

CHIEF MINISTRIES

August 2014

“Deep” is not a place we visit in our search for God, it’s what happens to us when we find Him.

Greetings from a deeper place!

Well, I love lockdowns! It's always a time of refreshing for me. I can spend more time studying, reading but most of all praying and listening. It's the last two that God has been sharing with me that are of the utmost importance. Granted, they all are; but... It's the last two: praying and listening that the Spirit of God reveals himself in such a way that I'm afraid words can't do it justice. It can only be “experienced”. Please hear what the Spirit is saying.

Most of us dress our Christian faith in an ill-fitting discipleship that, like a cheap suit, leaves us uncomfortable most of our lives. Among our friends at church we struggle to keep our reputation for godliness intact by what I call “busyanity”. We like to appear to be like Jesus without the discipline of really being like Him. Reading all the scriptural self-help books and even learning Greek and Hebrew, we talk ourselves into a spiritual reputation we have never really earned. We continue to live on the surface, only talking of the deeper life. If you were to die today, what would be said about you in your eulogy? Would people be overwhelmed by a need to tell more of your walk with Christ than it would be possible to tell? At the center of all you become, does your affair with Christ defy communication? So it is with all things deep.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, our bogus inwardness is laid bare for all to observe! *"No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." (I Corinthians 2:9)*

Paul is speaking of eternity and all that is futuristic. Here he gives us the final glimpse of what we shall own when we open our eyes to take our first glimpse of heaven. Yet, there is also something of the here and now in that verse regarding inwardness. A way to have heaven (the Kingdom of God) within you. The path to inwardness is too real to be measured by our senses alone - eyes, ears and fingers have their limitations. They are instruments too neural – too tiny - to measure the immensity of being that God has in mind for us. It is futile merely to take a sensory run at God for it will inevitably collide with His fullness. It would be like trying to measure the cubic volume of the ocean with a thimble and a teacup. Yet, how glorious is Paul's description of our inwardness. Those who enjoy it have eyes that see the invisible, ears that hear the inaudible and minds that conceive the inconceivable. Oh, I hope I haven't gotten too deep yet. Stay with me. True spirituality is not extrasensory, it is *ultrasensory*. Where the chamber of our heart ultimately empties itself of self, a new kind of being is born - one that thrills at His presence. There in our inmost being we discover that our own hearts are not chambers but doorways. We just need to climb to the doorway of the heart, put our hand on the latch, and enter into our hidden rendezvous with God. When we've closed the door on our side of reality, we can open it on God's.

I'm from Montana. Big Sky Country. I remember flying back from Europe once and getting over Montana and a Japanese businessman from Tokyo asked me "Does anybody live in all this empty space"? "Not many", I told him, we flew some more. "Nobody"? He asked. "Just a few", I said, "So huge, So beautiful, So vast", he said. I knew what he was saying. So huge, So beautiful, So vast. It's what I feel each time I encounter God. I lie down to sleep, but don't just pray "The Lord my soul to keep". Instead I stalk a greater immensity in a near nightly ritual of euphoria. His blessings swarm about me in a wonderful lightness of being. It is an odd insomnia, sometimes sponsored by sheer joy as he shows me things and talks to me. Usually my mind splashes around a tiny pool of God's grace in my life, but gradually the pool grows into an ocean that is too wide to measure, too deep to fathom. I am adrift on the sea of his endless being. Yet, I always step out into this ocean from the tiny piece of beach of my heart. I am amazed that in the center of my shallow tidal soul I have such immediate access to the vast oceans of His presence. The best answers never come from beyond us. Why? Because God best declares Himself from within us. That is, if we let Him.

God becomes visible to those who look for Him in the right place. Therefore, no eye - no literal eye - can see Him! No ear can hear Him! No mind can conceive Him! He hides His vastness only in the deepest dimensions of our inner existence.

The world around us is the world of "outer" relationships. In such outer places we make friends, achieve pieces of success, get "up" in the world! In this busy, worried world, we have appointments, face disappointments and force our ego driven souls to try and achieve power. We want to run something. On the surface of our lives, things frenzied and crazy that causes indigestion, dominate us. When somebody you feel has wronged you, how many of us let that rule our spirit for days? But in our hearts it's to be quite a different matter.

I Corinthians 2:10 contains one little word that lunges at us with a challenge: *"But God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the "deep" things of God"*.

The apostle' uses the word *bathos* here for deep. Deep is the dwelling place of God. Deep is the character of the ocean. Hold the metaphor for a moment and savor its lesson ahead of time. For deep is where the noisy, trashy surface of the ocean gets quiet and serene. No sound breaks the awesome silence of the oceans heart. Most Christians spend their lives being whipped tumultuously through the surface circumstances of their days. Their frothy lifestyles mark the surface nature of their lives. Let's admit it. The noisy cellie or the guy who doesn't bathe or the one in everyone's business really upsets us sometimes. Yet those who have and go deep learn to let the peace of God rule and reign in their hearts. Deep is the gift of discipline. I cringe when I hear of my Christian brothers that fight over the TV or going to commissary or who's going to be the one to teach next or give the next exhortation.

Bathos is the word I really discovered while scuba diving in Barbados. There is a beautiful reef off the coast of this beautiful island in the southern Caribbean, at first I felt overwhelmed by the odd sensation of standing up only ankle-deep 70-90 miles out in the middle of the ocean. It for me was the odd sensation Peter must've felt when he walked on the Sea of Galilee.

But once my ankle-deep wonder had passed, I remember why I had made the trip. I was with friends. Many of which had to snorkel while a couple of us were certified to scuba. Snorkeling is a past time more than a sport. While I plunged deeply beneath clear water to bury myself in the wonders of the mysterious ocean depths, the others, wearing masks only floated on the surface, face down.

In some ways what we were all seeing looked the same. But most of the snorkelers sunburned their backs in their surface study of the reef, while I plumbed its wonders.

There were other differences in the day. I had spent years learning to go deep. Deep requires years of practice. Deep cannot be achieved instantly on the first dive. The equalizing of head and facial sinuses must be developed gradually, for going deep can be dangerous, even fatal.

What amazes me most is what we reported upon returning from our Caribbean adventure. Ask me if I've been there and I'll say yes, of course. So will my friends. However, the truth is that the content of our experiences was vastly different. We will both spend the rest of our lives talking about the experience and our enthusiasm will always be exuberant. But only I and my friend really "knew" the reef; only we understood the issue of depth.

Abraham Maslow (renowned psychologist) conceptualized the pyramid of priorities. Only a few people, he said, ever become self-actualized. Only a few know who they are and live life to the fullest extent. Only a few live adjusted lives at the peak of his pyramid. In fact, Maslow said the whole world is comprised of non-peakers talking to non-peakers about peak experiences. In some ways it seems to me that much of Christianity is a conversation of snorkelers talking to each other of scuba diving experiences. If mere conversation or study groups or Christian classes were the path to deep experiences, the church would be deep indeed. But it is those who read and pray, not those who philosophize and chatter, indoctrinate with shallow experience, convince and brag to one another how right they are and how wrong everyone else is, who arrive at lives of real power.

The issue is going deep. Deep reveals the reality of God. Yet the snorkelers can use the language of divers, for the metaphors pass close. But they are not the same. It is odd that this state of reality lies so near us. It is utterly accessible, yet only a few ever know it or pass its gates with any regularity. Prayer is the gleaming doorway to the depth.

Why do we shun the grand doors of entrance into God? Busyness is the best answer. Though sometimes we may doubt that prayer really does any good. Sometimes we're angry with God in our hearts and our refusal to pray is our way of saying, "I'll fix him, I won't pray." How much wiser we would be to get rid of our temper tantrums and head directly into the depths.

In the depths of real inwardness lies the treasure. There is little use bragging where we think we are in Christ. Hungering for Christ - conformity is the treasure.

It is perhaps the oddest of paradoxes that "how to" lectures on the subject of inwardness are at risk of speaking beyond experience. Real spiritual divers are so in love with the depths that they don't spend much of their lives trying to make oceanography real in a world where birdbaths define the smaller passions.

The word *bathos* gives its Greek form to the word bathysphere. A bathysphere is a steel-walled diving bell in which oceanographers, armed against the crushing pressure of the sea, may safely descend and study the depths. Not only is the ocean depth quiet and still, it hides a wondrous mystery. Think about the scientists who descend into the heart of the ocean. There has to be a passionate curiosity in such people. They must unravel mysteries. Or, if they cannot unravel them, they must bask in them until utter transcendence washes over them with the only reality that can satisfy them. Hushed by the beauty around them and the vastness, they learn a splendor they can

never communicate to snorkelers. The unfathomable glories of the deep cannot be described to those hooked on the safety of shallowness.

But do seekers of the deep go there to solve or to experience the mystery? In I Corinthians 2:7 and twenty other times in the New Testament, Paul spoke of the mystery of God. We do not go deep to study God, we go deep to taste His reality. In such an experience we cannot define God, for He is not definable. But we do, ultimately, define ourselves. In the depths we meet our smallness, our powerlessness, our need. On the positive side, we discover the folly of trying to find our satisfaction in "surface" relationships. We learn - to our credit - that God does not hide His greatness nor our self understanding in three - hurried minutes of Bible reading a day. We suddenly know that the immensity of God never comes wrapped in contrived public prayers, where many - either consciously or unconsciously - are prone to approve themselves to the listeners at large.

The nobility of much "surface" intercession runs around here, like a boat hitting a sandbar. You see, much of our intercession, like our spiritual lives, is but evidence of our self-infatuation. We are stopped short of the deep hunger to know him by our contentment to play in the shallows of our little "askings". We go to God in prayer and ask Him to do this and to do that. Unlike a scuba master, we have a fear of the depths. Or worse, an apathy (whatever attitude) toward the depths. We can see that the little tidal pools hold no deep adventure. We can even feel the lure of the dark and haunting deep blue of the sea's soul, yet we balk at real inward adventure. Our shallow spirituality holds nothing profound, but it is safe.

"For who among men knows the thoughts of men except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of this world, but the spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (I Corinthians 2:11-12) Let our ordinary senses bring us to discovery. Let them confess their shortcomings. Let our ear be shamed by such silence. Let our eye discover what can't be seen. Let our mind be challenged by the wall of the mystery of godliness. Our smallness then becomes our glory! No! Rather His glory! We have tasted the deep and our interest in the shallow is gone forever. Now we are in pursuit of the living God.

It is a beautiful pursuit! How immediate it can be! Spirituality is not some distant thing for which we have to struggle all our lives. It's quite the opposite, actually. It presumes that deeper living is possible because God is near. Not only is He near. He longs to empower us in a deeper way and lure us even deeper into the splendors of our affair with Him!

But to receive the fullness of Christ, you must empty yourself of your own fullness. It's like the professor who was serving his students some tea. He filled the teacup and kept pouring until the tea overflowed the rim into the saucer. Finally, the student said, "Sir your overfilling my cup"! The professor answered, "well, if you would just empty it, I would fill it with better stuff than this"!

We just keep filling our lives with the same old appetite for spiritual expression, rarely stretching ourselves or expanding our horizons. But the way of the depth is better, believe you me. When we reach for God in love, and God reaches back, He meets us deep in the center of our existence where *"No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him"*.

Come let us enter into the depths:



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