

## Passion for Christ

### *Prayer*

I'd like to tell you about a young woman in her early forties who gathered her courage up and made the decision to leave her job, to leave the home and work overseas for a missions organization.

But before I do, let me give you some backstory...

This young woman we are talking about was molested as a child lived most of her life controlled by her fears. You would never know there was anything wrong. On the surface she had a bubbly personality, she was bright and cheerful, yet all of this was a mask for her lack of confidence and low self-esteem. This beautiful young woman wanted to get married to a godly man and work together with him on the mission field. Unfortunately, the right man never seemed to come along. So she went.

To her surprise and excitement a single Christian man around the same age who worked for the same missions team began to show her attention. It started with warm smiles, and genuine appreciation for her contributions to the mission's efforts.

He dropped little compliments here and there and suggested that they start getting together for lunches. So they began to have lunch together several times a week...

Now when this started she started to question herself. She felt plain and ordinary. She felt that no one could possibly desire her. Yet, his attentions seemed to have a healing effect and so she continued the lunches and got to know him better. She liked this man. She respected him.

Then came the day... he asked her if she would bless him by allowing him to take her out to dinner. During dinner he could not help staring at her. He had a loving and tender gaze fixed on her. He said to her: "I am sorry for staring at you but you are so beautiful that you literally steal the breath from my lungs."

She could not believe her ears. She thought how could he see me like that? I am not beautiful, I am not pretty; this can't be happening to me, I don't deserve this. So... she opened her mouth to say so and put herself down, but someone stopped her from speaking... God spoke to her and said in a still quiet voice: "He sees you the way that I see you." And she cried.

This morning, how do you see yourself?  
How do you think God sees you?

Do you think he looks at you and cringes?

Is he embarrassed that you are his child?

No... God sees you through the eyes of unending love.

Stay with me here... "Let's say you go to the bank and get a crisp new \$100 bill and put it in your wallet. While you are about your business during the day you pull out your wallet to check to see how much cash you have left and you start to pull that \$100 bill from your wallet. Suddenly a wind picks up and the bill falls and lands in the mud. Do you pick it up it is all muddy? Of course you do! But as you pick up the bill pollen wafts by and you are allergic and so start to sneeze, but the bill is still in your hand. As you raise your hand to stop the sneeze you get mucus all over the bill. In disgust, you drop it and step on it to stop it from blowing away. Small tears form in the bill. When you pick it up, it is slightly ripped, muddy and covered in mucus.

This \$100 bill has been through an awful lot. It has been abused, it is dirty; it no longer is as crisp as it once was. There are tears in it.

If you were the bill, how would you feel? You had been through a lot you would feel disgusting and gross.

Let's say for sake of argument that you go back to the bank... What will the bank give you for the bill? Has it lost any worth? Does the bank still value it the same?

No matter what you have been through, God still values you the same. Your worth has not changed, only your perception of it.

Guys let's say that you go out for the day with your spouse on dirt bikes and have a blast, racing up and down the trails, through the brush and the creeks. Through the mud bogs and so on. You have a blast, but at the end of the day, your beautiful wife is caked in mud, has a few scratches and maybe even a bruise or two... You are delighted with the fun you have had, you love the joy that your time together has brought about and yet she is covered in mud. She looks a bit like the creature from the black lagoon. Do you love her less because of what she has been through? Do you look beyond the mud and the troubles to relish the joy of your time spent together?

Just because we go through stuff and don't always look great doesn't mean God loves you any less. In fact, he is overjoyed that you walked together even though you might not look your best.

So many people abstract God to a "thing" or an "it". They seem to forget that God is a real thinking, loving and caring person. They seem to forget that they are called to be the bride of Christ. God is a deeply passionate being. He came and died for you so that you could be set free. He loves you with an undying love.

Folks my purpose this morning is to reawaken in you an understanding of the vast extravagant passion that he has for you personally.

Long distance relationships are tough. Many of you were once truckers and had to be away at times. I was a project manager/ business analyst and sometimes had to be away from home for weeks at a time. Did you miss that time with your spouse? Were you lonely?

How do you think God feels when he only gets to see and hear from his beloved once a week for an hour or two?

I confess that when I have failed in the past... oh gasp! Surely not you pastor... Yes, even I have made mistakes. In fact, sometimes I have felt like the chief sinner in the crowd. Yet, friends I have come to realize that the affectionate, passionate heart of God swells with joy over us even when we are failing, being stubborn or self-centered.

Anyone else here ever felt like they were coming up short?  
Has anyone else let how they were feeling, about themselves, affect their relationships?

David the psalmist cautioned us...

In psalms 2:11-12 NKJV he says:

Serve the lord with fear and reverence. Kiss the Son lest He (God the Father) be angry and you perish in the way.

This morning do you feel like the bride of Christ? Do you love Jesus? Are you letting your own self-deprecation and in some cases self-loathing get in the way of your relationship with Him?

What is he really saying here?  
Are you a fan of God or do you respect your relationship with him as the bride of Christ?

In Romans we see the free gift from him of salvation. In revelations we tremble at his majesty. Do we kiss the Son of God in response to the affection that he has for us or has the church become apathetic and complacent in her relationship to Christ?

Revival means to bring back life. Do we have life in our relationship with Christ? Does our not embracing who He has said that we are prevent us from experience all that he has for us in this life?

I encourage you to read the Song of Solomon this week. It is a typology of the relationship between Christ and his Church. You will see in the text the clearly

illustrated passion of God for his church and for you. This King's song to his beloved bride gives us revelation and power. It reminds us that God is real and he is passionate about you. He loves you with an undying love. It is that love that will restore the church, bring revival. Will we embrace the bridegroom?

In short, if we are not embracing who he has said we are to him are we sabotaging ourselves in our relationship with him?

There comes a time in the life of every mature and receptive Christian that we become awakened to a holy fervency. If you have great; if not, then a time will come when you get this epiphany and decide to say to God: "Lord Jesus, I am tired of serving you from a distance, I do not care what it will cost me, I do not care what it takes, I want to be wholly yours."

God let's us choose because he loves us...

In context now let us look at Jeremiah 29:11 CEV

*I will bless you with a future filled with hope – a future of success, not of suffering.*

Now NLT

*For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

Today will we embrace our savior and trust his plans or will we choose to do our own thing?

There is a trap for the unsuspecting Christian. The enemy wants us to be complacent. Many today deceive themselves into thinking that they are committed when in fact they are not. Many simply go through the motions; when what God wants from us, his bride is clearly illustrated in the Song of Solomon 2:3-6.

When you think of the church and yourself as the bride of Christ; is our God seen like this:

*Like the finest apple tree in the orchard is my lover among other young men. I sit in his delightful shade and taste his delicious fruit. He escorts me to the banquet hall; it's obvious how much he loves me. Strengthen me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am weak with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.*

Do we see God as precious to us? Do we sit under his banner and enjoy the fruit of his spirit. Do we allow him and the word that he has given us to feed us and strengthen us? Do we allow fellowshiping and ourselves to become refreshed when we are worshipping him? Do we recognize his protection and love? Do we let

him hold us close, do we allow him to enrapture us in his presence or do we allow some aspect of ourselves to hold us back from experiencing the goodness of God.

We have choices. Do we choose well? And if not, why?

I for one want us all to live in the pleasure of his presence.

Turn with me to the Song of Solomon 2:8. I personally like to think of the Song of Solomon as an SOS signal. Help me Lord, I need you. I need to be close to you.

I want to share with you some personal insight that I have managed to glean over the years. In my ministry, I have worked with couples that that have intimacy issues in the bedroom. Let us pause for a blush here... But I want to share with you a 100% consistent thing that I have observed... without fail, every couple that has had trouble with intimacy in the marital bedroom and I am not just talking about sex, but true intimacy, has had intimacy issues in the prayer closet...

If there is a blockage in intimacy in your prayer life, there may be a blockage in the intimacy in other areas of your life as well.

But I digress, let us get back to Song of Solomon 2:8

*The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.*

Beautiful images but what do they mean?

The hills and mountains speak of obstacles that must be overcome such as trials, tribulations, and our growth as Christians. On these hills and mountains are we struggling against satanic principalities and powers or just a self-focused nature? In my opinion it could be either. Are our obstacles things of this world? You know what? None of it matters because our beloved God can surmount any obstacle in our lives.

What is the bottom line this morning?

If you are not burning with passion for God seek him with your whole heart. He has promised you will find him.

Finally, turn with me to Song of Solomon 3:1-3

*On my bed night after night I sought him with whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him, I must arise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares. I must seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him but did not find him. The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me and I said, "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"*

God never leaves us but he does say that he corrects those whom he loves. He is not angry with us, but neither can he allow us to stay in our beds of complacent spiritual immaturity. We may not understand it but God brings us ever forward towards spiritual maturity. Remember... he knows the plans he has for us. He knows what is to come in our lives. God wants us to inherit all that he has for us as mature co-heirs with Jesus.

Ever felt like God had to pry your fingers off of something? Why do we hold so tenaciously to stuff that is no good for us? Parents have you ever struggled to take something out of your child's hands that they wanted to hold fast to? Well... God firmly but insistently woo's us back to what is best for us. Why do we resist so strenuously?

In Hebrews 12:5-13 He tells us: If you knew the glory of all I am and all you are to be, you would never refuse me. Have I ever led you into a place where I could not keep you and provide for you? I will never take anything from you that will not be restored tenfold. My disciplines are good. They seem sorrowful for the moment, but afterward they yield the fruit of righteousness.

NLT:

*And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said,*

*"My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."*

*As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever.*

*For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*

*So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.*

As I close and each of us is examining his or her walk with Christ in light of the intimacy of our relationship with Him, I ask you to also consider that our love for God expresses itself in the intimacy of worship. We need look no farther than the Song of Solomon to see it.

God loves you!

I found these words this week and it spoke to me of the hills and mountains. As we close I hope these words comfort and bless you as you seek him with all your heart:

The deepest level of worship is praising God in spite of the pain, thanking God during the trials, trusting Him when we are tempted to lose hope, and loving him when He seems so distant and far away.

At my lowest, God is my hope

At my darkest, God is my light

At my weakest, God is my strength

At my saddest, God is my comforter.

*Pray*