

Session 2 The Flowing Heart, Part 2

INTRODUCTION

I'll begin with a bit of review of last night. A number of you were here last night, and I gave an introduction. Tonight we will build on it, but I'll give a little review for those who weren't here.

In John 7:38 Jesus gives one of the best descriptions of the experience of discipleship in the Word of God. He says, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Then John adds, "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive" (Jn. 7:38-39).

Jesus is describing the heart of a disciple, a man or a woman, who is anointed by the Holy Spirit on the inside, with obvious manifestations of the Holy Spirit on the outside as well, in terms of the works of the kingdom, etc. He described a disciple as someone who, by the power of the Spirit, has a heart that flows like a river. This is one of the most profound descriptions of being a disciple. It's the people of a flowing heart.

Of course, the great leader, the One who disciples us, is the Man with a flowing heart, Christ Jesus Himself. This flowing heart speaks of tenderized emotions. It's not only tenderized emotions, but that's part of it. It talks about a progressive flow of revelation, of supernatural knowledge of God's heart: having our hearts tenderized, and receiving divine revelation and having new desires; the things that we used to love, such as sin, we now hate, and the things that we used to hate, such as righteousness, now we love. Our emotional chemistry is radically changed, and it's a work of the Holy Spirit.

Again, the Man with a flowing heart, Christ Jesus, wants disciples like Him. This is an invitation to wholeheartedness. This is an invitation to a new quality of life. Every single human on the earth has this invitation by the grace of God, but even those who have said yes to salvation, more often than not, settle for something far less than being a person with a flowing heart. Their hearts are locked. They don't feel the tenderness that God has ordained for them. They don't experience this emotional chemistry change, where they begin to love the things that they used to hate and hate the things that they used to love. They don't have this progressive dimension of revelation, of the supernatural impartation of the knowledge of God's heart flowing in them. Beloved, this is the quality of life to which God has called every single believer. We absolutely can't sell ourselves short of this divine invitation as a disciple of Christ Jesus. It really is within the reach of everyone in the grace of God, in the name of Jesus.

The man says, "Well, you know, I have so much bruising, and so many addictions, and I've been beaten up and my spirit is so worn out, and man, I can hardly feel any of this. I've been a believer through all these years, but it's just not happening."

I say, "The Lord has a great change in store for you." He really, really does. It's not a commentary on how messed up you are; it's a commentary on how powerful the Holy Spirit is inside of us when we yield to Him. I don't care what kind of condition, and how many addictions, and how much wounding and bruising and hatred and bitterness you bring with you. Because that human sin and brokenness and bitterness is no match for the power of the Holy Spirit when we yield to Him. Bitterness is an easy thing for the Holy Spirit to melt away, because He causes that hardened heart to flow like a river on the inside.

The Man who is inviting us into this has a flowing heart. He knows about it; He understands what it means to be disciples with flowing hearts in a supernatural way. It's a supernatural reality. The condition is that we believe on Him as the Scripture says. Jesus gives the condition, "You have to believe on Me in the way that the Scripture describes believing on Me."

The phrase, "As the Scripture says," qualifies the type of believing. It's not enough to believe on Jesus in the way that our denomination taught us. It's not enough to believe on Jesus in the way that our favorite teacher taught us. We must believe on Jesus in the way that the Scripture says to believe on Him. That's absolutely critical.

THE SPIRIT OF DEDICATION, THE SPIRIT OF DEVOTION, THE SPIRIT OF SERVANTHOOD

Last night I gave a little outline of three different dimensions of the necessity of believing on Jesus in the way that the Scripture says. I'm going to add a fourth one tonight. To believe upon Jesus as the Scripture says means we're people who feed on the Word of God. That's a given, but it's feeding our spirit on the Word of God in a particular way. Number one: with a spirit of dedication. It's absolutely necessary that we have a spirit of dedication. I don't want to develop it to the extent that I did last night, but you can call it that radical yes in our spirit to obey the will of God and follow the commands of God. It's not enough to skip that stage of believing. There's a spirit of dedication that's absolutely necessary or the heart doesn't flow like a river.

Now the problem is this: there's a gap in that yes in our spirit, that spirit of wanting to do everything. There's a gap in our experience and our fierce determination to obey. It's called *weakness*; it's called *immaturity*. But the Lord has a plan. The Lord has a contingency for that gap, but the yes is necessary.

The second thing is that we have a spirit of devotion; so that when we fill our heart with the Word of God—and that's the one great condition, filling our hearts with the Word of God—we do it with a spirit of dedication, but we do it with a spirit of devotion. We do it with an "I love You" in our spirit.

It's not enough just to become students of the Word. We're students of the Word with an "I love You" in our spirit. We take the Word of God and we turn it into a dialogue of love from our heart to His heart. I talked a little about that last night. I don't want to develop that again.

The third attitude is a spirit of servanthood. It's absolutely critical that as we seek the Lord, as we come to Him and fill our hearts with the Word, we do it with the full intention, the full commitment. Isaiah 58:10 tells us to extend our soul for others. We spend or extend our soul. We do it with a full commitment to give ourselves to bring the goodness of God to others. There's a very, very powerful dynamic that happens only when we're in the posture of extending our soul towards others.

Some people, when they hear about IHOP-KC, imagine that there are these 400 full-time staff members who are living in religious isolationism. You know, we've retreated from the world; we have good music. They've heard that we have a good coffee shop. We just retreat from the world and drink good coffee and listen to good music. Beloved, it doesn't work that way. The soul can't flow like a river unless at the very core of our being there's a fundamental commitment to extend ourselves to be agents of the grace of God to others. That's called partnership with Jesus. We do it in our labor; we do it in our giving. There's an extending of our soul. There's a pouring out. There's an extending of ourselves for others. That's a critical dimension to having a flowing heart.

THE SPIRIT OF CONFIDENCE IN THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE MIDST OF OUR WEAKNESS

The fourth attitude with which we fill our hearts with the Word of God is with the spirit of confidence. I talked about that last night. I was talking about a spirit of grace, a spirit of confidence in the love of God in our weakness. That's the one that's the most difficult one to cultivate in the Church, to get people to have a spirit of confidence, or a spirit of grace; to have confidence in the love of God even in their weakness. In terms of equipping people for the grace of wholeheartedness, that's what we're really talking about: cultivating the grace of wholeheartedness. That's really the aim of these messages. People say, "I want to be wholehearted. I want to cultivate the grace of wholeheartedness. How do you do it?" I tell them that it's absolutely critical that we fill our hearts with the Word of God. We have to be people who fill our hearts with the Word of God.

We can't do it separated from filling ourselves with the Word of God. It's not enough to come to an anointed atmosphere of praise and worship. We actually have to take the Word of God and personally digest it and feed our spirit with the Word of God, but it's not enough just to read the Word of God or to read your favorite Christian book. We have to do it with a spirit of dedication. We do it with a yes in our spirit, a fierce determination that we will be people of obedience. It's not enough to do that. There are a lot of calls to wholeheartedness. It's marvelous; it's wonderful. There are a lot of people saying yes to dedication, but it's not enough to say yes to dedication. We have to be a people of love. There needs to be a devotional spirit of filling ourselves with the Word of God; taking the Word and creating that love dialogue with the Word of God that I talked about last night.

Third, there's that spirit of servanthood. We can't disconnect from an active participation of pouring ourselves out unto others. We can't disconnect; we can't neglect that and still have a flowing heart. It's absolutely mandatory that our believing leads us to extend our soul for others. Then, fourth, we do it with a spirit of confidence in the love of God, even in our weakness. It's a spirit of confidence, a spirit of grace.

Sometimes people do two or three of those. Beloved, if we are to be a people of a flowing heart, we must be a people who believe in Him as the Scripture describes. We must do all of them. I find the one that's the most neglected is the spirit of confidence. It's that spirit of grace. They say, "Yes, I will be a radical believer in Christ Jesus. Yes, I want to love You! I went to the Devotion to Jesus conference, and the Passion for Jesus conference. I want to love You! Yes! I'll serve! I'll pour myself out for others!"

Again, whether, they involve labor, or giving of our strength, or resources, it's all about extending our soul. That's absolutely critical, but they do it with a spirit of religion instead of a spirit of confidence. When they run into their own weakness, and their own failure, they enter into an attitude of negotiating with God to try to motivate God to enjoy them. The whole process is short-circuited by a religious spirit instead of a spirit of confidence. They say, "I don't know what else to do! Here I am, I'm fully dedicated. I'm trying to be a lover. I'm pouring myself out for others, but I read the Word of God and my heart is locked. It's not moving. There's a stronghold in my heart that's preventing me from flowing like a river as the Word of God says." More often than not it's the issue of cultivating a spirit of confidence in their relationship with God. That's where we left off last night.

Turn to 1 John 4. It's the first epistle of John near the end of the New Testament. Not the gospel of John; the epistle, right before the book of Revelation. We spent some time on this. Tonight we'll focus on 1 John 4:16-19, which talks about developing, or cultivating, in a very, very focused way, the spirit of confidence in our

relationship with God. Without the spirit of confidence in the love of God, even in our weakness, especially in our weakness, our hearts are going to be locked up.

IN THE VERY ACT OF SERVING, UNDERSTANDING COMES FORTH

Before we do this, I just have this nudging. Let me back up for a moment. I want to talk about the spirit of servanthood. The Lord has set up His kingdom in an amazing way. In terms of revelation of the Word of God, I get more revelation in telling people about the Word of God than I do in my own private reading of it. It's an amazing dynamic. I study the Word; I pray the Word. I turn it into dialogue with God and I do it over and over and over. A certain amount of understanding comes. Then, I'm before a person one on one, or I'm talking to a group of four or five people. I'm counseling someone, or I'm praying for them. The very passage that I had studied, the very passage that I had meditated on, that I understood only a little; in the very act of giving it to others, one on one, or one on three, or even in preaching, it unfolds right in flight. There it is. It just unfolds. If I had, on a scale from one to ten, a "level two" understanding, I receive a four when I begin to use it in employing my heart and extending my heart in serving other people with the Word of God. It's an amazing reality.

Or, you're there in the acts of kindness, serving people, and you're talking, and you may or may not be having fun, and you're serving. All of a sudden ideas and understanding begin to touch our hearts in the coming and going of serving. In the very act of serving, understanding comes forth. New emotions come forth. The Lord says, "I will give you more understanding. I will give you more of My emotion. I will tenderize you more as you're pouring and extending yourself for others."

It's an amazing thing. Some people take all four of these things to an extreme. They take it out of balance. They become so committed to extending their soul for others that they lose their spirit of dedication. They lose their spirit of dedication to obedience. They get so lost in serving people. Many times they're motivated out of the fear of man or the desire to be seen as a servant. They do it for all of these things. They lose the spirit of devotion. They wane on the spirit of confidence. They're so extended that they lose out on the other things. Some people are so into dedication that they fail to cultivate the devotion. They fail to cultivate the spirit of confidence that's necessary for dedication to bring us to the place of a flowing heart. Any one of these four things taken distinctly and separated from the others doesn't produce the end for which we're seeking.

"WE HAVE KNOWN AND BELIEVED THE LOVE THAT GOD HAS FOR US"

We're going to 1 John 4. We talked a little about 1 John 4:16. I'll skip that because we spent about five or ten minutes on that one verse last night. I want to go to verse 4:17. We'll read verse 16 just to get it in context. Here's John the apostle speaking. He's in his nineties. He's an aging apostle. 1 John 4:16, "We have known and believed the love that God has for us" (1 Jn. 4:16). What a powerful, fundamental statement. I mean, that's where John begins. That's the foundation. He says, "This thing isn't going to work until we know"—I like to use the word *experience* instead of the word *know*—until we've experienced and we're convinced. Instead of the word *believe*, you can put the word *convinced*. This isn't going to work until we've experienced and are convinced of the absolute, Christianity 101, fundamental issue: the affection that God has for us. It's absolutely number one. John the apostle starts with that. We have to experience and be convinced of the affection that burns in God's heart for us. That's how I would paraphrase that sentence. My point is not to paraphrase; my point is, that was John's beginning point.

When people come to me and say, "Man I want to cultivate the grace of wholeheartedness; I want to cultivate passion for Jesus; I want to love God! How do you do it?" I absolutely know where to bring them. I know that

they need to say yes to dedication. I know that they need a devotional spirit when they read the Word of God; I know that they have to say yes to servanthood, but the main thing that most people are going to trip over is the spirit of confidence in the love of God when they discover their weakness. I bring them to this fundamental idea. I may not use this verse, but the idea is before me. I want them to experience and be convinced of the affection that God has for them.

“BEHOLD, WHAT MANNER OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS BESTOWED ON US!”

As a matter of fact, before we go on, let’s go to chapter 3:1. It’s the same idea. Some of you in this room are teachers. Maybe you don’t teach on a microphone, but you teach one on one. Maybe you teach your children. Maybe you teach a friend. Maybe you’re a counselor. That’s a form of being a teacher in the Body of Christ—being a counselor. You’re just taking the teaching, and it’s tailor-made for the particular need of one person in that hour. That’s a teaching ministry, when you look at them and you consider their need and you say, “Holy Spirit, help me here.” Beloved, I can assure you, for the vast majority of them, their big need is to experience and be convinced of the affection that God has for them. It really is. For the aging apostle, in all his years of teaching, that was the absolute, bottom-line foundation stone of all of his teaching.

Here he develops that idea of God’s affection for us. Look at chapter 3:1; he says, “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 Jn. 3:1). Oh, man, what a powerful statement. First, it’s a call to become students of the affections of God. It says, “Behold the quality of affection the Father has bestowed upon us.” Again, I’ll paraphrase it. Instead of the word *love*, put the word *affection*. Behold it. Study it. Stare at it; analyze it; feed on it. Behold it; encounter it.

BEHOLDING AND ENCOUNTERING THE AFFECTIONS OF THE FATHER

Again, John the apostle is writing this book in his nineties. He’s using all the wisdom of his sixty or seventy years of walking with Jesus. He says, “Let me tell you, encountering, beholding, interfacing with the affections of the Father for us is where the river flows. It’s where it begins.” It’s the beginning point of the river in your soul. If I had to have one theme for my study life in God, I would want to use this verse or one like it. I would want to be a disciple who beholds, who encounters, the quality of the affection the Father has given.

It’s not just that the Father has affections; He has manifested them. He has bestowed them upon us. He has lavished them. It’s an open display. Let me ask you: when you want to develop a flowing heart, do you behold the quality of love that the Father has for you? That’s the key to unlocking your heart. Or as a student, or as a counselor, as a teacher of the Word of God, is this the focal point from which you have confidence that God will unlock your heart because you’re one who believes that beholding the quality, the manner of love, that the Father has for you is the key to unlocking you?

THE WIDTH AND LENGTH AND DEPTH AND HEIGHT OF GOD’S LOVE

Let’s look at this phrase, “the manner of love.” Or, let’s call it, “the quality, the diversity,” but it’s more than the diversity. It’s also the quality and the measure of the affection that the Father has for you. Paul the apostle talked about the manner of God’s love in Ephesians 3:18. He said, “Oh, the width, and the length, the depth and the height of love, of the affections of God” (Eph. 3:18). He says, “It’s incomprehensible” (Eph. 3:19). It’s a vast ocean of reality! The manner of love is fourfold—it has a width, a length, and a depth, and a height. It’s incomprehensible in its fullness! That’s the manner of love which we study; that’s the focus of what we want to encounter. It’s not just, “Behold the quality of power that God has exhibited in creating the earth,” although

that's a great thing to study and a great thing to encounter. That's a great thing to encounter, but there's something even more dynamic, more fundamental than beholding the power. It's beholding the quality of love! The depth of it; the width of it; the length of it; the height of it! There are so many dimensions to it.

THE FLAMING INFERNO OF DESIRE THAT DWELLS IN THE VERY BOSOM OF GOD

When young interns come and join us, we want to train them in all kinds of things. I tell you, this verse says it right here. I want to train them in the quality, the measure of the affection the Father has: not just that God secretly has, but that He has openly proven in history is ours. It's openly displayed and proven. He has called us His own children. He has given us something far above that into which He invited the angels. He has called us into the very fellowship of the Godhead, into the very fellowship of the Trinity. The quality of this affection has a father's affection to it, "that we should be called children"; that we should live in that realm. Being children means more than just using the name of Jesus to cast out devils. That's part of being children of God, but as children of God, we're heirs.

Beloved, we're heirs; we have an inheritance. We're heirs to the revelation and the experience of God's burning desire. As a child of God, I have a right to something that the angels don't have. I have keys to unlock the divine treasure chest in the Holy Spirit. I can enter into the deep places of God's burning heart for me. That's my inheritance as a child of God. The angels stand at a distance in holy envy, undoubtedly saying something like, "Do you guys have any comprehension of the keys that God has put into the hands of the Church? You can move into the regions of God's heart to experience and understand the flaming inferno of desire that dwells within the very bosom of God for human beings!"

That's our inheritance as children. Yes, we have power to use the name of Jesus. I like that. Yes, we will inherit eternal life; I really like that. Yes, we have all kinds of blessings in God's plan for us. There are many, many things. Yes, we're heirs of divine discipline as children of God. There are a lot of things that being children encompasses, but here the focus of our inheritance as children is that we have the right and the privilege to move into the experiential revelation of the burning desire of God.

HEIRS TO THE AFFECTIONS OF GOD'S BURNING HEART

Look at what he says here: "Therefore the world does not know us" (1 Jn. 3:2). Or you can say, "The world does not understand us." The world can't comprehend, can't even make sense of us. Do you know why? We're motivated in an entirely different way. We're motivated by the reality of a Father who has all power, but has burning affection. When our spirits are touched by the burning affection in the bosom of God for us, we're motivated to do all kinds of strange things. We give our money; we give our time. We don't eat food that day; it's called *fasting*. We live extreme lives compared to their esteem of wisdom. They can make no sense of it. They say, "Here you are: you have all of this ability and all of this opportunity to do this, and this, and this."

John says, "They are never going to understand you. They don't know you. They can't comprehend why you're making your choices. They don't know what's moving you. They don't grasp what motivates your decision-making."

Rick shared just a few minutes ago how he left a really good income of years of success in the business world and lives on very little. He spends hours a day fasting and praying, and then other hours a day serving the saints and serving the needs of others. I mean, he did really well; and his friends back home say, "You have a lot of abilities. You have a lot of potential, Rick."

Not that Rick actually said this, but he might say, “You don’t know me. You don’t understand me. I have an inheritance. I’m an heir to the affections of God’s burning heart. I’m an heir to that. I have rights to a dimension of reality that the angels don’t have. It’s absolutely ruined me! I want other things! I feel differently about life, this age, and the age to come! I feel differently about money and honor and power and recognition! I have all kinds of different feelings than I used to have.”

Beloved, it says this, that “the world does not know you.” It can’t comprehend what’s moving you. It’s this invisible reality that they can’t grasp. The reason they can’t know you is because they don’t know Him. Let me develop it. They don’t know about this holy inferno of desire burning in the very bosom of the uncreated God. They don’t know anything about this. They have no grid to measure what your decisions and your lifestyle are like, because they have no concept of a God like this, who has a manner of love, a quality of love that we’re to spend our entire lives beholding: studying it, staring into it, encountering it, gazing on it, reading everything that we can to give us even one more fragment of understanding about that burning heart. What a way to live! We do it in this age, and then we do it in the age to come. A billion years from now, I’ll say, “Rick, got any new stuff?”

“Oh! My goodness! New stuff!”

“Me too!” I mean, it’s been going on for a billion years. “I have so many new dimensions of understanding touching my spirit!”

You know, the reason that the world can’t understand people living motivated by this holy inferno of love is because they don’t have a paradigm, a picture, of a God who possesses this kind of personality. They don’t know Him. They can picture a God of power, because all they have to do is look to the sky. They can picture a God of judgment because they have attributed everything negative in the created order to God’s judgment. They have no theology of an active devil, so they put it all on God’s account. They believe that He judges; they believe that He’s powerful, but they have no grid for a God who has this manner of love. He has given an open door; He has given access to that quality of love. We have the right and inheritance as broken, sinful people on this planet, even before we enter into the age to come. Oh, I love this stuff. So do you.

THE VERY CENTER OF GOD’S PERSONALITY IS BURNING DESIRE

Let’s go back to chapter 4:16. So he’s already given 3:1. He’s already talking about how we’re the people who behold the manner of love, the quality, the measure of God’s affection. In verse 16, he says we’ve experienced it: we’re convinced of the affection that God has for us, because God lives in a realm of burning love. He’s the God of burning desire. When it says, “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16b), it points us to the very center of God’s personality, burning desire.

He talks about the person who lives or abides in this realm of love, the person who lives in the experience, the encounter, of this realm of love. Beloved, we’re only going to encounter it a little in this age. I mean, it’s like a billion volts and a 110-watt circuit. We will be absolutely fried if we experience the fullness of it. Our capacity is pretty small, but we get incremental, little down payments, little tokens of the fullness of this in this age.

Oh, man, we live in the realm of love, which means we’re drinking from this reality, this revelation of love. We’re drinking from it. That’s what it means to abide in love. We’re feeding our spirit on this revelation. That’s

what King David did. That's why he was called, "the man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14, paraphrased). He fed his spirit constantly on this realm. Do you know what happens when we live in love, abide in love, or drink of the revelation of love? We live in the realm of God; we live in the activity of the Holy Spirit. We live in the power realm of God's heart. We live in the realm of Holy Spirit activity. Our hearts begin to flow like a river. There's a divine action on the inside of us. There's a divine manifestation of power on the inside of us when we live and drink of this revelation of love. Then what happens is that as God lives in us, there's a manifestation through us to other people.

THE WORD IMPLANTED WILL DELIVER YOUR SOUL FROM OPPRESSION

When it says, "God in us" (1 Jn. 4:16, paraphrased), it's talking about that internal combustion, that internal activity, and living in God, living in the realm of God, has an outlet. God lives or God manifests Himself through you. I talk to people and they say, "Hey, I want to get into this." You really have to feed your spirit on the Word of God. There's just no way around it. It's not enough to come all day long to the house of prayer and be in an anointed atmosphere and just tell God that you love Him. That's beautiful. I mean, that's wonderful. I say, "Go the next step. Feed your spirit on the Word of God. Fill your spirit with the implanted Word."

I'm just going to quote James 1:21. Well, I can't quote it now, so I'll paraphrase it. It says that when we receive the Word implanted, it is able to deliver our souls. Actually, it uses the word *save*. When we hear the Word, when we receive the implanted Word, we have this idea that it saves our soul and that we become born again, or justified by faith. No, it's talking about delivering us from all forms of wickedness. When the implanted Word takes root, it is able to deliver us from every single form of barrenness: spiritual barrenness and oppression. Our souls are delivered, are saved utterly from the oppression of the enemy against us. It's the implanted Word.

It's not enough, again, just to come into an anointed atmosphere; I want to be a man with the Word implanted. I want it to take root within me with a spirit of dedication, with a spirit of devotion, with a spirit of servanthood. I want that spirit of confidence as I'm going forward.

WHAT WE BEHOLD IN GOD'S HEART, WE BECOME IN OUR HEART TOWARDS GOD

"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 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"—or mature—"in love. We love Him because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:17-19).

We will begin to unpack this verse. Last night we ended by discussing it for just a moment or two. The first principle, here in verse 19, is the "beholding and becoming" principle. I've heard holiness preachers use this phrase through the years. It's a phrase that some of you have heard as well. Whatever we behold in God's heart towards us is what we become in our hearts toward God. I'll develop that in a minute. Whatever we behold in God's heart toward us is what's awakened in our heart back to God. For example, he's saying, "The reason that we love Him, the reason that love has been awakened in us is because we first saw, we first understood that He loved us." When God wants to awaken love in you for Himself, what does God do? He reveals Himself as a lover to you. When God wants to awaken love, when He wants you to become a lover, He reveals Himself to you as a lover. Because whatever you behold about God is awakened in your heart back to Him. Whatever you behold in God towards you is what's awakened in your own heart back to God.

People say, "I want to love God more!"

I say, “Great! No problem. Study the love of God for you even in your weakness. Especially study the way God loves you in your weakness.” You study the way that God feels about you in your weakness, His love, and I promise you that it will awaken love in your heart back to God. Whatever you behold in God’s heart towards you will be awakened in your heart back to God.

WHATEVER YOU BEHOLD IS WHAT YOU BECOME IN TIME

We could put any number of words in here. We pursue God because we first understood that He pursued us. You want to have a hot pursuit of God? For years I’ve heard good sermons on the necessity to pursue God. Let me tell you, if we will teach people to pursue God, we have to teach them how God pursues them. The way to awaken a pursuing heart in a believer is by revealing the pursuing heart of Jesus towards them, especially in their weakness. When they see in their weakness that He’s pursuing them, it may take them a little while to connect the dots, but in a few moments—it may be a few months down the road, but a moment or two later, they begin to say, “Wait, He’s pursuing me, and I’m so broken! Oh! I want to pursue Him! I want more of Him!” It awakens within you a pursuing heart.

You can use the word *dedication*. We’re dedicated to Him because we first understood that He was dedicated to us. You can use the word *enjoy*. We enjoy God because we first understood that He enjoyed us. Whatever it is that you want in your relationship towards God—dedication: “I want to pursue Him. I want to love Him! I want to be abandoned to Him! I want to give everything to Him!” Study all of those things in His heart towards you. I guarantee you, in time, in time, it will awaken that corresponding emotion in you. You behold it in God and then you become whatever you’re beholding in your emotional life before God. It’s the “beholding and becoming” principle. Whatever you behold is what you become in time. I love it!

“I want zeal for God.”

Cool! Study God’s zeal for you then. It will awaken it. That’s the fundamental principle. That’s where John is taking this thing. I mean, that’s just Christianity 101.

IT’S NOT IN TRYING HARDER, BUT IN BEING WEAK AND LOVED

Here’s the sad thing, and it’s so illogical. The vast majority of Christians want to love Him. You know how they want to love Him? By focusing on exerting energy to love Him. They want to try harder. I tell them, “Don’t try harder; enjoy more. Don’t try to love Him; enjoy the fact that He loves you and it will awaken love in you.”

The tragedy is this; the sad thing is this: so many believers want to become passionate lovers of God, but they go to the wrong place to awaken love in their heart. They go to religious self-determination. They’re going to psych up and charge the hill. “I’ll love You, God, even if it kills me! I will love you!” When they should go in a very opposite direction. They need to retreat and say, “I don’t have anything to offer,” and fill themselves with the revelation of God’s love, and that’s when it awakens supernaturally in their own heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Love begins to grow in them. They fill themselves with the Word of God, and with the spirit of dedication, and with the spirit of devotion, and with the spirit of servanthood, and with the spirit of confidence.

Here’s the issue of confidence. Verses 17 and 18 are the best verses I know in the whole Bible on the subject of cultivating the spirit of confidence and obedience. “Love has been perfected.” Instead of saying *perfected*, let’s say, “Love has been matured among us in this.” He’s going to describe how love is mature. As I said last night,

the word *love* in the epistles of John usually, but not always, speaks of the threefold love. When it says *love*, it speaks of one reality. It's seamless. It's one seamless reality. We can separate the threefold love to study it, and that's OK, as long as we know that we experience it as a seamless reality. We don't experience one part and then later experience the other part. It's one reality that's operating at the same time.

There's a sequence; there's a progression that's critical. The first dimension of love is that we understand He loves us. The second dimension is that it awakens love in us back to Him; we call that "passion for Jesus." That's the second type of love. The first dimension of love is understanding the love that exists in His heart for us. It's a revelation of His love for us. It awakens passion or love in us back to Him. Those are very different dimensions of the one river. "He loves us" is where it begins. In time we begin to love Him. Then there's an overflow; there's an overflow of that love towards people. There's an overflow of that love towards people. When it's calling us to be mature in love, people say, "Which love is it?" It's all three of them, because we mature in all of them together.

Let me tell you this: the focal point is to mature in the revelation that you're loved. Remember verse 19. If you get that, it awakens love for Jesus and overflows in love towards people. When it says, "Love is mature in this," it's talking about all three dimensions. It's your understanding of God's love for you, your love back to Him, and your love overflowing towards people. It's all one reality. He's talking about love maturing in all of those three dimensions, or those three expressions of one reality of love.

PERFECTING OUR REVELATION OF HIS TENDER LOVE FOR US

The important part is this. Most people who read the word *love* immediately go to the third expression, and think about love between people. "Our love is perfected, or matured towards one another in this," but really, I would rather direct their attention to the beginning of that. Your revelation of God's love for you is perfected in this way that He's going to describe. It's always going to awaken love for Jesus. It will always overflow towards people—always! It's a false argument, a false dichotomy to think that some people love people and other people love God. I've heard that. I want to say this nicely: it's illogical, for sure, but it's impractical. It's unrealistic, is what I'm trying to say. The idea that one group loves God and the other group loves people? That's impossible!

If you touch the tender flow of God's heart for you, you become tender towards Him and tender towards others. It's one reality. You can't be tender towards others without knowing that He's tender towards you, but I've heard of different camps. "This camp is really focused on loving people." "This camp is really focused on loving God." That's like saying, "What's more important, your heart, your liver, or your kidneys? Which one do you want to go without?" It's one reality, this perfected love. Let's not focus on perfecting love horizontally right now. Let's not focus even on perfecting love for God. Let's focus on perfecting our revelation of His tender love for us. Because when that happens, remember, verse 19 is the foundational principle. When you understand His tender love, His tenderness towards you, you automatically end up tender towards Him and towards people. It's absolutely unstoppable!

"THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE, BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR"

"Love is perfected among us in this." As I said last night, this is the strangest part of the verse. Here's what I would think John would say: "Love has been perfected among us in this: that you had an open visitation of an angel who told you how much God loved you." I remember when I was younger, I was teaching this verse in my early twenties and I could never, ever grasp the logic of verse 17. They seem like three completely separate

ideas forced into one verse that didn't have any connection with one another. I remember when I was teaching 1 John, that verse was so troubling. I said, "What on earth is he talking about? Why is my love for God perfected, my revelation of God's tender love perfected with boldness in the day of judgment? What do those things have to do with one another? This makes no sense to me!"

Verse 18 describes it. We talked a little about this last night. He gives the principle of how boldness in the day of judgment relates to perfected knowledge of God's love. Verse 18 is a parenthesis; John is giving some human psychology. Verse 17 is the great verse of confidence before God. He says, "If that verse is stumping you, let's just back away for a moment and do a little human psychology. Let's talk about fear."

The word *fear* in this context is referring to fear of rejection. This isn't just various phobias in life, but the fear of rejection in relationship. Fear of relational rejection is the idea. It says, "There is no fear in love, but the mature revelation of love drives fear out of the relationship." Instead of "fear of rejection," you could use the word *insecurity*.

He goes on to describe it. He says, "Here's what happens in relationships. When you have the fear of being rejected, when you have the fear of being judged, when you have the fear of being cast off, there's torment in your relationship with the person you believe is casting you off. There's torment in your relationship."

Imagine that your best friend comes up to you and just gives you the rebuke of a lifetime and says, "I mean it this time! You're the most horrible, a, b, c, and d, and I don't ever want to talk to you again." You're in the same church. It's next Sunday; you go there, you see the man and he looks at you and says, "Bah, humbug." He snarls.

You say, "Whoa, this thing is for real." There's torment in your relationship with that person. You say, "Ugh, I don't even want to go near that man!" Your spirit shuts down and retreats with levels of guards on it. You have all these thick shields guarding your self. That man walks by and you won't look at him. You won't do anything. Everything in your spirit is guarded when there's fear of being judged and rejected. I mean, I'm saying the same thing. There's torment in the relationship. The spirit is closed. Your spirit is closed towards that person.

Maybe the man gets in a good mood one day and comes by and pats you on the back a month later. He hasn't said anything to you, except for how horrible you are. He pats you on the back. You just cringe: "Get your hand off of me!" Your spirit is so shut down. That's called torment in the relationship.

SECURITY IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WE'RE LOVED BY GOD

John goes on to describe becoming mature in love. Being mature in love means being secure in the knowledge that God loves you. That's the beginning point. When you become secure in the knowledge of love, fear is cast out (1 Jn. 4:18). It drives fear, it drives the torment dimension, the insecurity dimension, the condemnation dimension, out of the relationship. But the man or the woman who fears rejection in the sight of God, the born-again believer, hasn't been made mature in the revelation of love. They haven't been made perfect in love. They aren't mature in their revelation of the knowledge of God's heart.

This is the absolute number one problem, in my opinion, amongst the sincere believers in the Body of Christ: they're afraid that God is mad or sad. When they think of God, they think of Him as mad or sad; almost never

do they think of Him as glad when He looks at them. When they think of God in a personal way, they think, “When God thinks of me, He’s either angry or grieved, He’s so sad.” They have this fear in their relationship. Most people I know worship God with a sincere “I love You,” but with a closed spirit, with a heart locked by torment. They go to the worship set and say, “I love You! I love You! I love You! O God, I tell You what, if You’ll forgive me this one more time, I promise that I’ll never ask again! I promise I’ll be a missionary! I’ll do this, I’ll do that, if You just give me one more chance!” They do everything that they can come up with in their religious bargaining, their religious negotiating, to try to motivate God to give them one more chance, and then perhaps God might enjoy them. That’s called torment in their relationship. We call it condemnation or rejection or insecurity with God.

And John says, “Let me tell you something.” He’s speaking as an apostolic leader, using human psychology. He says, “That worshiper that’s driven by insecurity and fear before God hasn’t been made perfect, hasn’t matured at all in their revelation of the burning, tender heart of God for them.” He says, “We have to get them established in that right from the beginning.”

He goes on back in verse 17 and makes this absolutely gigantic statement. He says, “Let me tell you who we are.” He says, “We’re the kind of people, because of the grace of God in Jesus, who will have boldness even in the day of judgment” (1 Jn. 4:17, paraphrased). You could add the word *even*, because the logic of the statement implies it. The Bible describes this in the second chapter of Romans and in several other places. The sincerely born-again community, because of the blood of Jesus, on the day when the wrath of God is fully unleashed, with nothing to diminish it, nothing to hinder it, will have boldness on that day. Your spirit won’t draw back in torment. You’ll have the greatest boldness that you’ve ever had. You’ve seen Him face to face, and you’ve beheld the manner of love; your spirit will be bold on that day! It will shock some of you, the boldness that you’ll have!

John says, “Let’s do the logic: if you have cause for boldness on that day, when the wrath of God in its full display is being vented in full, if you can still find the boldness to cry, ‘Abba! I love You! You love me!’” he says, “if that’s true on that day, how much more should you have boldness in the time when God’s judgments are restrained significantly?”

WE HAVE THE SAME POSITION OF AFFECTION BEFORE THE FATHER AS JESUS

He goes on to make this other statement; it all ties together, but I could never piece it together when I first started reading this verse. He says, “Let me tell you the reason. Here’s why you’ll have boldness on the day of judgment.” Oh! I love this! “This is why you’ll have boldness on the day of judgment: because as Jesus is before the Father, so also are you” (1 Jn. 4:17b, paraphrased).

John adds another dimension. He says, “You stand before the Father in the same affection that Jesus as. Even now you do.” He says, “So also are you even in this world. You have the same position of affection before the Father that Jesus has.”

On the day of judgment, Jesus isn’t going to back away and say, “Oh, no! Father is mad! The whole house had better duck, including Me!” On the day of the Father’s judgment, Jesus will be bold. He has no fear that judgment is going to hit Him—none whatsoever. He has no fear of the wrath of God crushing Him. He’s as bold as a lion on that day.

Here's what John says. He says, "As Jesus is, right now in the present tense, before the Father, so also are you even while you're in this world in a flesh- and-blood body. You have the same position of assurance of God's confidence. And on the day of judgment you'll be as bold as Jesus." I'm talking about in terms of fearing the wrath of God. Yes, some of our works will be burned as though by fire; but we don't fear the wrath of God in that day. We have absolute boldness as children.

Here's what John says: "Listen, guys: your revelation of the love of God is matured in this way—that you have boldness before the wrath of God, in the presence of divine wrath." Why? "Because you've come to understand that you have the same position of assurance of God's affections that Jesus has."

ENCOUNTERING LOVE FROM HIM IS WHAT AWAKENS LOVE IN US

Now, here in verse 18, he goes on to describe the human psychology. He says, "The torment dimension, the fear of wrath, the fear of being cast out, that element of torment is gone! It's out of the equation! You have the chance to mature in the revelation of love" (1 Jn. 4:18, paraphrased). Then he goes on to say, "When you mature in the revelation of God's love, you'll love Jesus with a new passion and you'll overflow in loving people! You can't stop it!"

Then, in verse 19, he goes on to say, "Let me remind you of the fundamental principle: when you encounter His love for you, it awakens your love back to Him." He says, "Encountering love from Him is what awakens love. Encountering His love is what awakens your heart for Him and for others."

Beloved, we need to behold the manner of love that the Father has for us. We need to believe and be convinced of this: the affections of God for us. We need to mature, to perfect, our revelation of love. We need boldness to be awakened in our spirit! The kind of boldness where, even on that day, even in the presence of the full venting of divine wrath, we have the boldness, the assurance that we're not going to hell! The same assurance that Jesus has that He's not coming under that wrath! Because as He is, so also are we—even in a flesh-and-blood body. We have the seal of the Spirit; we have the down payment, the earnest payment, the Spirit in us. We're born again; we're forgiven. Yes, our flesh is weak, but the bigger reality is this: it's sure, it's final, it's forever, it's already in us!

Oh, beloved! When that spirit of confidence touches us, and we mix it with a spirit of servanthood, and with a spirit of dedication and devotion, when we approach the Word of God, when we implant the Word with those four attitudes, I guarantee you, it may take some months, or even a few years, but your heart will begin to flow like a river as you believe in Him as the Scripture says to believe in Him.

Amen. Let's stand.

MINISTRY TIME

Oh, I want boldness; I want boldness in my spirit. We need boldness, don't we? But you know, boldness isn't going to come because you come up at the end for prayer, and we lay hands on you, and all of a sudden, "Boldness!" No, boldness comes because you feed your spirit. You behold the manner of love. You study it. We're students of the affections of God. We feed our spirits on this thing. Every time we get a chance, we feed our spirit. We love this thing! It makes our spirit powerful and mighty.

Let's just posture ourselves. I encourage you to close your eyes. Let's wait on the Lord. I'm going to ask the Lord to drive out the spirit of oppression. See, the enemy wants to shut our hearts down. We're worshiping with a locked heart; we're worshiping with a guarded spirit. That's why we're not connecting. The Lord says, "You have torment in the relationship between you and Me. You think that I'm about to throw you out! I'm not! I really like you!" Feed your spirit on it.

Father I ask You; oh, Holy Spirit I ask You: I ask You for the release of Your presence on us, even right now.

We're just going to wait for a second. Holy Spirit, we ask You for the release of Your presence upon our hearts right now. We hate the spirit of oppression that steals and kills our hearts. We hate it.

I'll ask the Lord to free some of you from a spirit of oppression tonight. The devil comes to steal, kill and destroy (Jn. 10:10). He hates an open spirit in worship. Holy Spirit, we invite Your presence, even now. Come, Holy Spirit.

I want you to pray in your own words, something like, "Father, I agree with Your heart for me. And I resist the spirit of oppression. I resist it." Just talk to Him about that. Take your own stand. No one can do that for you. "Father, I repent of the lies that I've allowed to enter my heart against You—lies that You're mostly mad, or You're mostly sad, or You're grieved all the time. I repent of those ideas about Your heart."

Talk to the Lord. Again, no one can do that for you. No one can get on the inside of you and make you agree with God. You have to do it.

Now, Father, we ask You for a spirit of liberty. I rebuke the spirit of oppression. I rebuke it right now in this room. I take authority over it right now.

Some of you are repenting: "Heavenly Father, I've accused You of the things that were true about my earthly father. I want to repent of accusing Your heart of being like that." We have to break our agreement with lies of the devil against the Father's heart.

Come in power, Lord, right now; come in power, we ask. Come in power right now, we ask. Fire. Come like fire. Rest on the people with the spirit of liberty.

I'm inviting people to come down who are saying, "I love Jesus; oh, I love Him. But I feel that my heart is a bit locked when I worship. I feel like there's a guard on it. The enemy is attacking me on this. And I want to have a fully confident heart." And if you feel that this is an area in which the enemy is trying to strike you, and you would like prayer, I want to invite you to come forward. It's not something to be ashamed of. The devil is committed to locking our hearts.

I'm going to ask the ministry team to come on up if they would. Father, release Your Spirit right now! In the name of Jesus, release power, I ask You! Release the power of Your presence right now, on the human heart!