course, comes in the “seed” form of the Holy Spirit. John tells us that God’s seed (Greek, *sperma*) was literally implanted within us. We understand the vivid imagery of the Greek word *sperma*, but the key concept to understand is that “genetic” material was imparted to us in the new birth. That genetic material, in the person of the Holy Spirit, programs a course of development within our hearts. Like the “leaven” that Jesus described in His parable on the Kingdom, just this one little seed would, when nurtured, grow and expand until every ounce of our nature and being is conformed to the image of the very Son of God. That is exactly the Biblical picture given to us. One day, even our earthly bodies will be conformed to the image of the spiritual body of the risen Lord Jesus Messiah. John tells us that

we will not continue to live as we once did—we have a genetic makeup know that given the opportunity to develop and mature, will make us like unto the man from heaven in power, character, and wisdom. Jesus was indeed the “first born” among many brethren. What should encourage you today is that Father, when you were born into His family, made you “look” like His Son. You favor Jesus! Not only that, you are being conformed into His image day by day, as you continue in His Word, in fellowship, in prayer, and in love. That is why John could say confidently: “Greater is HE that is IN you!” Jesus living in us is the hope of glory and hope of all that God has and all that God is.

The concepts, no matter which one you use, are the same. Transformation into the image of Jesus and union with God are the same idea! You can not have one without the other either. We cannot be transformed into His likeness without “beholding” the image of the Lord in intimacy and passion. We cannot have deeper union with God without being transformed into His image. They are in essence the same concept. Both, again, are tied specifically to advanced prayer, deeper love, passionate pursuit, holiness, and perfection. Madame Guyon offers yet another thought in this regard:

Your spirit can be poured into [God]. He is your center. In Him your spirit can be transformed. God, in creating you, made you a partaker of Himself. He made you to be reunited with Him, and He gives you an inner urge toward that reunion. On a human level, God gives man this desire to be fully united with a spouse in marriage; but that union is never totally complete because the two can never totally merge into one. This is like trying to melt two different kinds of metals together. They can never be totally united because of their different properties. The more alike the two metals are, the more readily they mix. On the other hand, if you mix two glasses of water together, they immediately become so fully mixed that you cannot separate them. **Your spirit is made to be united and transformed into God. You truly are made to married to Him.** There may be an initial union with God without this deeper merging of your spirit with His. But this deep exchange is the kind of union with God that I am discussing. **Your spirit can be united to God in this way because that is what it is made for.** [Author's Introduction, The Song of the Bride]

We were truly made for Him! We were truly made to be united with Him. How did God accomplish this? Primarily, by becoming ONE of us. He partook of the human nature so that we could partake of His divine nature. Please don't call me a heretic for that statement: I didn't say “so that we could become God ourselves.” We will never be His equal or completely like Him. We were made with an inherent ability, unlike any other thing in creation including angels, to be partakers of His image and glory and nature! Angels, from what we know, do not have the divine seed living in them. They are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit as we are. What I am saying is no less than what Peter tells us:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

2 Peter 1:1-4 (NKJ)

You and I are called to be partakers of His nature. This is no different than Paul saying that we are being transformed into the image of Jesus. This is no different than Jesus asking Father God for us to be ONE in them and with each other. This is no different than John telling us that we have divine seed of the Holy Spirit living and growing in us. Our spirits were made by God with

an inherent design in mind. That design involved ultimately a union with Himself. This union, again, is not the same as pantheistic union where we are joined to an impersonal energy and we lose our identity in it. No, we will always be created and God will always be Creator. It was possible (hard, yes) for the Creator to become the created (i.e., the carpenter from Nazareth), but it is not possible for the created to become Creator! Please see this! This desire is inside of *all* human beings is really there! God put it there. Granted, not all will hear it or respond to it. Religions, cults, and New Age spirituality are answering a hunger that is resident in the human makeup. The Church is sitting idly by with our hands over our eyes and ears saying, “Ooh.. no stop; that’s not orthodox; that can’t be Biblical; that’s not for us; that’s gotta be counterfeit; no, that can’t be God; no, this is for those deceived eastern religions!” No really, this is Bible. It’s Jesus. It’s God. Why can’t we show the world the ORIGINAL instead of letting satan show off his counterfeits??

Madam Guyon again supplies us with a great observation:

Deep union with God can take place only when you surrender your self-nature to exist only in God. There is a deep fellowship where you stop preserving the self, and lovingly and perfectly sink into God. Certainly this does not mean that you lose your own personality and become God. If you allow a drop of water to fall into a cup of wine, the water loses its own form and character. The water is apparently changed into wine; however, the water will always remain distinct in some way. So you see that you will never become God, and you do have the choice to separate yourself from Him. [Author’s Introduction, The Song of the Bride]

As I have said, even though perfection and union with God are very clear in the New Testament, we have ran from them as the Western Church because they can sound like a Hindu or New Age concept if we take them to extremes. I am firm believer that these false religions have only capitalized on truths that God has already expressed and perverted them in some way. The ideas of Christ-consciousness or enlightenment as expressed in Buddhist or Hindu thought are merely perversions of truths that God intended for humans to experience in context to a relationship with Him. I’ll quote loosely from something I heard Mike Bickle say at a conference on Passionate Pursuit and Contemplative Prayer. He basically said, “When will the church get it? Barnes and Nobles has gotten it.. just look at their bookshelves and the subject matter.. they understand there is a hunger for people to touch God.. you can’t find a book on contemplative prayer in a Christian book store hardly, but Barnes and Nobles has them on their best seller lists.. the church hasn’t got it yet!” In my own opinion, we cannot have our programs and idea of spirituality and have union with God too! Something has to go—and before it is over with, God will shake every church institution to its foundations.

Do you know what will survive when that shaking comes?

- Our intimacy and union with God.
- Our passion and love for Jesus.
- Our oneness in spirit with the Spirit of God.

Relationship will be the **ONLY** thing that will survive the shaking that is coming. Whatever you do, put yourself in the way of these things—NOW! Don’t wait any longer or put it off any more. Move yourself in this direction, because ultimately it is our only hope for the days to come, individually and corporately as the Body of Messiah.

This is the cry of the Holy Spirit in this hour. It is the cry for Bridal love and devotion. This bridal union, which I have already alluded to in the first chapter, is key corollary to the idea of spiritual union with the Divine. Remember, oriental and eastern mystics speak of union with the divine that is very similar to the “force” in the Star Wars saga. We speak in terms of relationship with the God who exists high above all other creation—and infinitely separated from us by the fact. Yet this infinitely separated God calls us to be joined in union with Him! How incredible! Yet, that is exactly the message of the Gospel and underpinning of *mystical bride*.

The Bridal Union

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the Bridal allegory we find in Scripture clearly speaks to our identity as a cherished and nurtured partner whom the Holy Spirit is preparing to be joined one day to her Bridegroom. That shaping process involves purifying and transforming us so that in the end, a white and radiant Bride will come down from Heaven, prepared for her Husband. This revelation will change our base identification and point of relation with the Lord. It can touch our hearts and transform us from being *just* servants and workers to being friends and lovers of the Son of God. Our relationship with our Bridegroom on the earth and in this age is what we would term properly a “betrothal.” A betrothal in the Jewish sense of the word, which is the context of 95% of the Bible, was a legal arrangement that was as strong as the actual marriage itself. Betrothal was equivalent to marriage with the exception that the marriage was not yet consummated.

Miriam (white Anglo-Saxons call her ‘Mary’) and Joseph were “betrothed” to be married when she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. Joseph was going to put her away quietly rather than having a public ceremony normally associated with a divorce on the grounds of unfaithfulness. They were legally married, but as we understand, Joseph did not consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born. A divorce was required by Joseph even though they were only “betrothed.” So we see that it was just as legally binding as our modern concept of marriage. In this sense, we as believers are legally the “Bride” on the earth right now. We have no idea of the power and the glory we are going to possess as the Lamb’s wife on THAT day in eternity when we step over the line of time and space. We will be fully the Bride when our “marriage” to Him is consummated and we are physically in His presence on the wedding day. We will have glorified bodies with untold and unheard of powers and capabilities and with inherent capabilities to experience and receive love and revelation from God. This is the destiny of the Bride.

The question can be (and should be) rightly asked as to how much of our Bridal identity and position can we experience on earth. It is this question that the Holy Spirit divinely stirs in the hearts of all believers, but that few respond to. Sad but true, not all followers of Jesus will respond to this wooing. When we realize that we can live LIKE the Bride NOW, on this earth, it will awaken some very intense feelings and emotions within our heart. Spiritual passion, at its root, is defined by this awakening of the Bridal identity in our hearts. When we begin to understand that God has designs and plans for the human heart NOW, not just in eternity, it can begin to move us and cause us to want to pursue our Bridegroom God NOW, in time and space.

Most Western Christians are content, however, to live a life of mediocrity in terms of connecting with the Divine. We easily settle for just activity and performance as indicators of our relative spiritual maturity and our theological correctness and abhorrence of sinful things of the flesh as evidence that we are “on our way” to experiencing more of God. For many other Christians, we easily settle for the world or the exaltation of our own “self” even in our religious pursuit of God. The fact is that we in general have neglected the entire world of our inner life in God and thus have replaced the mystery and awe of romance in our hearts with stale, compartmentalized, religious exercises instead. When God defines Himself in the written Word, He never reveal something of His character like along the line of “God is theology” or “God is perfect doctrine.” No, instead Scripture reveals that “God is love” and “God is light”, two things that we even as humans can experience yet cannot define fully or grasp correctly.

Is light a particle or a wave? Yes.

Is love a feeling or a choice? Yes.

See what I mean?

Darkness is the absence of light. Hatred is the absence of love. God defines Himself as “love” and “light” and in essence places Himself in the category of “things we can feel or experience but that our minds cannot comprehend fully.” That is the whole point. Yet by understanding love we understand a little, not all mind you, about God. We were made to be LOVERS first. That is why the FIRST and the GREATEST commandment is “to love.” It should be obvious, though it is not, that we can live as the Bride now while in these physical bodies living on planet Earth. We don’t have to wait for our official wedding day, when we will physically see the Lord and will always be in His presence in heaven in eternity. We don’t have to wait until the other side to experience the love and passion of our Bridegroom, the awe and wonder of our King, or the intense jealousy of our Judge. We can live in the spirit of the Bride NOW. We can live in passionate pursuit NOW. We can live in lovesickness before our eyes truly see Jesus, NOW. If we do not live in the spirit of the Bride, what we are left with is a dull, boring Christian experience that has been common to the majority of the church in history and the majority of the modern church as well. I don’t want to live in spiritual apathy, boredom, or compromise. Yet without the fire of love touching our hearts, our flesh will rule and reign even our Christian experience and walk.

This is where we can learn much from those who have experienced and written about what I call the “mystical” Bride. The mystical Bride, in my humble opinion, is simply believers and disciples of our Lord who have the desire and the passion to live in the spirit of the Bride now, in time and space, on planet earth. It is comprised of those who say “yes” to the wooings and invitation of the Holy Spirit to the “deeper” life in God. It is made up of those who are not willing to settle for “business as usual, church as usual” and who refuse to live in Churchianity. It is in essence those who will hear the invitation of the Bridegroom to travel the narrow way and reach and grab for all that God will give them. I can’t explain necessarily how one enters into this journey—all I know is that not all believers I have met have this passion or desire. I can’t explain how I have a desire for “more” of God other than God offered and somehow by some miracle I said “yes.” I believe that He gives grace to those who say “yes” but that He cannot force anyone to say “yes” to His invitation to “more.” The sad fact for many Christians in

America is that we can experience as much or as little of God as we like. God answers the cry of the hungry heart just like He respects those who do not want more than just a salvation experience and a passport stamp and seat on the heavenly express. Yet, we as evangelicals can so focus on the salvation experience that we forget that it is only the beginning of the journey and not the end.

In this respect, the idea of the mystical Bride is only a further extension of the Bridal revelation. It is the essential idea of oneness or unity with God. It is the idea of being “joined” to the Lord. Here is I believe a good Biblical context for the mystical Bride:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Corinthians 6:15-20 (NKJ)

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:31-33 (NKJ)

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NKJ)

Here again, we see a clear reference in these passages of being joined to the Lord and being joined to one another. Paul says clearly that if we are joined to the Lord we are one spirit with Him. Do you want to try to explain that one without being accused of heresy? What do you think “one spirit” means? It certainly supports the idea that our spirits were created to be joined and united to the God by the Holy Spirit. Our very bodies are referred to as temples that house the very glory of God inside of us. We are told by Paul that collectively we are being built together as a dwelling place for God. Wow! I thought God dwelt in obscurity in heaven. He does! Yet, the God of Creation condescends to dwell and live in us. How incredible! God is humble, please understand this. His condescension to become man and His condescension to indwell humans shows it very clearly! Paul says, speaking and revealing one of the greatest mysteries hidden in the counsels of the Godhead, that the very picture of marriage demonstrates the joining of believer with the Bridegroom God in the spirit. We are “one flesh” with Jesus by virtue that He shared our humanity and by virtue that we share in the same communion of the Holy Spirit that He and the Father share.

Like the example Madame Guyon gave of two metals being mixed, the more alike two metals are, the easier they are to mix. The more you are conformed to the image of God's Son, the easier it is for you to "mix" with His Spirit. Here is where the ultimate picture of divine oneness and the mystical Bride is seen clearly. God desires oneness with us... in fact our very spirits were designed for that intimacy and sharing, from before creation. This was again the purpose of God in all of creation and His ultimate goal: a Bridal partner for His Son, made likened unto Him. Remember that Father made the first Adam, the man of the earth, a helper "comparable to him." Some versions translate it "suitable for" or "compatible with" or "fit for" Likewise, Father is making the last Adam, the man from heaven, a partner that is comparable to, fitted to, and suitable for. The goal of our perfection and the ultimate goal of holiness is primarily about "compatibility" issues. The Holy Spirit is making you "more like" Jesus so that you will be "more readily joined to Him."

Now be honest. Have you ever heard holiness expressed in terms of union with God? I'll guess probably not. Yes, God does command us and want us to be holy. No doubt. Have you ever met Christians who preach and pursue holiness as an end in itself?? After all, what do you do once you have obtained holiness?? Gloat about it? Become prideful and religiously harsh on non-holy people? Those are indeed both possibilities, right? What is the end of our holiness? It is still the person of God ultimately!

Consider another thought from Guyon on this:

Deep and lasting union with God, the spiritual marriage, is what you should ask of your Beloved. Let your passion cause you to proclaim to Him your deepest desire: "**Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.**" The bride in the Song of Songs asks it of Him as though she were addressing someone else; in third person: an impetuous exclamation of love, giving vent to her passion without specifying to whom she is speaking. She says that only a deep union can satisfy her, and that is what she demands.^[Author's Introduction, The Song of the Bride]

I hope you will agree with me that the ultimate goal in the Christian life is to be joined to our Beloved. That is His ultimate goal as well: for you to be joined to Him. You may have a hard time swallowing that—but don't worry about it. It is another "Western" obstacle that you need to let the Holy Spirit help you overcome. When I speak of the "mystical Bride", I am referring to the deep and lasting union that Madame Guyon refers to—a union that is possible in this life!

Notice also that our ultimate goal is not to be a good worker, win thousands of souls to the Lord, wreak havoc on the kingdom of darkness, or live without spot or blemish. It's not even to be greatly anointed, have a huge ministry, give to the poor, or have great theological understanding. I guarantee you, by the Word of God itself, that if you seek HIM first, all of these other things will follow after you in due time. If you will pursue Him for His own sake—not for what He can offer you in terms of ministries and gifting—you will discover something far more valuable than gold. You will find the depths of love and relationship with the God of Eternity. Nothing can compare to that, and one you have tasted of that, you will never want anything else but that! Don't get me wrong: I want to be anointed and I want to move in the power of God like you wouldn't believe. What I am learning though, is that before God can release power like that to me, He must first be sure He can trust me. The only thing that can demonstrate trust like that is

to see whether we will love God for Himself—and thus we have the key ingredient for all spiritual growth.

The concept of the mystical bride, again, is that we can live in this age in the spirit of the Bride. Yes, the consummation of our wedding is not until later. But we are legally married right now! We are betrothed to the Bridegroom God! We are His spiritual Bride. There is a world of exploration in spiritual experience to be had here as well! There is a world of exploration in the area of advanced prayer and holiness that outstrips most every Church exercise you can think of. This idea of a world of inner love and exploration in the Holy Spirit is the *original* in the heart of God that many eastern religions and yogis have falsely copied. Yogis and swamis and gurus and imams are offering people spiritual experience—but it is false and it will eventually lead to destruction in hell. Satan is an angel of light—and he comes most often not with the pitch fork and horns but rather cloaked in the auspices of spirituality, religion, and “light.” The Bridegroom God is calling His people, before the last drama at the end of the age is played out, to come to him with the same desire and passion found in those giving themselves to yoga and all these eastern philosophies. He wants even greater passion than those who are in cults like the LDS or false religions like Islam. Before He returns, Father is going to give Jesus a Bride that is as much in love with Him as Jesus is in love with them. This is the picture of a Bridegroom, clinging to His Bride, nurturing and cherishing her, washing her with His word, and showering His love upon her. This is the destiny of the end-times generation, and it is a fullness I do not want to miss out on!

If you want to explore the depths of this relationship, there can be no better starting point than the symbology and allegorical view of the Beloved and the Bride found in the Song of Songs. This, in my opinion, is the Lamb’s song that is sung in eternity and it is the GREATEST song of all. The greatness of the song comes from its subject and object: it is the story of our Lover and His interactions with the Bride—his Beloved! It is a picture of the pattern of spiritual growth that you and I can expect Him to take us on if we will embrace the spirit of the Bride in this age. We are all ultimately the Bride of Christ—every believer. However, not everyone in the Church is living like the Betrothed! Before the end of this age, however, the Spirit and the BRIDE are going to cry out for their Beloved to COME! We will live in the fullness of this identity before it is over with. I can wholeheartedly recommend Mike Bickle’s study course on the Song of Solomon as a great starting point. I will expound more of the allegory of the Bride as I share more throughout this book, so I am only giving it a cursory introduction here. Madame Guyon opens her commentary on the Song of Songs with the observation that our passion and our deepest desire should be the cry for bridal intimacy, the cry for the bridal revelation, and the cry for our position as the mystical bride! This is the essence of the first verses of the Song: “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.”

We will expound this later as well in more detail. For now, trust me that the “kiss” the Bride cries for is the very revelation of the Word of God to her heart. This should be our cry as well—it is a cry for the Bridal identity to be awakened in us. Like Madame Guyon, I hope that you are at a point where only a deep union with the Lord will satisfy you. In all likelihood, odds are you that you are not there right now. The furthest thing from many Christian’s minds is intimacy and deep union with Jesus. Don’t give up hope though—the Holy Spirit has been sent to lead you onward. You may have a bit to go before you are dissatisfied with everything else in this life or

even with Christianity and your sole request is for MORE of Jesus. Pursue Him, though, and ask Him to change your heart—He will!

In the end, we can lose almost everything in this life: our homes, our families, our friends, our possessions, our jobs, our reputation, our children, our freedom, our wealth, our health, or our name. At any moment, you could lose *any* or *all* of these things. In the end, the only thing that **cannot** be taken from us in this life is our friendship and relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A woman in the New Testament, Mary of Bethany (a.k.a. Miriam, who was Martha's sister), learned this lesson well. She chose the "good thing." Jesus told her that what she chose would NOT be taken away from her. Let's talk further now about the "threefold" cry of the believer in this regard, and what you and I need to choose as the "good thing" or "one thing" in this life.

Chapter 3

The Threefold Cry

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Phil 3:7-15 (NKJ)

When we consider the life of Paul, we get glimpses of a man who had “everything going for him” in terms of “worldly” success. Before Paul encountered the Living Messiah, he was a deeply spiritual man who had a passion for God, even though his passion was grossly misdirected. In terms of human attainment and recognition, Paul really had everything a person could dream of. He had a Ph.D. equivalent theological education. He was trained in the finest rabbinical school of his day (Rabbi Gamaliel). He had the credentials of a full Jewish heritage and pedigree (born of the tribe of Benjamin, of the stock of Israel). He was a leader among the highest councils of Jewish religious and social life (he had authority to arrest people from synagogues in another city outside of Jerusalem). He had a form of religious observance that measured up to the highest standards of the oral tradition of his day and even of the Law itself (circumcised on the eighth day and a Hebrew of Hebrews!). We in the 21st century may use different words, but we know to what Paul is talking about, don’t we? We may not be in the exact context that Paul was, but we are still consumed with our own drive to perform and excel in a world system that recognizes us primarily for what we do or what we possess and not for who we are innately created to be. Even in the Christian context, we are more comfortable relating to God based on what we do for Him rather than on how He views and sees us through grace. Whether it is overt or spoken, we in our heart of hearts can easily be led down the road of performance in an effort to win God’s favor and earn merit from Him so that He will like us and accept us. We can all too often find ourselves striving to fulfill what God has already told us He would perform! We as Christians in the West place far more value on our attainment of knowledge about God and our works for God but leave neglected the far greater attainment of a deeper love and devotion to the one who has called us to draw near to Him through grace.

The Apostle Paul indeed faced this in his own life. Paul came to a startling realization one day as he surveyed his life and considered where he had come from and where he was going. He told the Philippians that “what things were gain to me, these I have counted as loss.” In essence, Paul was saying that the things that he once grasped for and found some form of pleasure or self-pride in was just worthless now. I would paraphrase this by saying “all the things I have pursued in

this life like money, fame, education, and power are really just worthless pursuits in comparison to the pursuit of the Man Christ Jesus.” Why would we as humans ever consider letting go of such things as power, prestige, pride, money, fame, recognition, acceptance, or pleasure? These things along with a strong sense of “self” are all paraded to us in the 21st century by media advertising and the entertainment industry as “gain” in life. We all spend our entire lives on this earth pursuing one or more of these—or at least we pursue them until we meet the One who is pursuing us! We have learned to define our lives in, especially in America, by how much stuff we have, how big our house is, how much money we make, how much our 401K is worth, what kind of car we drive, what kind of clothes we wear, who we know, what we do, where we spend our vacations, what we do with our free time, where we invest our money, where we work, how high up we go, how much education we have, how many friends we have—and on and on and on. There is no end to the pursuits that we have as Americans—or human beings in general for that matter. That is of course where true Christianity and the American version of it can come into conflict. At some point, we must come to the conclusion that there is nothing good in us and that there is nothing good in this life at all (including the American dream)!

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

Romans 7:18 (NKJ)

Everything we can offer God in our own natural ability and resources is really worth nothing! Everything in this life not done in the light of eternity will vanish one day. Everything we do on this earth in a temporal sense will eventually be forgotten and no longer remembered. Solomon said it best when he likened things done “under the sun” as a “striving after the wind” and “vanity of vanities.” Only what we do in the context of a love relationship with Jesus Christ will have any eternal lasting value. If you have not come to this conclusion and adjusted your course through life to this aim, you are headed for sorrow not only in this life, but certainly you are headed for sorrow in eternity. When Jesus looks at many on the last day and says “Depart from me, I never INTIMATELY KNEW you as my own”, there will be great anguish, sorrow, and gnashing of teeth. No amount of good works or ecological savvy or visualizations of world peace or random acts of kindness will matter.

The ONLY thing will matter is whether we have a love relationship with the Son of God. It breaks my heart to think about it. It breaks God’s heart too. However, it also broke God’s heart that He had to provide Himself as the spotless lamb so much so that the Father would be pleased to bruise His very own Son in order to bring about our redemption. The Father was in no way happy to crush His own Son under the full weight of justice and wrath as punishment for every sin committed by every human who ever lived! Yet, it “pleased” Him to know that this act would allow you to be drawn near into His own family and that His Son would have an eternal companion as a result—that you and I could go free while not violating His holiness or righteousness at all. The greatest realization is not just to know and believe there is a God—rather, it is to believe and know that THE God of Creation desires us as the objects of His affection and passion and great love. This realization will in turn cause us to become affectionate and passionate for Him!

Paul came to this realization—and he came to an understanding of the “right” things to pursue in life as well. After all, if you give up “everything” else in this life, then what is this life all about

to start with? That was in essence the question I was trying to get you to think about as we started our discussion about the Bridal Paradigm of the Kingdom. If life is not primarily defined by our attainments or our possessions or our conquests, then why are you living and breathing? If we are created by a Creator, then what was the purpose of Him creating us to live and breathe and walk on this planet? That is indeed the million dollar question that psychiatrists are paid large sums of money to figure out for people. That is a question, in my opinion, that the Western church has provided very shallow answers to.

Don't get me wrong. We do indeed as the Protestant church, especially evangelicals, know how to tell people about heaven and hell and sin and righteousness. We can communicate the essential message of the Gospel (with a minimal degree of effectiveness) in a way that the Holy Spirit can lead someone to trusting faith in Jesus as their Redeemer.

Though it does not have to be perfectly communicated by us, people need to know that they are separated from God by sin and that there is only one way by which they can be made right with God. We can present the Romans Road and illustrate how Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We can encourage people to believe and receive Him. All of these are of course essential to communicate to humans that for the most part are ignorant of their eternal destiny.

We can get people saved, but can we communicate to them the heart of God in why they exist and why they were created? Can we communicate the heart and character and nature of God in a way that, long term, people will run to Him instead of away from Him when confronted with their own weakness, sin, and depravity? Can we adequately convey the love of God to a cold heart that does not feel God in the midst of loss, brokenness, and despair that still goes along with the "Christian" life? The knowledge of why we were made and why we exist are the foundations for living "life eternal" and coming to the realization that "all things that are gain in this life" are really just worthless when done without an eternal perspective.

It is only when we get a grasp of "why we were made" that we can agree with Paul that the gains of this life are really to be only counted as loss. There is obviously nothing wrong per se with having personal goals or striving for personal excellence in all we do. There is nothing per se wrong with aspiring to position or fame or fortune. The issue is not that we desire certain things or have certain dreams we want to see fulfilled. The issue is that we are so messed up in what we place the greatest **value** and **worth** on. Whether we admit it or not, we will spend energy and time and money doing the things that bring us the greatest pleasure, joy, and fulfillment. All Paul was saying was that the things he used to find the greatest fulfillment and pleasure in were just "dung" in comparison to the real reason that he was created by God. Paul's reason for existence was the attainment of "the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

Philippians 3:8

You were created for the sole purpose of coming to the knowledge of God and finding your pleasure and purpose solely in Him. The purpose of our existence, as we explained in the discussion of the Bridal Paradigm, is really bigger than just being an expression of God's glory

in creation. For most of human history, the idea of either a human inheritance or bride coming from human history was not revealed clearly by the prophets. We live in the era of time in human history when God's plan has been fully revealed through His Son and the apostles. As such, like Paul, there is a "cry" in the human heart that has been put there by the activity of the Holy Spirit. We know that the Spirit cries "Abba" within us... and on another level, the Spirit and the *Bride* cry "Come!" Likewise, Paul reveals that his life in Jesus was defined primarily by three cries of the heart:

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Philippians 3:10 (NKJ)

Paul wished that he would be FOUND in Jesus with a righteousness that was not his own—a right standing that was FROM God and IN God and THROUGH God. From this position of righteousness, Paul says these things are his ultimate desire in life:

To Know Him (Jesus)

To Know the Power of His Resurrection

To Know the Fellowship of His Sufferings

This cry forms the basis and the focus of the "normal" Christian life. Paul put this cry as the "one thing" that kept him pressing onward to the high mark of the call of God in the Messiah Yeshua. He PRESSED ON ... realizing that you do not ATTAIN everything fully in this life. Here again, Paul does not define success in terms of our ATTAINMENT... but rather he defines our success by our PURSUIT!

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14 (NKJ)

Forgetting.... Reaching... I press!

Those are the key ingredients to life that is truly life. Life that is truly life is rooted in knowledge on three different levels- in relationship to our past, present, and future. All humans, whether they admit it or not, want to know and be at peace ultimately with their past, present, and future. Paul sums up his quest for attainment and perfection by describing life related to these three dimensions.

There is first of all life in relationship to our past:

Paul forgot what was BEHIND him—his past life of fame and success in the highest levels of Judaism. Paul forgot what was BEHIND him in terms of his intellectual prowess and his own natural abilities. We can not clearly focus on the future or ever attempt to find happiness with our present until we have dealt with our past. This was

Israel's problem in a nutshell. The Exodus was successful in getting Israel out of Egypt but it was not successful at getting Egypt out of Israel! Our salvation experience is no different either: it is very successful at helping us forget our past sinful life and helping us to embrace Jesus with love and repentance. However, getting rid of our self-life and building faithful character that endures even in the face of the blackest night of circumstance requires a CURRENT and on-going walk of endurance. Israel's wondering for 40-years in the desert proved that they had not succeeded in forgetting their past and embracing God's current workings.

Next, there is life in relationship to our present circumstance on planet earth:

Paul admitted that he had not attained EVERYTHING in terms of the knowledge of God... or that he had been perfected ALREADY. This speaks to us about our current situation: none of us reach perfection here on planet earth. Neither knowledge nor perfection is available in fullness on this side of eternity. Yet, the Holy Spirit within us DRIVES us forward to pursue the highest levels of knowledge, perfection, and union that we can attain in this life. It tells us what our present life activity should be centered around: a three-fold cry 1) to know him, 2) to know the power of His resurrection, and 3) to be acquainted with His suffering. Paul did not focus either on the state of his CURRENT perfection either. Rather, he only needed to know that he was PURSUING and reaching for perfection (at least what is attainable) in this life. Again, the issue is not about attainment but rather pursuit!

Third, Paul describes life in relationship to our future in eternity:

Why did Paul spend the energy of his life forgetting his past and pursuing God in his present situation—no matter what that situation was? Because he knew that there was a God in heaven who was pursuing him! The knowledge that Paul had of God was of a being who instead of being aloof and distant was active and passionate about pursuing him. When the knowledge of our ultimate destiny is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, it sets our life on a course which can withstand the strongest winds and currents of sin, the flesh, the devil, and the world. The knowledge that you are loved and pursued by a God of burning passion will itself have the power to set your heart on fire. Paul knew that Yeshua had apprehended him for a reason—and his grateful response was to run to apprehend that ONE! Paul said that at the end of the road there was a PRIZE. Ultimately, apart from sharing in God's kingdom and dominion, that prize is the very knowledge of God Himself—disclosed at the deepest levels ever imaginable.

Thus, Paul draws our attention to a three-fold cry that has relationship to three aspects of life: past, present, and future. This three-fold cry is essential for our spiritual growth and the deepening of our lives in God. These cries are the cry of the Holy Spirit within us! He so longs for us to allow these passions to be birthed within us so that we can truly enter into the fellowship of the divine heart of love. This cry represents a healthy and balanced Christian life as well. Yet, we in the Western church scarcely embrace them and furthermore do not lend our own voice to express them. What we attempt to do with these is a shallow counterfeit, and thus the overall state of the church, in history and in our own day, is one of compromise, boredom,

and disinterest in the pursuit of God. Let's examine this cry a little closer and see how we can learn what life is truly about.

To Know Him

When we speak of "knowing" God, we mean in the highest sense to know Him in intimacy and deeper communion. Paul prayed that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the *fellowship* or *communion* of the Holy Spirit would be with us. The knowledge that Paul spoke of is easily tied in the Greek original text to the special knowledge known by Adam and Eve in the first marriage. Adam "knew" Eve in the sense of union and unashamed openness and so it is the express desire of the "last Adam" to "know" the "second Eve—His Church and Bride." The question is really whether WE desire to KNOW Him in a very intimate and real way.

In terms of the Western church, I would conjecture that most of us are content to know "about" the Lord rather than "knowing" Him. It's very similar to the idea that we can know "about" the President of the United States by reading the Constitution. After all, the Constitution spells out clearly what the President is like and what his powers are—how old he is, what citizenship must be, what authority he has as commander in chief, what powers he has over Congress, what powers he executes with the Supreme Court, what his various titles are, how he is to execute his office, what the expectations of his character are, and on and on. Yet the Constitution cannot truly reveal to you the actual nature and personality of the one that will occupy this office at any given time!

We sometimes approach God in evangelical circles no differently. Instead of the Constitution, we have the Bible. We study the Scriptures (at least those who are actually serious about God) and we devote ourselves to arranging in our minds what we think the God of the Bible looks like. We know His names, His titles, His attributes, His rules, His laws, His powers, and His theological truth. We talk about doctrines as though they are the primary way to define who God is and what He is like. We define spiritual maturity by our knowledge of Scripture and our ability to please God by interpreting and following out every letter of the Law. We rely far too easily on our intellect and place far too much trust in our emotions to determine what God feels and thinks about us. We live our "Christian" lives much like "non-Christian" do out of our external life while ignoring the inner cry of our spirit to KNOW the One who is desirous, jealous, and passionate about us. Even among charismatics, we can approach God on the basis of a "formula" to be followed rather than a "person" to be fathomed.

We can indeed pursue knowledge about God without ever coming into contact with His emotions and thoughts toward us. Yet, we cannot KNOW a living burning flame without ourselves being set on fire—and that is the whole point. We can certainly KNOW ABOUT a God who is passionate and jealous and lovesick over us—but yet never have that realization touch our inward most parts—our hearts. If we settle only for an intellectual or emotional embrace of God, we will be people that are imbalanced, ineffective, unstable, unsure, and unmotivated in our knowledge of God. If we are to be transformed into the image of God then we must first of all come into regular and fresh contact with the true knowledge and image of God. This principle is known as "beholding and becoming".

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (NKJ)

It basically says that we as humans will BECOME LIKE what we PURSUE. We primarily pursue after things that we first of all love. In essence, we gravitate and are drawn toward what we love. We thus become what our mind and our heart feast upon because it is there that love first expresses its passionate desire in our souls. It can be summed up in this statement:

What we love is what we pursue and behold, and what we behold is what we become.

If we LOVE God, there is at least an inkling of desire in our hearts (put there by the operation of the Holy Spirit) to pursue God and run after Him. This act of grace is the seedbed upon which our own desires and passions for God are aroused and developed. God puts love into our hearts with a distinct expectation that we will respond IN LOVE back to Him! As we open to love, our perspective of God will change accordingly. Opening to love is NOT an automatic activity of spiritual growth either. It requires MUCH renewing of our mind and it also requires in some cases a long battle to tear down and destroy spiritual strongholds that are in our mind—built by the Kingdom of Darkness to keep us from the knowledge of God and therefore to keep us from freedom.

As sinners that have not embraced God's offer of grace, most human beings have a veil that covers their heart. They are "dead in sins and trespasses." Yet when the Spirit of God works in our heart to take that veil away, we can begin to "behold" the Lord through the mirror of the Scripture. Thus we see an interesting principle take place. God intended this principle to be a guiding light for us in spiritual growth and a journey deeper in communion with Him. The Scripture reveals to us the glory of the Lord—by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. As we see a picture of the heart and personality of God, we begin to be transformed into the image that we see.

Both the Kingdom of Light and Kingdom of Darkness utilize this principle as well. The king and servants of both kingdoms understand the power of becoming and beholding. Paul says that we are transformed from glory to glory by beholding the image of the Lord. The word *transformed* is the word Greek *metamorphosai*—where we get the picture of a transformation seen in the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. We can become people who are not primarily earth-bound, as the ground crawling caterpillar depicts. God intends that we do not live our lives from our earthly or carnal nature, but rather, we are transformed into a creature that lives and moves primarily in the air or the realm of the Spirit. That is exactly the picture that Paul describes.

On the other hand, satan and his cohorts know that if they can seed us with false information about God or wrong pictures of His personality and character, then we will ultimately be conformed to that image just like we would be conformed to a true image of His personality as well.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
Romans 12:2 (NKJ)

For as [*a man*] he thinks in his heart, so is he.

Prov 23:7 (NKJ)

As we think in our heart, that is what we are! Thinking is being! This a very strong statement: that God looks at our desires MORE than He even considers our actions! Actions are important, no doubt! But God can work with someone who has the DESIRE for righteousness. In terms of intimate knowledge with the Lord, we must always have the right starting point. We will never know and enjoy the Lord until we are at peace with Him first. Even after we are reconciled, we must move past this knowledge and come to the realization that we are loved and passionately desired by God. More than even this, we must FEEL His affections for us before we will ever be motivated to return those affections in like kind. God's pattern is always that He originates and models what He would like in return from us. He first demonstrates the emotion or character—and then invites us to return it to Him!

If He wants us to love Him, for example, He has first taken great pains to show us and demonstrate that He first loved us. He did not send us an e-mail or a letter. He came Himself to show us what love is!

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:7-11 (NKJ)

We love Him because He first loved us.

1 John 4:18-19 (NKJ)

It is not that we loved FIRST. No, God loved us first and it was out of response to His love that we returned that love to Him. When God wanted to communicate love to us, the Scriptures tell us that He demonstrated or manifested love by giving... becoming a man and in human form giving His very life in exchange for ours. As John says, "He does not love God does not know God". I would paraphrase this as "To know God is to love Him" or "You can't HELP BUT TO LOVE GOD once you get to know Him!" That is the whole idea. The very being that defines love in His own person... "God is love"... this being is the one who is communicating to us a love that is violent, passionate, and jealous! No wonder He describes Himself as a jealous God that burns with fiery zeal for His people. It would only seem natural that the creator of the concept of marriage (the joining of two – male and female – as one) would set this forth as His highest ideal for relationship between Him and human beings. Once we get past the garbage of our modern 21st century concepts of marriage and love (which are rooted in sensuality and perverted sexuality), we can begin to get a sense of the radical and awesome plan that God has in mind for us: a Bridal partner equally yoked in love!

When we talk about “knowing God” we are really talking about “knowing Love”. Anyone who has ever known real and true “love” in human terms (not the sexual kind of love), can normally testify that love intoxicates and thrills us! God made us that way. The reason we love to love is because God loves to love! The reason that we love a good romantic love story is because in our heart of hearts we long for and crave love ourselves. The most miserable human condition there is to be in is one where we have no one to love and no one who loves us.

If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!
1 Corinthians 16:22 (NKJ)

Do you realize this is the eternal definition of hell? Hell is separation from the One who supremely loves us! Heaven is union eternally with the One who supremely loves us! Yet humanity blindly marches onward, ignoring the pain in our soul that comes from an unfulfilled love that we were made to walk in. Only the curse of the law is left when we refuse to love the Lord Jesus! The curse of the law demands that we be separated or cut off from God when we do not follow all that the Law commands.. it’s that simple.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
Matthew 22:36-40 (NKJ)

To love God with all our heart (spirit), all our mind (soul), and all our strength (body)... our ENTIRE makeup as a human being... is the definition of knowing God and the first commandment. The first commandment is first because it has preeminence above all other pursuits towards God. No matter how much we are involved in or attend church, no matter what committees we may be on, no matter how much money we give, no matter how much spiritual discipline we perform, and no matter how much we witness for God: if these are not born out of love for God they are simply wood, hay, and stubble before God! The American church --- every person who calls on the name of Jesus regardless of their denominational affiliation --- needs to seriously consider how much energy we spend playing religion versus how much true energy we spend developing the first commandment. The first commandment MUST be put back in first place if we are to KNOW God.

It is not only first commandment, but it is also the “greatest” commandment. This means that LOVE is the REASON we were created: it is the great purpose for living. Our whole lives on planet earth are meant for one purpose and purpose only: to develop voluntary love towards God. We can’t develop love for God until we have been loved by God. That is the principle of transformation. Unless you can see a God who loves you unconditionally and with great passion, you will NEVER be a passionate lover of God in return!

To the credit of the evangelical church in America, there are many believers and congregations that do have a heart for the second commandment. The second commandment can be likened to the Great Commission and the task of evangelizing the lost. This is the highest way we can love our neighbor: to love them into the Kingdom of God and introduce them to a real Jesus! Our problem is that when we put the second commandment first, the fulfillment of the Great

Commission is going to be with less authority, less power, and less reality of God. It's not to say that the Great Commission can't be accomplished when it is put first. However, there is a reason that God put love for Him FIRST and then witnessing for Him SECOND. How can we have authority to call other people as disciples and followers to a God that we have little real feeling (other than religious zeal) in our hearts for? How can we draw people to love God just based on the fear of Hell? We can't! If the American church would see authority in winning the lost of this nation, we MUST return and call people back to the first commandment... to living a lifestyle of personal intimacy, worship, prayer, and fasting in devotion to God. This is the ONLY foundation that can produce authority in terms of doing the second commandment.

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

John 15:9 (NKJ)

In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

John 16:26-27 (NKJ)

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me

John 14:23-24 (NKJ)

Two truths are put forth in Scripture that when deeply considered and meditated upon should deeply unsettle us and cause us to lose all sense of reality:

- 1) Father God loves us as much as He loves His Son Jesus
- 2) Jesus loves us as much as He loves His Father

The reason that these two truths are significant is because it overlaps two very different kinds of love: how God loves God and how God loves humans. What is even more amazing is that these two truths embody both concepts! It is the humanness of Jesus that is at issue just as much as His divinity! What God wants us to KNOW about Him is that He loves us with the greatest degree of love that is possible: the degree of love with which He loves Himself! When the full weight of this impacts your heart by the Holy Spirit it is going to knock you out of your chair and cause you to fall on the floor in weeping agony! How could this be? Who is this being that could be this way? How could the Creator *really* feel that way about me? How can He love me like *that*? Doesn't He know who I am? Doesn't He know who He is?

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 17:25-26 (NKJ)

We must also come to a realization from these truths that it is impossible to love God with the love that He deserves! In fact, God has made arrangements for that problem as well. The people that God has promised His Son, King Jesus, according to Psalms 2 are a people that are "possessed" *fully* by His Son. The only way that we can be possessed by Him is to love Him with the same love with which He is loved by His Father! When we discover and learn what the

Father's heart is fully and truly like (which is the declaration of His *name*), our only response will be to love Jesus just like the Father loves Jesus! Do you realize that Jesus has prayed for the very divine, supernatural, and eternal love of the Father for Him to be put inside of you? The love with which the Father has loved the Son, that degree of love is what Jesus asked for to be IN YOU. Jesus was praying in agreement with the Father's declaration of Psalms 2:

Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:
"Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.

Psalms 2:5-8 (NKJ)

Do you see this? Father God has promised His Son an inheritance that is a Bridal partner composed of human beings who voluntarily say yes and love Jesus. In response, the Son prays to the Father asking that He would reveal His name to the disciples (those who are Bridal partners) and that His Father would place in them the SAME love that burns within His heart for the Son within the hearts of Jesus' disciples. This is the prayer that will produce the inheritance that Father has promised His Son! When the love that the Father has for Jesus is divinely implanted into your heart, you will begin to love God like God loves God!

Do you also see that it is impossible to love God without God? A favorite saying from the Friends of the Bridegroom has become: "It takes God to love God." If you want to be transformed into a lover, you must FIRST see the God who loves you with fiery passion. This is the principle of transformation: we become what we behold, and we behold what we love.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:34 (NKJ)

I hope this begins to make sense to you. To know Him means to know His heart. When you study and meditate upon what God is like in His emotions and thoughts, this image will bring about our transformation. Our hearts follow our treasure! When we make God our treasure, our hearts WILL follow along. When God wants to produce love in us, He first presents Himself as the God of love. Likewise, if God wants us to find our pleasure in Him, then we must realize that FIRST He is a God of pleasure and that He takes great pleasure in us! Many Christians fail to find their greatest delight in God because they fail to see that THEY are His greatest delight and pleasure!

Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Psalms 37:4 (NKJ)

Let them shout for joy and be glad, Who favor my righteous cause; And let them say continually, "Let the LORD be magnified, Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."

Psalms 35:27 (NKJ)

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.

Psalms 147:11 (NKJ)

For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.
Psalms 149:4 (NKJ)

Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.

Proverbs 8:30-31 (NKJ)

What we should not confuse is God's sadness and disappointment with our sin as God's disappointment and sadness with us. Yet for many Christians, this is exactly how they are taught to relate to God. They are taught that God is angry and saddened and disappointed with them because of their sinfulness, lukewarmness, and carnality. Notice this is different than saying that God is disappointed with sinfulness, lukewarmness, and carnality... which He is! The key word is "with them". The object of God's hatred is toward sin, not the one who sins. This applies before we are saved and it applies more even after we are saved. If we would KNOW God, we must KNOW what He is really like... not what our religion has painted a picture of Him to be like. You can use the Bible to beat people over the head with, no doubt. However, God's way of transforming is found in the same Bible... and it revolves around us becoming what we behold as our image of God. How can we ever find our pleasure in a God who does not have pleasure in us? How can we expect to find happiness in obeying and living the Christian life when they only see and hear about a God who is unhappy and sad when He thinks of them? The fact is, we can't and the truth is that God *does* have pleasure in those who have said yes to Him—even in our weakness and in our immaturity.

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

Matthew 17:5 (NKJ)

It should make sense that if we want to please God, we need to meditate and contemplate on the One who brought God the greatest pleasure: His Son, the Man Jesus of Nazareth! We would do well to spend long and loving meditation on the Man Messiah Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God... and the express image of His person. You can do better than spending the rest of your life asking God to reveal the depths of the mysteries of His Son to you... with the earnest expectation that you will be changed into that image!

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God."
Romans 3:9-11 (NKJ)

When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."
Psalms 27:8 (NKJ)

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."
Luke 19:10 (NKJ)

The pattern for knowing God should become clear to you: God changes us by first showing that He is first the example and representation of what He wants us to become. When it comes to seeking God, we should lastly realize that God has first sought us before we ever seek and pursue Him. If you want to pursue God more deeply, then study and behold the God who is already seeking and pursuing you! If you want to be a “God-chaser”, as Tommy Tenney has so eloquently called the church of Jesus to, then you must realize that God is first of all the pursuer and we are the one being pursued! Your response is based on His initiative. It always works that way. He came to seek and save the lost... even before we knew we were lost. He calls to us and says “Seek me” and we respond to say “OK Lord, I will seek your face”.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:29-39 (NKJ)

This is the highest view of transformation: that we are being conformed to the very image of the Son of God. Our heart's cry to know God will be answered by God conforming us to the image of His Son! Do you see that to KNOW Him we must first SEE Him? If you cannot see a God who loves, who burns with passion, who has pleasure, who seeks YOU then YOU will never be transformed into a person that loves God passionately, that seeks Him, or that finds your greatest pleasure in Him? It is the vision of God that touches our hearts that will transform our hearts and lives. As we are conformed to His image (from glory to glory), we can then be brought NEARER to His presence and His heart. Isn't this what the desperate cry of our hearts is? To be fully known by God

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own

John 10:14 (NKJ)

But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

1 Corinthians 8:3 (NKJ)

The one that LOVES God is the one who is known by Him. If you and the church/fellowship you are joined to are not seeking how to LOVE God more in practical ways, then you are in essence no seeking how to be known by God or to grow in knowing Him. Don't worry too much that you can focus on loving God so much that you will neglect people! If you will pursue the one who burns with fiery desire for human beings

then I guarantee by the Scriptures that YOU will be set on fire for other people as well. You will not be able to help... it will happen naturally.

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; Then it was well. Was not this knowing Me?" says the LORD.

Jeremiah 22:16 (NKJ)

It should be apparent that knowing Him is to know the most HUMBLE being in the universe. When we behold and see His suffering, His passion, His loss and brokenness at humanity's condition, then our hearts will break as well. When we get to know the God who loves the poor.. we will love the poor. When we get to know the God who loves the lowly and humble.. we will love humility and those who are lowly. When we get to know the God who gives of His own life freely... we will begin to give of our own life freely.

And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:15-16 (NKJ)

If we would want to know Him, then we must behold the God who loves, who gives, who seeks, who has passion for weak human beings, who takes pleasure in us, who has gladness and joy over us, who sings, who is the consummate artist and poet, and who is the greatest romantic lover of all time. This is the God we need to know... This is the God the American church is totally unfamiliar with. This is the God of the Bible.

To Know the Power of His Resurrection

When we think of power, most of us I believe in contemporary American culture would agree that we know even less about the true power of God than we even know about the true heart of God. I have often wondered why the supernatural aspect of God's nature is a great topic of study in our seminaries and schools of theology, but it rarely finds itself applicable in every day living or as part of our normal life in the Body of Messiah. Part of our problem, I believe, is that the Western idea of "knowing" has more to do with intellectual knowing than it does experiential knowing. I have often told people that the Bible was meant to be experienced more than it was meant to be studied for theological truth. In fact, Paul's view of "doctrine" was explicitly tied to "godliness" in the way a believer lived. In other words, a person showed that they understood the doctrine of "love" by forgiving those that have wounded them, not blaspheming people with our mouth, and speaking truthfully with one another. "Sound" doctrine was belief that promoted holy living and spurred people on towards deeper love and devotion of God and other people.

When we as Western believers approach the knowledge of God's power, we can in many cases run the risk of being able to define theologically what God's power is while at the same time never having any experience of it outside of our initial salvation experience. Unfortunately, many denominations have squarely boxed themselves off from experiencing power in any real sense because they have beliefs that clearly exclude or ignore the present day ministry of Jesus to His Church through the manifestation and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Let me also say right up front that I am desperately lacking the real experience of God's power in the way that I would *like* to see it in my own life. I, like many of you, am in the category of wanting desperately more of the experience of God's power than what I experience as part of "church" in normal

Protestant America. At the same time I realize that I must pursue the very deepest levels of intimacy that are possible with the Lord before I can ever have true authority in the realm of His power. I don't want to be guilty of the sin of those who came out of Egypt... who witnessed the miracles and power of God yet their hearts were unmotivated and unstirred to pursue closeness with the Living God for themselves. That is why God disclosed His ways to Moses but disclosed only His acts to the children of Israel that were in the generation of the wilderness. I realize that "to know Him" must come before "to know the power of His resurrection". In fact, if there is any truth that we know for sure, death to our own selfishness must always precede true life in God. Likewise, it is our weakness that is the springboard from which true power in God arises.

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJ)

The temple that God is building today—in the generation that will see His return—is first founded upon intimacy with God. In order to know His power, we must first of all come with voluntary love—passionate, unyielding, unquenchable, and burning—in our hearts. That kind of love is only developed over time, in long and loving meditation and pursuit, with the sacrifice of both praise and prayer seasoned with fasting. To be honest, we are too proud in America and too reliant on our theological knowledge to be worthy of God's power. God only visits power on the weak... and it is only weak people who pray without ceasing, who worship extravagantly, who give sacrificially, who seek God wholeheartedly, who pursue holiness with great zeal and fervor, and who fast as part of their normal lifestyle. This is "voluntary" love at its best... unforced and completely un-required by Him for Him to love us. This is love that is birthed in response to the revelation of God's love. It is when we "know Him" that we can't help but "love Him" in return. It is those who "know Him" this way that are rightly prepared to "know the power of His resurrection."

The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.

Psalms 110:1-3 (NKJ)

We have many examples of modern day movies and cinematography in our society where the hero destroys all of his enemies with lasers, thousands of rounds of semi-automatic arms fire, or just plain old kung-fu style brute force. God the Father has promised His Son that HE would make the enemies of Jesus His footstool. It is going to be Father that will send the rod of Jesus' strength out of Zion—God's people. We are going to be used by God to demonstrate His power and His wisdom in an unprecedented manner... in ways that are going to shatter the theological deadness of the Western church. This is the generation when the fullest promises of God's power through His people will be manifested in the earth... the very glory of God will be seen in and through us. God's power is intended to judge the things that hinder people from loving Him. It is not intended to demonstrate that He is the boss and somehow we are the puppets that are under His thumb. His power is intended to destroy the very work of evil that destroys human life, human existence, and human purpose. The LORD of heaven is coming to rule in the midst of His enemies ... in our generation! Beloved, it is those who are voluntary lovers that

will be used by God in the day when His power is manifest. This is what Psalms 110 is declaring: in the day when the Son leaves His throne (seated at the right hand of God) to return to earth, the Father is going to intervene in the affairs of planet earth in an unprecedented manner. This involvement is going to shake everything that can be shaken: political, social, religious, military, cultural, and economic structures at every level of human existence. The LORD is going to send the rod of HIS strength out from the midst of His people, Zion. By this action, the LORD is going to rule in the midst of His enemies in an unprecedented way... through a people that are characterized as being volunteers and are bathed in the beauties of holiness.

And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Ephesians 3:9-12 (NKJ)

Paul expounds this concept by saying that God WILL make known His manifold wisdom through His people—the Church—to spiritual powers of wickedness and darkness that now rule over the earth. This is God’s power at its best: judging evil and hastening righteousness. He will accomplish this. He has not fully accomplished this as of yet... but He will. The big surprise to the Church is that this is going to be accomplished through us just prior to the return of the Lord (when He gets up from His position at the right hand of the Father!). This time period coincides with the greatest rise of evil mankind have ever seen.. even since the time of Noah... and it does not coincide with the creation of a utopia or a “better” earth. Trust this: things will get worse *before* they will get better. Scripture clearly tells us this if we have ears to hear. What many cannot see is that God is going to shake the heavens and the principalities through a body of people that are voluntary, abandoned, lovesick, worshipping priests. We haven’t seen it in 2000 years of Church history... but we will.

If we would know the power of His resurrection, we must understand how this power is communicated to us.

O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?

2 Chronicles 20:6-8 (NKJ)

Behold, God is exalted by His power; Who teaches like Him? ... Behold, God is great, and we do not know Him.

Job 36:22,26 (NKJ)

The greatness and power of Jesus being raised from the dead is only understood by those who “know” Him. Even Job realized this. God is great... and yet we do not know Him. The world

looks everyday at the greatness of God in creation... we can observe His awesome majesty in the smallest atomic particles to the vast hugeness of the universe... and yet we do not know Him.

God has spoken once, Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God. Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; For You render to each one according to his work.

Psalms 62:11-12 (NKJ)

Power does belong to God. Yet, He wants to use His power through us to establish mercy in the earth and to establish His rulership in the hearts of people. We are to be brought out from under the power of satan to live our lives in the power of God. I believe this is one of the primary ways that we know the “resurrection” power of Jesus:

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13-14 (NKJ)

To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Acts 26:18 (NKJ)

What was the real object lesson of God’s power in the resurrection of Jesus? For human beings death is something that cannot be escaped—it is inevitable. In fact, even though science can add some years to our life nowadays, we all will reach the point one day when our bodies will fail us... our strength will fail us... and we will pass on. The power of death and darkness has sway over every single one of us—they hang like a shroud over all of humanity. Death is final and all consuming... nothing can escape it. This is the nature of God’s power: to come into the cold, dark, and dead places of our life and bring life. The power that raised Jesus from the dead... against hope, against anything that could be seen in the natural, and against the very kingdom of darkness that stood mocking Him on the cross, is the same power that works to change your heart from a place of wickedness and sin to a place where God can call “home”. Yes, even though you cannot see yourself as righteous, holy, and in passionate love for God.. He can! Yes, even though you cannot see yourself walking in victory over the sins that possess you or the bondages that cling to you, He can! He is the one who arose in the power of God to a life that will never, ever have the possibility of being destroyed (ever again!). Beloved, this is what God can do in your heart when you cry out to know the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ--He is Lord of all-- that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Acts 10:35-43 (NKJ)

The church of Jesus in America needs to know the power that raised Jesus from the dead in a desperate way. Our lifestyles, in many ways, cannot be distinguished from those who do not know Him. Our failures to sin and our own moral failings can barely distinguish us from the rest of America who don't care about God at all. The divorce rates of those that are Christian are barely different from those that are not. I believe it is because we really don't know the power that raised Jesus from the dead.... We don't know the power of God that can truly change our life and give us victory. I think that in large part, in order for God to demonstrate His power through His own Son He used one of the most accursed things we can think of: a cross. The cross is a symbol of those who are utterly cut off from God! Do we realize the humiliation and the degradation of just being executed this way? Apart from the pain and suffering (which we will get to), the stigma of the cross is in my mind a much greater obstacle to overcome. We are talking about the ruler of the universe... in the form a man... nailed to a cursed object. There in plain view for all to see, God was seen in probably one of the weakest and most abominable places that one could ever imagine God would be seen: a Roman tree. In order for resurrection power to be manifested, the cross had to come first. Remember that this is the prototype for how God manifests ultimate power!

And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

1 Corinthians 6:14 (NKJ)

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:18-23 (NKJ)

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NKJ)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NKJ)

Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with

lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

Psalms 103:1-10 (NKJ)

To Know the Fellowship of His Sufferings

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Luke 24:46-49 (NKJ)

Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Acts 3:17-21 (NKJ)

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

Acts 17:1-4 (NKJ)

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come-- that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

Acts 26:22-23 (NKJ)

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:16-17 (NKJ)

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

Philippians 1:29-30 (NKJ)

For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

1 Timothy 4:10 (NKJ)

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

2 Timothy 1:8-12 (NKJ)

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2 Timothy 3:12 (NKJ)

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10 (NKJ)

I sleep, but my heart is awake; It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, "Open for me, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one; For my head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night."

Song of Songs 5:2 (NKJ)

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed. But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots. But You, O LORD, do not be

far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.

Psalms 22:1-21 (NKJ)

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Matthew 2:10-12 (NKJ)

Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!" Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!" So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified. Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him. Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it. And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS. With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him. Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. 38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" There

were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee; and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. And when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid.

Mark 15:6-47 (NKJ)

And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

John 19:39 (NKJ)

His cheeks are like a bed of spices, Banks of scented herbs. His lips are lilies, Dripping liquid myrrh.

Song of Songs 5:13 (NKJ)

I arose to open for my beloved, And my hands dripped with myrrh, My fingers with liquid myrrh, On the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, But my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

Song of Songs 5:5-6 (NKJ)

THE BELOVED: I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.

Song of Songs 5:1 (NKJ)

Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense. You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you.

Song of Songs 4:6-7 (NKJ)

Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders? Behold, it is Solomon's couch, with sixty valiant men around it, Of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, Being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night.

Song of Songs 3:6-8 (NKJ)

A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, That lies all night between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms In the vineyards of En Gedi.

Song of Songs 1:13-14 (NKJ)

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, Out of the ivory palaces, by

which they have made You glad. Kings' daughters are among Your honorable women; At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.

Psalms 45:6-9 (NKJ)

Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

Esther 2:12-14 (NKJ)

So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened. Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Genesis 37:23-28 (NKJ)

A Voice in the Wilderness

Chapter 4

While Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. Luke 3:2 (NKJ)

Temptation in the Desert

Chapter 5

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. Luke 4:1-2 (NKJ)

The Comfort of the Shepherd

Chapter 6

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her.
Hosea 2:14 (NKJ)

Embracing the Cross

Chapter 7

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Romans 6:5-6 (NKJ)

Understanding the Night

Chapter 8

I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, "Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick! Song of Songs 5:2-8 (NKJ)

A Weaned Child

Chapter 9

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever. Psalms 131:1-3 (NKJ)

The Bridal Life Vision

Chapter 10

Draw me away! We will run after you. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you.
Song 1:4 (NKJ)

Redefining Spiritual Maturity

Chapter 11

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 1 Cor 13:11 (NKJ)

The Coming Night

Chapter 12

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." Matt 24:4-14 (NKJ)

I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. John 9:4 (NKJ)

[1] John K. Ryan, ed., *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Garden City: Doubleday Image Book, 1960), p. 43.

[2] A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961), p.2.

[3] Sam Storms, *Pleasures Forevermore* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001) p.35.

[4] Mike Bickle, *The Pleasures of Loving God* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2000)

[5] Job 38:4-7

[x] Gary Wiens, *Bridal Intercession* (Greenwood, MO: Oasis House, 2001)