



1

SESSION

DEEPENING
DESIRE



DESIRE

IT ALL STARTS WITH A SPARK.

The first chapter of Song of Solomon captures it well. Newfound love is an irresistible force. We've all experienced that pleasant tension of meeting someone and knowing that everything is different. Plans change. Priorities are rearranged. The future can no longer be considered without reference to the one with whom we've fallen in love.

It's the same when we begin to walk with Christ. Though the love is of a different variety, it has the same kind of power and pull. We desire a future with him just as we long for a future with a special person.

Just as in romance, there will be highs and lows in the relationship with Christ. Sometimes we'll feel we've grown apart. Other times we'll know we're closer than ever. In both cases, it tends to be about communication. This week we'll be thinking and praying about desire—the right kind of desire for the right kind of person and our desire for the only person who can make life worthwhile: Jesus Christ.

WEEK ONE, DAY ONE

Verse for Today:

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

– Matthew 22:37–38

Welcome! You're about to spend some serious time thinking, reflecting, and praying about love. Not just any love, but your love—for God and for others. How does that idea make you feel?

People have followed Christ for many reasons. Some of us were born into Christian families and never considered any other way. In that situation we would come to realize that our relationship with Christ was a kind of “arranged marriage” spiritually. True love means choosing to follow him, as we would choose to be with the human partner of our choice. Think back to the time when you chose Christ. Reflect for a few minutes on that time. What first attracted you to him?

In today's verses, Jesus laid out the top two priorities of life: loving God and then loving one another—in that order. He went on to say that every other law of life is contained within these two. Spend time today considering that concept in the context of your own life.

Your reflections on that:

JUST A THOUGHT

We become truly personal by loving God and by loving other humans. . . .
In its deepest sense, love is the life, the energy, of the Creator in us.
– Kallistos Ware

Ask God how you can love him more deeply today. Listen to his heart as he tells you, and write your response here:

Lord Jesus, you are love. Everything about your life, everything about your teaching, and everything about following you comes back to your gracious love. It's your mission for me. I want to live it out in a far more powerful way. Help me do that today. Show me at least one way I can love you more deeply.

WEEK ONE, DAY TWO

Verse for Today:

One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

– **Psalm 27:4**

Romantic love often begins with a physical attraction. It's an emotional response to the beauty of another person. It begins as a physical attraction and then becomes a deeper feeling about the love of the total individual as we come to know them better. We are also attracted to the beauty of Christ, but of course it's a different kind of beauty. The more we experience of him, the more we are attracted to his character and his love.

What do you find most beautiful about Jesus Christ?

There is a dramatic difference between physical beauty and the beauty of the Lord. One fades with time while the other is imperishable. The only thing that changes is our ability to perceive the greatness of God as we grow closer to him. How does Psalm 27:4 demonstrate the writer's passion for the loveliness of the Lord?

Notice the three objectives specified in this verse. What does each one mean to you? In the psalmist's world, the temple was the only place where God could truly be worshiped; today, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do so everywhere. What would seeking God mean in your life today and tomorrow?

JUST A THOUGHT

Beauty is God's handwriting.
– Charles Kingsley

Meditate on the beauty of the Lord, and tell God how you feel about that. Compose your own brief psalm about it—in your own words. It doesn't need to be fancy, just sincere.

Lord, all beauty is a reflection of your beauty. I could not even tell light from dark or good from evil if I weren't made in your image. All things bright and lovely remind me of your greatness. Today, help my life to be a beautiful statement about a beautiful Lord.

WEEK ONE, DAY THREE

Verse for Today:

How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

– **Psalm 84:1–2**

When you fall in love with someone, you want to spend time with them. I bet you've never heard a couple say at the wedding, "We plan to have separate honeymoons." There's a self-perpetuating cycle that sets in: The more we love, the more time we want together; and the more time together, the more we love them. It's the chemistry God created for the personal fusion we call a relationship. And it's true of our relationship with him. Can you remember a time when you yearned for more time with God? What was that like?

The psalmist of today's verses was clearly lovesick. He expressed deep emotion in his desire to be with his Lord. If you read the entire psalm, you'll see that he wished he could be like a sparrow making its nest near the altar! Romantic love is one thing, but what, in your opinion, would lead to someone feeling this way about an invisible God?

If you're like most of us, you may be feeling a little uncomfortable about now. You might be thinking, I hurry into church late, my mind wanders during the teaching, and I forget to pray half the time. Why aren't I more like this guy in the Psalms?

Don't beat yourself up; it's called being human. But again, we observe that love, time, and presence are inextricably tied together. Making time for God leads to feeling deeper love for God. Write down one workable strategy for carving out more time for God in your life. And here's a hint: It's not all about focused Bible study and prayer at home. You can also "practice his presence" in traffic, between meetings, while showering, or anyplace else.

So what's your plan?

JUST A THOUGHT

What we think about when we are free to think about what we will—that is what we are or will soon become.

– A. W. Tozer

Today, refuse to focus on feelings about God. Feelings are followers—they always come behind the right kind of action. Focus instead on time spent with God. Try giving him a day in which you're aware of his presence every hour, worshiping him in your mind, asking him how he wants you to minister. Tell him below how you plan to do that:

Lord, time is treasure. I realize that it's my most precious resource, and I want to lay it on the altar as a gift to you. I've come to realize that killing time is a terrible thing, because it has no resurrection. I devote this day to you. Let's live it together in joy and love.

WEEK ONE, DAY FOUR

Verse for Today:

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

– **Psalm 96:3**

Love rarely makes a secret of itself. As a form of joy, it can't be contained; it tends to bubble over. If it's no more than a great restaurant you've discovered, you have to recommend it to all your friends. If it's a mate for life, all your friends and family have to know.

But what if you've met the Lord of creation, the giver of eternal life, the only one capable of transforming us into new creations? How can we keep quiet about that? To love God means to declare him before the world. It's not a matter of obligation any more than a bird feels obligated to fly or a fish to swim.

Yet we often feel reluctance to talk about our faith before others. List a few of the reasons you think this might be so.

Telling others about Christ helps us to love him more. For one thing, we learn to depend upon his power for the boldness we need. Then, as we do so, we find that he gives us the words we need. Every time we declare our faith, we can feel it grow. As we pray for others to come to know him, we feel his affirmation and joy.

Today's verse is one of many that talks about declaring his glory to the nations. We want the whole world to know, but the neighborhood is a good start. The cubicle next to yours at work could be a mission field for you. Take a few moments right now to ask God to bring one person to mind, one acquaintance who needs to hear the name of Jesus this week.

List that name, along with others in your personal circle to whom you could speak.

Marriage is a public event. We invite others to the wedding so we can declare our commitment to the world. Some of us need to “go public” with our faith. That doesn’t mean being obnoxious or pushy, but simply being loving and servant-hearted as we look for the right opportunity to talk about the one who lives in our hearts. How do you feel about that? What can you do to be more comfortable telling the world about your faith?

JUST A THOUGHT

God directs his people not simply to worship but to sing his praises “before the nations.” We are called not simply to communicate the gospel to non-believers; we must also intentionally celebrate the gospel before them.

– Tim Keller

Today, ask God to make you more aware of other people than you’ve ever been. Actually, the more aware of God you are, the more aware of others he will make you, because he wants to speak through you. He wants your friends to know him. Focus on service today, and give the glory to God. In the space below, tell God about your commitment to do that:

Lord, I realize that loving you more means coming to love others more. It's only natural. Help me, then, to look at people through your eyes, to see in them what you see: lost and wandering children who can't find their way home. Give me your love for them, your moment, and your words.

WEEK ONE, DAY FIVE

Verse for Today:

For the grace of God...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

- Titus 2:11-12

One of the great word pictures in the Song of Solomon is that of the "little foxes" who creep into the vineyard and spoil it. The idea is that small things can become big problems in any relationship, whether it's a friendship, a marriage, or a matter of faith in God.

When it comes to being a devoted follower rather than simply a fan of Christ, the world is infested with foxes of every size. We would grow as Christians if not for this; we would serve him more fully if not for that. A time comes when we find we can no longer feel God's presence because we've let too many obstacles, too many unconfessed sins, come between us.

Why do you think it's the "little" things that cause so many big problems in faith?

Paul the apostle wrote a letter to his friend Titus and spoke of the self-discipline involved in following Christ. The grace of God "teaches" us, he said. That's interesting. We aren't simply saved by Christ and left to

struggle along the best we can. This is a relationship, just like marriage, and it comes with the teaching built in. And the lesson described here is one of saying “no” to ungodliness.

As you read this verse, what issues or obstacles in your own life come to mind? Spend some time in reflection, and then list at least one key issue—and describe why you think it has such a hold on your life.

“Self-controlled” means controlling our habits. “Upright” means proper or right, and “godly,” of course, means God’s way. Make these your three “words of the day,” and think about how they would describe the situations and questions you face.

“In this present age” is Paul’s way of saying right here and right now. The past is only a memory, and the future is only on the drawing board. What you have is this moment, this day. Write a few sentences telling God how you’re going to enjoy a fox-free day—or as close as possible—by learning from his grace.

JUST A THOUGHT

Virtue is what happens when someone has made a thousand small choices requiring effort and concentration to do something which is good and right, but which doesn’t come naturally. And then, on the thousand and first time, when it really matters, they find that they do what’s required automatically. Virtue is what happens when wise and courageous choices become second nature.

– N. T. Wright

Now just spend a moment forgetting about all the hard parts and simply experiencing the goodness of God. Remember, we said this is about his grace. That means he has done the heavy lifting! It's good to plan a godly day, but don't get caught up trying it in your own strength. Celebrate God. Thank him for the classroom of today. List some of his special blessings below.

Lord Jesus, you know how far short of perfect I fall, and you died for me anyway. You want each day to be a victory that we share in this present age. I can't imagine how or why you could love me so much, but I want to take hold of it and live this day as a celebration. I will go forward in your strength and love.

WEEK ONE, DAY SIX

Verse for Today

Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.
For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth.

– **Psalm 47:1–2**

This week we've focused on the idea of loving and desiring God. We've looked at the idea from several angles, meaning that we've come to a good time to ask the question, Are we having fun yet?

It's true. Some people focus so much on the process and the structure of following Christ that it becomes a task rather than a relationship. John Piper has said that loving Christ is a honeymoon that never ends—at least it never should. So today is a day for simply stopping to think about the greatness of God, to remember that all at once, he is the awesome Lord

of the universe, great beyond our imagining—and someone who knows us and loves us better than anyone else. Have you clapped your hands about that lately?

In the space below, rewrite the two verses above in your own words. Find a new way to say what the psalmist was so excited about.

Awesome has become such a casual word that it's almost surprising to find it in the Bible. We've seriously devalued it, describing a good pizza or an entertaining movie as "awesome." The dictionary defines it as "inspiring an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, or fear." In other words, we are astounded. We stop breathing momentarily. We are in awe. Write the attributes of God that you find most awe-inspiring, and why.

If the psalmist realized the greatness of God, he would be in awe. But it's the realization that he is our God that makes the psalmist clap his hands and shout! Our God is no uncaring cosmic force. He is love. He is Father. He is Savior and King. He calls us his own and claims the entire world as his kingdom. Not only is he infinitely beyond our comprehension, he is absolutely present and caring. Tell God how you feel about that. Don't be afraid to get excited:

JUST A THOUGHT

Our God is at home with the rolling spheres,
And at home with broken hearts.

– M. P. Ferguson

It's too easy to forget that our days are battles in a war we've already won. Christ has defeated death. He has promised us all good things. It only remains to go out and reclaim the field for his kingdom, victory by victory. We begin with the right mindset when we celebrate his greatness and bask in his love. Claim this day (or tomorrow) as a victory and lay it before him as a gift of devotion:

Lord, I can think of you as the infinite, all-powerful creator, and I can think of you as the loving Lord who walks with me. What I struggle to do is hold both of these thoughts in my limited mind at once. Help me to worship you for your holiness even as I accept your intimate friendship.

WEEK ONE, DAY SEVEN

As our first week comes to a close, let's use today to review and reflect, before moving on toward thinking about increasing our intimacy with God. Take a few moments to revisit this week's entries in your journal. Which of the days, subjects, and Scripture passages were most helpful to you, and why?

What commitments did you make to God for your daily life this week?
And how did you do in keeping them?

Thinking about your daily life—apart from the journal—what was your greatest single victory this week? What would you go back and change, if it were possible to do so? Why?

Thinking about the coming week, what would you like to see happen between you and God? What steps will you take on your end? What would you ask of him?

In the space below, thank God for his goodness and love in the past week. Be bold enough to ask for his blessings in the week ahead. Bring him your requests, and don't forget to pray for your spouse and other people you love.

JUST A THOUGHT

God's end is to enable me to see that He can walk on the chaos of my life just now.

– Oswald Chambers

God wants to do something unexpected, something magnificent, something jaw-dropping with your life. It doesn't matter how untidy or unimpressive it is. Jesus walked on stormy waters, not calm ones. He wants the same kind of miracle for your life, so that people will look and see not you at all, but Jesus on his way to teach and to love them.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the week we've had together. Like all weeks, it has been all about your perfection and my flaws. And still you love me. Still you keep leading me forward to the next week and the week after that. Thank you for the surprises that you have planned ahead. Thank you for loving me. Help me to love and desire you more than anything else in this earth.

NOTES:

