



Holy Yearning

For those who thirst for God—A One-Day Spiritual Retreat

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God, You are my God

earnestly I seek You;
my soul thirsts for You,
my body longs for You,
in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psalm 63:1



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- Morning Session -

Greetings and introductions (10 minutes)

Opening prayer and singing – (10 to 15 minutes)

Part I: Our Thirsty Hearts

Teaching: *The Gift of Desire* (15 minutes)

Silent Break & Quiet Reflection (30 minutes)

Teaching: *Quenching the Thirst* (15 minutes)

End with a song

Lunch Break

- Afternoon Session -

Re-gather with a prayer and singing (5 to 10 minutes)

Part II: God's Heart

Teaching: *God's Heart* (15 minutes)

Silent Break and Quiet Reflection (30 minutes)

Part III: Come and Drink

Teaching: *Come and Drink* (15 minutes)

Quiet reflection (30 minutes)

Group Sharing (30 minutes)

Our Thirsty Hearts . . .

Once upon a time there lived a sea lion who had lost the sea.

He lived in a country known as the barren lands. High on a plateau, far from any coast, it was a place so dry and dusty that it could only be called a desert. A kind of coarse grass grew in patches here and there, and a few trees were scattered across the horizon. But mostly, it was dust. And sometimes wind, which together make one very thirsty. Of course, it must seem strange to you that such a beautiful creature should wind up in a desert at all. He was, mind you, a sea lion. But things like this do happen.

How the sea lion came to the barren lands, no one could remember. It all seemed so very long ago. So long, in fact, it appeared as though he had always been there. Not that he belonged to such an arid place. How could he? He was, after all, a sea lion. But as you know, once you have lived so long in a certain spot, no matter how odd, you come to think of it as home. -- The Journey of Desire by John Eldredge, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

We are so used to the barren lands. But if we pay attention to the yearnings of our hearts, we will realize that we were never meant to live in a dry and thirsty place. God invites us to come.

Isaiah 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

John 7:37 During the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."

Morning Session

-Lecture Notes-

Part I: Our Thirsty Hearts

❖ **The Gift of Desire** – 1st teaching session (15 minutes)

Our deepest desire is for God. This is His invitation, which IS our yearning. Our Creator designed us to *want and need* Him and to be able to experience a relationship with Him.

Lately, this concept has been in the news. A cover story and headline for TIME Magazine stated:

***THE GOD GENE. Does our DNA compel us to seek a higher power?
Believe it or not, some scientists say yes.***

The molecular biologist Dean Hamer wrote a book entitled: The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired into Our Genes.

One thing is certain, even to the scientists, the God-Gene has nothing to do with religion, but everything to do with “experiencing God”. Religion is institutional (as in rules to follow, an organization or belief system to be part of), but “experiencing God” is intensely intimate and personal. The God-Gene, according to the scientist’s discovery, has to do with one’s physical and emotional makeup—enabling spiritual awareness. –

The God Gene – Is God in Our Genes? By Jeffrey Kluger. Cover story, TIME Magazine, October 25, 2005.

The truth is, we have been created to enjoy God's Presence and, therefore, we NEED it. Jesus speaks to this need in nearly everything He says. He knows that we were made to live an abundant, full, blessed life. He said,

"The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance" John 10:10.

Jesus' discussion with a Samaritan Woman is another example of this. We all know this story well for it has been studied and discussed repeatedly. But do we really grasp the impact of what happened between Jesus and this person? Listen carefully to the story; listen like you've never heard it before.

Read John 4:5-26 (The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.)

"I who speak to you am He."

Can you imagine the Lord smiling when He said this to her? This was His only open declaration of His Messiahship until His trial.

Jesus knew she was made for much more than a life of survival and whatever crumbs religion might throw her way. He saw the six relationships with men as nothing more than her search for love and acceptance. With so much unconditional love to give her, He must have looked intensely into her eyes when He said, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Can you imagine a man saying such things to you? You'd think He was crazy. She probably did too. You or I might have been afraid to be alone with Him. It's hard to imagine such an encounter.

But kindness emanated from Him, certainly she felt it. He wanted to reveal God's own heart to her.

He said, "...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

To understand why Jesus disclosed so much to this person, and at this place, we must notice something – a curtain being raised on the stage of God's drama. This was an important scene.

First, Jacob's well was certainly a sacred place to Jesus. In Jacob's time, it was quite an accomplishment to have reached such an excellent source of water. Cut through one hundred and fifty feet of limestone, it became the very sustenance of life for his family's needs and that of his descendents; it was the only well for great distances. In Jacob's lifetime, this land was surrounded by Amorite neighbors who had many springs to drink from, but his own well offered him a strife-free life without the need to contend with the fighting herdsman around him. The well became part of the covenant of blessing between God and Jacob that God would take care of him.

Imagine what Jesus must have been thinking as He prayed and waited there for His disciples to return with food and water. When He first saw the woman as she approached the well, He understood the moment. His Father had sent her. And, now, He was ready to make a new covenant at this well, a covenant that would reach beyond His own Jewish people. For it was a holy longing that beat within His heart, a yearning for all people to know the love of God.

With God's pangs of holy desire for those so far from Him, He spoke to her about the quenching water only He could give. When He spoke about "worshiping the Father in spirit and truth" her ears were the ones to first hear THE secret of the Universe revealed.

It's significant to consider to whom Jesus chose to uncover such pearls of wisdom—God's treasure—for she was a "nobody"; in fact, she was the lowest of the low. A woman. Culturally unacceptable. A known sinner. Socially unacceptable. A non-Jew. Religiously unacceptable. And, yet, it was to her that He unveiled the Father's heart and the condition of her own.

Jesus not only opened this woman's heart by speaking to her about her thirst, He laid bare God's desires as well. He revealed to her alone the new covenant He was about to make with the human race. So often we see only what He revealed to her about her own condition—which was her undiscovered need for God. But the other side of this, and the crux of the matter, is that God has desires too. Here stood Jesus at an ancient covenant well God had given to

Jacob. As a man, he was physically thirsty and hungry. But this discussion with her was not about natural thirst, but that of spiritual thirst. Hers and God's.

When we believe in Jesus and make Him the Lord of our lives, our hearts change radically, no longer will we shun God with closed, hardened hearts, nor will we look elsewhere to fill our needy appetites. The new heart knows what it wants because it is awakened spiritually. Living for God becomes a matter of joy, not duty.

Ezekiel 36:26 says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

As Jesus taught, we become a new wineskin to hold new wine. Our hearts will then desire what is good. God makes only good things. He promised to create a new heart in us and, as His beloved one, He does so. Your new heart is good. If you love Jesus, you can trust in your own heart. You can actually follow your heart's desires for Him, because this is what it means to be Spirit-led.

We were made to know God, intimately, and to partake of His living water, which is His Spirit and His Life. It is His presence in us and in our lives.

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God"

Ps 42:1.

"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" Ps. 63:1.

This is holy yearning. All we need to do is follow our heart, our love knows the way to everything we long for—it is through Jesus—not the trappings of religion or the shallowness of self-actualization, or the emptiness of possessions, power, or fame—it is enough to have Jesus. Relationship is the experience, not religion.

And, be careful. Don't let busyness or the many good things you can do keep you away from closeness with Him. The Psalmist, King David, knew his deepest heart's desire was to know God and to be in His presence. This is a matter of be-ing, not do-ing.

Sometimes we believers can become empty and worn out when our pursuit for God stops short and settles for less than what we can have—when we trade delight for duty.

We stop yearning for what we were meant to enjoy. What was meant to be a beautiful dance of desire and devotion becomes a drill. Our experience becomes more effort and performance-oriented, rather than free-flowing joy and loving passion for God. Duty can have a deadly effect on any relationship. So it is with God.

God, always the initiator, draws us closer and closer to Himself. He wants us more than we want Him.

It is a wonder to realize that God longs to be wanted by us. He actually WAITS to be wanted. He waits for us to realize what we DON'T HAVE. He waits while we languish for spiritual water in a barren land, like the sea lion who has forgotten the sea. How God longs for us to recover our "first love" experience of desire – to have awakened hearts.

A Christian counselor told a story about how, during a session with a married couple, he asked the husband what he most desired from his wife.

The husband replied, "All I want her to do is make sure I have clean socks in my drawer."

What?

The man wanted nothing more than that his socks would be clean when he needed them? The counselor was appalled by such an answer. The husband's heart was so dull, so dead, that he had no desire. No wonder the marriage was failing.

This is how it often is with us and God. We stop yearning for God and the kind of life we could enjoy with Him. Death to a relationship is lack of passion. Lord Jesus said this to a first century church – "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of My mouth." Rev. 3:15-16.

If you don't feel hungry and desperate for God, pray to be. We try to fill our need for God with everything else. Nothing else will cut it, nothing else will last.

Oh, that we would not be content with anything but His closeness. Do you want to experience intimacy with God, to see Him in ways you've never known before? Pray for an undivided heart; pray to be like Mary of Bethany, who chose to sit at the feet of Jesus instead of preparing a meal for him with her sister, Martha. About the one seated at His feet, Jesus said, "What Mary has done will not be taken from her for she has chosen the one thing necessary." We, like Martha tend to busy ourselves with so many things when Jesus wants the main thing: our relationship with Him to be close.

This is what God is doing in His people these days: He is infusing them with the adoration of Mary of Bethany, He is giving them the fire of passionate love, and this kind of love is a hungry love – this is the Bride wanting nothing but to know and please God. Like Heaven, it is the Sea of God's love and company we long for—and what our hearts are made to enjoy.

Quiet Reflection (30 minutes)

[Encourage participants to use this time for a silent stretch and restroom break and this prayer exercise.]

Think of these prayer exercises as a kind of heart checkup . . .

How are you doing?

Are you aware of any discouragement or distraction that may be affecting your heart or your relationship with the Lord?

What are you feeling . . . thinking . . . wanting?

Journal your prayers, thoughts, or what God is saying.

❖ Quenching the Thirst – 2nd teaching session (15 minutes)

There was a time, many years back, when the sea lion knew he was lost. In those days, he would stop every traveler he met to see if he might help him find his way back to the sea.

But no one seemed to know the way.

On he searched but never finding. After years without success, the sea lion took refuge beneath a solitary tree beside a very small water hole. The tree provided refuge from the burning rays of sun, which was very fierce in that place. And the water hole, though small and muddy, was wet, in its own way. Here he settled down and got on as best he could. (The Journey of Desire by John Eldredge.)

God never intended for us to settle down for less than wonders and pleasures. The very reason we exist is to be loved by God and to know and enjoy Him.

Jesus experienced and saw firsthand how thirsty we are. It's endearing to note that, in fact, His first miracle was nothing short of an astounding surprise. Wasn't it even a bit out of character? Most of His miracles were about healing, mercy and compassion, but the first time Jesus displayed Heaven's power was not typical, not even typical of most miracles in our times.

That day in Cana, Jesus didn't heal bodies or exorcise demons, nor did He remedy any other result of the devil's work. His first sign of Heaven's power took aim directly at our thirsty hearts.

Jesus begins to change the status quo—and it takes place at a wedding. At first it appears He isn't ready to step out of anonymity, not until He recognized the opportunity. But when He does, He most certainly fought from cracking a smile as He tells men to fill huge

water pots with water. Except for His mother, no one else at the wedding banquet knew what He was capable of doing. He had Heaven's creative power in His hands and Heaven's extravagant love in His heart. Gallons and gallons of water used for ceremonial washing became gallons and gallons of wine. For what purpose?

***In your presence is fullness of joy; in your right hand
there are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11***

Here's the heart of the matter—the extravagant goodness of God will transform us. Just as Jesus changed the water into wine, He changes a person's life. To be sure, we will not be idle. We will join Jesus in His work, reaching the lost of the world with His transforming love and power. But, it will be out of our intimacy with Him that we will have our being, and we will have His heart beating in union with ours.

The following illustration comes from Mike Bickle in [The Pleasures of Loving God](#):

Picture walking up to a homeless boy and handing him a ticket for a wonderful vacation by the sea. He would stay at a five-star resort hotel, eat the finest foods that money can buy, sleep on a warm, clean bed and spend his days swimming in the crashing waves and building sandcastles on the beach.

The dirty little youngster takes the ticket from you and places it among other collected items in a corner of the large box where he sleeps at night to shelter himself from the rain and cold wind. Instead of eating hamburgers and fries, apple pie and ice cream, he curls up on a door stoop and eats spoiled meat he has gathered from the trash. He plays in the dirt, making mud pies and eating them as his dessert.

C.S. Lewis put it this way: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because we cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea."

Jesus understands our dilemma. He came to take care of it. He knows that our hearts are afraid to desire too deeply. That is why He continues to invite us to “Come.” That is why He wants us to consider the things we look to for *life* other than Him.

Imagine this scene, which took place in the temple courts in Jerusalem when Jesus made an amazing, dramatic proclamation.

John 7:37-38: On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out in a loud voice saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow out from within him.’

Each day of that festival week, there was a procession of priests and a crowd of people. They drew water from the pool of Soloam and carried it into the temple, walking once around the altar with a choir chanting. Then the water was poured out as a libation on the altar.

This was a time of joy so great that it was said, “He that never has seen the joy of the water-pouring has never in his life seen joy.” This joy was associated with the Scripture, Isaiah 12:3: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

On the greatest day of the feast, they did the same, but instead of going around the altar with the water once, they went around it seven times. (Seven symbolized completeness, fullness, and perfection.)

At this high point during the week of the feast, Jesus cries out dramatically and His voice echoes for all to hear, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.” He called these words out repeatedly and He drew a crowd to Himself in doing so. It was extremely daring because His enemies were ready to arrest and kill Him. The traditional feast existed for this very moment.

In the inspired biblical writings, water was God’s rich symbol. El Shaddai, the All Sufficient One, called Himself “the spring of water” in Jeremiah 2:13; and 17:13. Unmistakably, Jesus stands in the temple and claims to be able to satisfy people’s thirst for God.

The cries of the Psalmists are answered:

“O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps. 63:1).

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Ps. 42:1-2).

Both of these Psalms go on to speak of meeting God in the temple: David has seen God in the sanctuary (Ps. 63:2), and the sons of Korah speak of “leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng” (Ps. 42:4).

Think of it – When Jesus cries out during this feast, on this particular day, the worshipers meet God in His sanctuary—in the person of His Son—the One to bring them eternal life and the endless wellspring of His Spirit.

There is something crucial happening here. The longing for God is met with God’s invitation to us to come and be filled. God longs for us, we long for Him. In Jesus, both can be satisfied. By inviting the people to come to Him and drink, He proclaimed to be their Salvation and the Thirst Quencher of desire—the desire of their hearts and lives.

In offering them His Spirit, His living water, that day in the temple, Jesus claimed that the “age to come” had arrived. Just as water flowed out from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10-14), so a river would flow from a future temple (Ezek. 47). Ezekiel’s vision had begun to be fulfilled in Jesus’ offer in the temple court, and it would come to completion in heaven in “the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

The only requirement is thirst. The one thing necessary is desire. “Whoever wishes . . . come,” is how Jesus phrased it.

What, in life, do you wish for? Get in touch with your heart. Do this often.

John, son of Zebedee, knew that the greatest treasure of all treasures was the King of the Kingdom—Jesus, Himself. John wrote about an experience he had at the supper table with Jesus the last night they were together. Speaking about himself, John said, “The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus . . . He leaned back on Jesus’ breast...” (Jn 13:23, 25).

Brennan Manning captures the significance of John’s experience. In his book, “The Rabbi’s Heartbeat” Manning writes:

John lays his head on the heart of God, on the breast of the Man . . . [who] is co-equal to the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God . . . God allows a young Jew, reclining in the rags of his twenty-odd years, to listen to His heartbeat! Have we ever seen the human Jesus at closer range? Clearly, John was not intimidated by Jesus. He was not afraid of his Lord and Master. John was deeply affected by this sacred Man.”

Manning speaking about himself, said, “*Fearing that I would miss the divinity of Jesus, I distanced myself from His humanity, like an ancient worshiper shielding his eyes from the Holy of Holies. But as John leans back on the breast of Jesus and listens to the heartbeat of the Great Rabbi, he comes to know Him in a way that surpasses mere cognitive knowledge. What a world of difference lies between knowing about someone and knowing him!*”

In a flash of intuitive understanding, John experiences Jesus as the human face of God who is love. And in coming to know who the Great Rabbi is, John discovers who he is—the disciple Jesus loved. For John the heart of his faith was not an inherited doctrine but a message born of his own experience. And the message he declared was, God is love” (2 John 4:16).

In Jesus, resting upon His heart of love, our thirsty souls will be quenched. Here is the joy of salvation, and it is a deep joy. No longer will we be lost in the barren, thirsty lands. We are invited to come and partake deeply of His love and presence—of His very life.

“Joy is the serious business of Heaven.”

C. S. Lewis

End the morning session with a song. Here’s a suggestion, a simple but powerful hymn that says it all.

Give Me Jesus

In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise,

Give me Jesus

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.

You can have all this world, give me Jesus

When I am alone, when I am alone, when I am alone,

Give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.

You can have all this world, give me Jesus

When I come to die, when I come to die, when I come to die,

Give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus

You can have all this world, give me Jesus.

Afternoon Session

God's Heart . . . (15 minutes)

***You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse;
you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes.”***

Song of Songs 4:9

The Ravished Heart of God by Mike Bickle:

“I am convinced that an understanding of God’s ravished heart is central to the end-time church. The gospel flourishes in the revelation of the extravagant passions of the personality of God. It is not enough to know that Jesus died on the cross. We need to know why He did it.

What motivated Him? Was it simply His desire to be obedient to the Father? No! It was the burning desire of His heart for us. He longed for us before we were even created.”

Today, Jesus is making it easy for us to respond to Him. He is romancing His bride. How is He doing this? By satisfying the deep longings of her heart . . . longing to be enjoyed and delighted in; longings to be fascinated, adorned and intimate; longings to make a difference through His Word and His Spirit. He is letting her see what He sees when He looks at her. When she feels the truth of it, she becomes lovesick.”

This is the goal – for us to fall in love with God because of His great love for us. Think of it! He has all authority and dwells in eternity – yet He deeply desires you. Knowing His feelings toward you is what should most define your life.”

Everything looks different in the revelation of the ravished heart of God. Suddenly obedience is not hard. Sacrifice comes easily. And the Christian journey is no longer a struggle to overcome obstacles, but an invitation to engage in a love affair with the One who burns with desire to have you as His bride.” - Mike Bickle, The Ravished Heart of God, The Maranatha Voice.

Part II: God's Heart – 3rd teaching session (15 minutes)

We've managed a glimpse of God's heart in the story of the Samaritan Woman and through Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana. We've seen what Jesus did in the temple, when He cried out to everyone there . . . "Come to Me all you who are thirsty!"

God's heart is full of love. As Christians we know this in varying degrees, but can we ever really comprehend it? Often our sense of God as a personality is a vague awareness that He is far above us and yet near enough to hear our prayers. He is so powerful a being that He somehow holds the universe together, and is the One on whom we rely. He is the higher-than-me One – our Higher Power. God is God and no other is like Him. That's why we grapple with the concept that He is also a person, not to mention the mystery of the Trinity.

What we need to remember is that we are made in God's image. We are made in the image of a Divine Person. God thinks and plans. He dreams, hopes, and knows the sting of disappointment. He laughs and weeps. He's playful, witty, creative, and full of surprises. He likes this and dislikes that. He moves with purpose and enjoys beauty. He suffers and grows impatient. He desires. He chooses. He determines and demands.

He gives and gives and gives. His breath is life and His kiss is glory. He initiates and He finishes. He waits. He sings. He plans. He loves.

Of course God is a person. But He is God as well. If only we could fathom this truth. If only we could grasp how very powerful He is, but how very lowly He made Himself for our sakes. Here is what Catherine of Siena, a mystic and a theologian, wrote about the One she loved and knew so dearly:

"When then, eternal Father, did you create this creature of yours? ... You show me that you made us for one reason only: in your light you saw yourself compelled by the fire of your love to give us being in spite of the evil we would commit against you, eternal Father. It was fire, then, that compelled you. Oh,

unutterable love, even though you saw all the evils your creatures would commit against your infinite goodness, you acted as if you did not see and set your eye only on the beauty of your creature, with whom you had fallen in love like one drunk and crazy with love . . . You are the fire, nothing but a fire of love, crazy over what you have made.” – The Prayers of Catherine of Siena.

The most wonderful thing about God is the motivation of His heart. His heart is full of love. He loves people—all colors and shapes of people. His heart beats with holy yearning—the desire to love and be known by each living soul, including you and me. God chose to share Himself—His life—with people, the creation of creatures made in His image. We are persons because He is a person. If only we could grasp the magnitude of His heart and desire for us.

We need our concept of God to come out of the clouds—and into our everyday lives.

That’s why Jesus became one of us. He wanted us to see Him, hear His heart, and discover the treasure that we can own. He continues to come to us, today, in many ways. We need to become more aware of His heart towards us as individuals—we need to notice His invitations . . . His gifts . . . His doings . . . in each of our lives.

Once we know Him, we know we are His beloved. We’ll be like John – we’ll be able to describe ourselves as, “The disciple the Lord loved.”

Try reading the Gospels accounts like you’ve never heard the stories before. Through the life of Jesus, discover the distance God has traveled, and the extremes He’s gone to, to reveal Himself to us.

Think about the drama of history, of God’s Story with a poet’s eye. Start at the beginning, at Creation. This is where God’s heart is first revealed.

The Divine Drama by Kurt Bruner. Pg 58 & 59:

“God is love. Therefore, He has to love.

It was a deep yearning to express His love –

to share His heart with another person –

that drove God to create mankind.

He didn’t make us so that we would love Him

but so that He could love us.

We were not made to be a race of servants

but to be the object of God’s affection.

That’s why you and I exist.”

Let’s look at the beginning of the human race, at the time of Creation—in the Garden of Eden. We read that God created Adam and Eve, and that God Himself walked with them in the cool of the day, every day. In other words, He enjoyed their company and they enjoyed His.

Everything was given to the man and woman, and they were happy. They enjoyed a stress-free life filled with beauty and goodness—and, best of all, God was close, always close.

God had already been disappointed in His creation during a time before ours. One third of the angels He had made chose not to love Him and fell from grace. Our part in this epic story didn’t begin with our own creation. We were invited into the story that had already been going on for a very long time.

God, the author of this living drama, understood the risks involved and what His own part would need to be; still, God had placed two trees in the garden. One was the Tree of Life, the other was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from saying that if they did, they would surely die.

The forbidden tree was put there as a testimony of love when they chose to obey. This was freedom, to obey and love, or not to. They had the same power of choice as did the angels. Love is not love unless it is freely given and freely received.

Every time they walked past the tree, their choice was to trust and to love. This obedience delighted God's heart—until they chose to disobey. Then knowledge beyond innocence rushed in. The reality of life apart from God became theirs and they found themselves cut off from the Tree of Life, cut off from God, and in a dry and barren land.

When the Hero arrives on the scene, it is to usher in the river of God's life and reopen the way to the Tree of Life.

Jesus reveals the heart of God. It was a very long time that people thought of God as frightful, certainly unattainable, untouchable and unreachable. The Jewish people knew Him primarily as HOLY, far too glorious to approach; afraid to even speak His name. To keep from speaking God's name too lightly, or in an unworthy matter, they chose to never utter it. All this did was further separate them from Him. Many believed God to be without feelings. And more thought He was a hard taskmaster. Others thought He was detached from the happenings of earth. It wasn't until Jesus came and taught His disciples what God was really like, that things began to change.

He brought the truth to us about God. We are now able to know a God who expresses affectionate longing and tender mercy towards us.

The Twelve disciples of Jesus took His message and the story of His life and witnessed to the far corners of their world that God had great love for all people and that He had come in person. They proclaimed what Jesus revealed to them, to all that met Him. They taught others what Jesus taught them about the Holy One of Israel, the God

of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That He had come down from Heaven to not only save us by His own shed blood, but to reveal the Father's love, the Spirit's life-giving power, and His own desire to give Himself to us on an ongoing basis.

They taught that Jesus deliberately underwent every human experience, including pain and vulnerability. They taught that He chose to suffer death on a cross in order to redeem us.

This was such a radical new view of God that it was difficult for the Jews to accept. It violated every known image of God they had at that time. But this is the message of the Holy Spirit: God is the Great Lover of the Universe. He desires those He created and paid a ransom for with His blood; this is such a passionate act on His part, it is difficult to comprehend.

But the Lord loves us so very much: He says to the soul who desires Him:

You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse" S of S 4:9.

"Ravish" means to overcome with emotions of delight. Do we have the capacity to do this to Jesus? Yes, and it is important to Him that we know that He is in love with us. Look at what He's gone through to convince us. Is this why He has done so much for us?

What exactly does God want of us, do you think?

Here's the love Jesus gave us: His power showed us He was from Heaven. He cried out to us in the temple; He cried out to us from the Cross—nails in hands and feet, and heart pierced through. Here was the strongest act of love ever given. Here's the depths of passion and love, the likes of which will move mountains in the hearts of those who "get" it. We are caught up in God's love story, the story of all stories, this amazing epic of the love He has for each one of us.

This demonstration of the absolutely fierce love of God calls us to love in like manner, doesn't it? How can it be then that we have come to view our faith and life as what we DO for God? Listen to the words of Brennan Manning in his book, The Furious Longing of God:

“How is it then that we've come to imagine that Christianity consists primarily in what we do for God? How has this come to be the good news of Jesus? Is the kingdom that He proclaimed to be nothing more than a community of men and women who go to church on Sunday, take an annual spiritual retreat, read their Bibles every now and then, vigorously oppose abortion, don't watch x-rated movies, never use vulgar language, smile a lot, hold doors open for people, root for the favorite team, and get along with everybody? Is that why Jesus went through the bleak and bloody horror of Calvary? Is that why He emerged in shattering glory from the tomb? Is that why He poured out His Holy Spirit on the church? To make nicer men and women with better morals?”

The gospel is absurd and the life of Jesus is meaningless unless we believe that He lived, died, and rose again with but one purpose in mind: to make brand-new creations. Not to make people with better morals, but to create a community of prophets and professional lovers, men and women who would surrender to the mystery of the fire of the Holy Spirit that burns within, who would live in ever greater fidelity to the omnipresent Word of God, who would enter into the center of it all, the very heart and mystery of Christ, into the center of the flame that consumes, purifies, and sets everything aglow with peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love. This, my friends, is what it really means to be a Christian. Our religion never begins with what we do for God. It always starts with what God has done for us, the great and wondrous things that God dreamed of and achieved for us in Christ Jesus.”--The furious longing of God by Brennan Manning, published by David C Cook, 2009

Quiet Reflection (15 minutes)

Meditate on the Song of Songs 1:2-4

***“Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth —
for Your love is more delightful than wine.***

***Pleasing is the fragrance of Your perfumes:
Your name is like perfume poured out.***

***No wonder the maidens love You! Take me away with You . . .
Let us hurry! Let the King bring me into His chambers.”***

How do these words of Scripture make you feel? Ponder them. This is the yearning heart revived, a heart seeking the face and closeness of the Lord — the soul’s great Lover.

What about you? Are you in touch with your heart? Are you desperately thirsty for nothing but God HIMSELF? Ask Him to awaken you to all the GOOD He yearns to give you of Himself. This is a holy yearning. It is the sacred, passionate love relationship we are meant to share. He is the Reward of heaven—the Answer to all we want and need.

Song of Songs: 7:10-11:

“I am my beloved’s and His desire is toward me.

Come away, my beloved,

Let us go forth into the countryside; let us stay overnight in the villages.”

This is the heart of the Lord and His Word.

Come and Drink . . .

If we can ravish God's heart with one glance of our eyes, imagine what happens when we draw close enough to Him to listen to His heartbeat. If we come that close, then we will really know how much He loves us.

To rest our heads against the Lord's chest means we've stopped running around—at least for the time being. How could any other place be better? How can we hear Him, really enjoy His company, when we are always so busy? Even when we do carve out prayer times into our busy schedules, the noise of our lives crowd in. We need to learn to quiet our insides. This, I believe, is what it means to sit beside the still waters with our Good Shepherd. We need to put aside all our cares, and rest in His good company. He longs to reveal His love and Presence—to have us drink deeply of His Living Water.

If the children of God drew close to their Lord and Savior once a day, if they could only stay there quietly for a time, just allowing Him to hold them and love them, there would be revival everywhere. God wants us to experience His love and then take that love into the fallen world. The Lord is returning soon. The time may be very, very short. The following is from two prophetic voices of our day, telling us what is on God's heart these days, and what He is doing in our world . . .

Sid Roth's Messianic Vision, an article by John Arnott:

"The present revival going on now across the globe looks like this: The Holy Spirit is drawing whosoever will into a profound and wonderfully close relationship with God through the process of soaking. Soaking is quieting yourself before God and opening your heart not only to hear God, but to feeling His love for you and imbibing His Presence into your spirit. It is what is meant by 'abiding' in the love of God. There is an ever-increasing group of people who, with all their hearts, want to be full of the oil of the Spirit's love and are ready to meet the Bridegroom."

Mike Bickle, Growing in the Prophetic.

“The last days will be accompanied by a multiplication of all four elements of the Joel 2 prophecy:

- *the outpouring of the Spirit;*
- *prophetic dreams and visions;*
- *signs and wonders on earth and in the heavens and*
- *a wholehearted turning to Jesus—first for salvation and then with extravagant love for Him and 100 percent obedience.*

This wholehearted calling on the name of the Lord is not only for unbelievers, but it includes the church growing in holy passion for Jesus.

Part III: Come and Drink – 4th Teaching Session (15 minutes)

Yes, we have been made to enjoy God—to have an intimate, uniquely individual love relationship with our Maker. This is what it means to “come and drink.”

Without the Lord’s love and favor, His mercy and kindness, none of us would give Him any notice or think about Him at all. Remember this. We are all born in a state of spiritual deadness and it takes the grace and gift of the Holy Spirit to awaken our hearts to even consider God, let alone desire Him. Sea lions, all of us, often find ourselves far from the Sea of God’s love. Or, as thirsty deer, we long to drink from the Brook of God’s quenching waters. God always meant for us to know Him and enjoy His love. That is the main reason for our existence and why we cannot be satisfied with anything else.

Picture this—the Lord’s arm is outstretched. His hand motions to you. “Come.”

Listen to the Scriptures, listen to the booming voice of Jesus as it echoes throughout the temple courts – His words reach for you here and now, today, 2,000 years later: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.”

We thirst for God. He knew it then and He knows it now.

Let’s think about these words and see if we can get them to move from our mind into our heart.

Come!

It may seem simplistic to say this, but the Lord is calling out to us. We must not stand motionless, or pretend we don’t hear. Don’t turn away. We must move from wherever we are to draw closer to Him. Another way to put it is “we must respond” to Him. There needs to be movement.

Jesus is not physically standing in front of you saying, “Come,” and He didn’t mean it physically that day He said the words in the temple. He is not physical water, He is a person and He is God.

So, how do we come and how do we drink?

Our response to His invitation will be as unique an experience as is each and every one of us. Our response to God and His love towards us is as individual as we are.

Your act of “coming” to Him will depend upon you and your circumstances.

Pay attention to your heart. First, have you said the big Yes to God already? Have you moved from the kingdom of the earth to the kingdom of Heaven?

That is certainly “coming” to Him, and it is the beginning. Yes, you believe, and yes, you want to follow Him, and, yes, you want to please Him and live for Him. These are huge steps towards Him; you’ve already come so very far. Now, on an ongoing basis, how do we stay close to Him, and drink?

The next word we need to consider is the word “drink.”

“Come to Me and drink.” What does this mean to those who already know Him?

Jesus used another metaphor to say the same thing in John 6:51, I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

In order to live, we must eat every day. We must drink water, every day.

How do we eat a person?

[Pause here for a couple of moments.]

How do we eat and how do we drink this holy drink Jesus has to offer?

We are thirsty and hungry creatures. Our bodies were made to eat and drink just as much as our spirits were made to eat and drink. We must have Jesus to stay alive spiritually.

But we were made for much more than survival—we were made to enjoy abundant life.

The abundant life is full of adventure and passion—it is to find yourself caught up in the middle of a divine romance more wonderful and amazing than any love story you’ve ever heard or known.

The book of Acts is still being written and, the climax, the chapter we could very well be living in, in this epic story of God’s, could very well occur in our lifetime.

Just remember, there is an enemy who is out to kill you and all that is precious to God. We are living in a war zone. It has been going on before our time. Part of the Evil One’s schemes is to keep us far from the river of life, to keep us busy and preoccupied with things that will never satisfy us. Our Hero has come, He stood in the temple courts calling out to those who had gone astray from Him, and He calls to each of us today, in our daily experiences and trials: “Come to Me and drink.”

God is crazy about you. He is absolutely in love with you.

The treasure and satisfaction we are able to lay claim to is Divine. It is not of this world. Our love relationship with God is supernatural. It is as other-worldly as is our spiritual hearts, when they beat for Jesus.

It is not enough to simply discover the treasure, we must lay claim to this Pearl. As Brennan Manning puts it, “we must own it through ruthless determination and tenacious effort.”

Again, it is all about movement.

What happens when you discover something of such great worth that you become consumed by it? Is it really possible to be that way about God?

Jesus admonished one of the early churches to “do what you did at first”—the “first love” kinds of things lovers do. For here is that hidden mystery that Christ came to reveal: God’s love is a wondrous, fiery love affair. He is passionate about us and we must realize this.

What is your deepest desire? Tell Jesus. Ask the Lord to fan the flame of your first love; ask the Lord to reveal His heart to you. Then brace yourself. He's the wild, passionate, untamed Lion of Judah and He will certainly answer that prayer.

Be creatively responsive. Find out what God enjoys. For example, we know He likes to celebrate "anniversaries" of events. He established the Jewish feast days for remembrances. He determined to fulfill some of them in person, when Jesus and the Holy Spirit came to us. He would appreciate celebrating meaningful experiences with you, too. Do you honor Him with special days, special to the two of you?

Love what Jesus loves. Experience what He wants to experience with you.

Is there some form of art you can use to glorify the Lord and your love for Him?

Have you learned the joy of coming to the still waters, to spend time in silence and solitude with the Good Shepherd? How often?

Do you get excited about shopping or decorating your home more than sitting at the feet of an anointed teacher? Where is your heart?

Are you pursuing God like a person in love?

Do you long for ways to be used of Him?

Do you notice the things He is doing to impress you, surprise you, or show favor to you each day? Do you reflect upon specific ways He is showing His love for you and what He is doing in your life?

Are you keeping a journal, so beneficial to hear from Him and keep a record of your life together? You'll end up with your own Gospel account of your life with Him. This can be so beneficial.

Do you soak up His presence whenever you get the chance to be alone with Him? Do you go on "dates" with Him?

Have you meditated on the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life to the point that you feel like you've walked the dusty roads with Him? In prayer and meditation, have you witnessed His love poured out on His cross of shame, as though you were really there?

Your desire will lead you to Him – it could be as simple as reading Christian books that fan the flame of devotion. It could mean trips across land and sea to join Him on amazing adventures. Have you been in the Throne Room? God often sings love songs to His beloveds. He calls us by nicknames.

Whatever shape or form your love with Him takes, as you “come to Him and drink,” it will grow and deepen during the span of your life until you see Him face to face.

Jesus not only wants you to believe in Him as the One who once lived and died for you, but He longs for you to believe in Him in the midst of the events and moments of our days. Include Him in your thoughts in a conscious way. This is what it means to pray unceasingly.

We weren't meant to dwell in a desert void of His loving presence.

Do you hear His gentle whispers and urges throughout the day? His thoughts are full of love and acceptance, always drawing us closer.

What form or shape is your “coming” to Him taking? We are all invited to come. You can come as close as you like. You can drink as much as you desire. We were made to swim in an ocean of love and drink the brooks of Holy, Divine *living water*.

Come, experience the Water of Life . . .

[In closing the lecture, go over these simple practices.]

1. Praying with Scripture - *Drink from the Fountain of Life*

Hearing God's *Rhema* (now) word to you
Meditation: contemplating, personalizing, imagining.

2. Being God-conscious is Unceasing Prayer - *Glances and gazes Sips throughout the day*

Be aware of God "with you" moment-by-moment to abide in Him.

3. Prayer of Examen - *Take a soul shower every day*

Two questions to share with God at the end of your day . . .

What was the happiest moment of my day today? (God-moments)

What was the most grievous moment? (Sometimes it's sin to acknowledge or forgive)

4. Prayer partners, spiritual mentors and friends - *Walk in the "rain" together*

Regularly talk and pray with a spiritual friend you trust.

5. Taking personal retreats - *Soak in God's Gentle Presence*

"Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." Mark 6:31

6. Listening with a Prayer Journal - *Float down the River of Life*

Listening prayer; communicate; record your experiences; be open to God with no agenda; be consistent.

7. Devotion and Art - *Tap into the creative well of God's Living Water within you*

Express your heart. The more you pray meditatively and are aware of His Presence, the more you'll discover and express your creative gifts. Pour your love on Him—find creative ways to show your devotion.

Quiet Reflection (30 minutes)

Remember, Jesus is our Good Shepherd and we can hear His voice.

Personalize Psalm 139:1 and let the prayer become your own:

“Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know my rising up and my sitting down. You understand my thought from afar. You comprehend my path and my lying down. You are acquainted with all my ways.”

Choose one of these questions to ask the Lord, pay attention to which one seems to draw you:

- ❖ Lord, what have You put into my heart that is or is not being realized?
- ❖ What do you like about me?
- ❖ What do You want me to know about You that I don't already know.

What does God want to say to you today?

Group Sharing (30 minutes)

Gather in a group or groups to share what God has done during the retreat day. Be sure to ask participants to limit their sharing time to five minutes each to give everyone a chance to talk. Ideal group size would be four to eight in number. If larger than eight, be sure to divide into more than one group.

End with a song and communion, if that is possible.

It's always good to give the participants God's blessing as you close:

**"The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace."**

Numbers 6:24-26