

DESIRE a book written by **John Eldridge**
The journey we must take to find the life that God offers us.

Had you journeyed in those days through those barren lands, you may have seen the sea lion for yourself. Often in the early evening when the heat of the day had gone, he would come and sit upon his favourite rock, a very large outcrop, which allowed him a full view of those lands, as far as the eyes could see. There he would remain for hours into the night, silhouetted against the darkening sky. On nights when the wind shifted to the east, a faint smell of salt air would come to him on the breeze. Then he would smile and close his eyes and imagine himself at the sea once more. As he lay down to sleep, he would dream of a deep blue ocean where he would swim and twirl, diving into the depths and then surfacing feeling the fresh morning sea air on his whiskers. The sea was calling to him.

3. 'Dare We Desire'.

"What do you want?" Jesus of Nazareth

If we read the gospels through the lens of desire, you will see that it was one of Jesus' main themes. He practically shouted it out. He said "I have come that you may have life, abundant life, and have this life to the full!" John 10:10. He was talking about the here and now, not in the distant future. Just examine what he asked each of those who needed healing.

To the shrivelled figure of a man who was laying by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus said to him "Do you want to get well?" Can you imagine what went through this man's mind. "Is this guy for real? I have been lying here for 38 years and you have the audacity to ask me "Do you want to get well? Are you mocking me?" It was as if Jesus were saying to him "Hey there, you without legs, do you want to get up and have a walk around, maybe even dance a little? Who would be so callous to ask such a question? But as the mans eyes began to focus on the man before him, he saw a kind face and those compassionate eyes. And Jesus' voice certainly had no malice in it. Slowly, but surely, all those 38 years of unmet desire were now being confronted head on. All his days he had only wanted just one thing-to walk! Are we missing something in Jesus' question? You don't have to be God to see the obvious. Life for this man could be captured in his one simple unreachable desire: to be able to walk. Jesus' question took the man back into his abandoned desire. Why? Because, it is where we all must go if we want to meet God. Christianity at it's core begins with an invitation to *desire*.

When Jesus came along, he began appealing to peoples desires. Jesus extends the offer to anyone who realises that their current life is not meeting their deep desires. He says "ask, seek, knock." "Come to me and have life." "I am the gate, come on in." "If you thirst, come to me and drink." John declared "In him is life." John 1:4. These are provocative words aimed at arousing our deep desires. Do you not want the life you were made to have? Are you hungry enough to bang on the door? In John 10:10 Jesus was simply saying, look at me and understand, the main purpose of me coming is to bring you the life you want in all its fullness. You will notice in the gospels that it is the people who are not so good at keeping up with the program but who are very aware of their souls deep thirst, they are the ones captured by Jesus' message. It is always, when life is at stake and the answer is within reach, that you see human desire unmasked in all its desperation.

As it was back then, "the good news" has again been lost and buried under a pile of religious teachings and programs that put the emphasis on knowledge and performance instead of life

in him. The gospels are understood today to be about sin management. Right belief is seen as the means to life. Desire is regarded as irrelevant and it is *content* that matters. We have chosen the wrong tree! We are told, know the right thing and do what is right: this is life! We certainly do not need more facts or more lists of things to do in order to get life. All of this drains us of the very energy we so desperately need to pursue the life we desire. We need life, and we've been looking for it ever since we lost paradise. Jesus appeals to our desire because he came to speak to it. If we abandon desire, we no longer can hear or understand what he is saying to us. We have in essence returned to the message of the synagogue and the law. Desire is the enemy. We are told to kill desire and call it sanctification. Jesus said to the pharisees "You load people down with rules and regulations, nearly breaking their backs, but never lift even a finger to help!" Luke 11:46. In contrast, it was David whose soul 'thirsted for God' and 'found joy in his presence' and said 'you have made known to me the path of life'. God said of him "he was a man after his own heart.' It seems that king David got it right. You see, Christianity can not offer anything to the person who is already happy. The good news is meant for those who hunger and thirst for the real life. John said "He who has the son has life!" 1 John 5:12.

Have we misunderstood the story of desire? We misunderstand the good news when we hear it outside the story God is telling. The good news speaks to our dilemma: to have life and where to find it. Where are we in the story? If you will picture for me the story told in the movie *The Titanic* which captured the hearts of nearly all those who saw it, and was possibly one of the most acclaimed films ever made. It is a story of love, romance, adventure, bravery: Eden.

The two lovers are set in a picturesque scene of splendour, magnificence and grandeur. Is this not the life we were all made for? Have we forgotten? Have we not been told? Remember... the sea lion was meant for the sea. But tragedy strikes, the ship goes down in the icy Arctic waters, the hero (Jack) sacrifices his life for (Rose) his beloved. Paradise is lost and don't we know it. But then in the final scene, the Titanic begins to transform before our very eyes. Light floods through the windows, the great and beautiful rooms come to life again, all the great hearts of the story are not dead after all, but quite alive and rejoicing in the ballroom. Laughter and music fill the air. The heroine dressed in white ascends the staircase to embrace her lover. Everything is restored. Tragedy does not have the final word. Somehow, beyond all hope, Paradise has been restored. Is this not our dilemma? Is this not the good news we have been longing for? A return to the life we prize. Is this not what Jesus came to offer us?

But you say, "Doesn't Christianity condemn desire?" Not at all, on the contrary, Christianity takes desire very seriously and refuses to budge from the fact that man was made for pleasure, that his beginning and end is in Paradise, and that the goal of living is to find Life. Jesus knows our dilemma and spoke to it in nearly everything he said. He recognises that desire has gone mad within us, but does not seek to rectify the problem by killing it, but by healing it.. Jesus never said, "The problem with you guys is, you want too much. If you'd just be happy with less, we'd all be able to get along just fine." What he did say was exactly the opposite! We have a realistic God, he knows that ecstasy is not an option, we are made for bliss, and we will have it one way or another. He prefers us to chose him and his way, as the other way does not lead to life but to death.

The parable of the prodigal son is the story of desire. To understand what Jesus is alluding to in this parable is important for us to grasp. Spend a little time to study the three main

characters. See Luke 15:11-32. The younger son who squanders all his inheritance on worldly desires, the father who desires his lost son to return, and the older son who has lived a life of duty and has never asked. It is, however, the younger son who receives redemption. The scandalous message of this story is this: those who kill desire - the legalists, the dutiful - are not the ones who experience the fathers embrace. So the question is: who are you in the story?

For Reflection

John 10:10 I have come that you may have life and have it to the full'

John 1:4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

1. What is Christianity an invitation to? Does that come as a surprise to you? How was Christianity explained to you?
2. Have you understood Jesus offer? What goes through your mind when you read ' If you are thirsty come to me, come and drink....that rivers of living water will flow out from within"
3. What does Jesus mean to you when He says 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full?