

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

This leg of the journey we are about to embark on is probably the greatest source of confusion and pain in most people's lives. Why would God make life so hard? Why won't he just grant me what I desire? Why would he actually set himself against the very things that are so precious to me? As Oswald Chambers says, "It is here in the valleys of our lives, that most of us lose heart and give up." That's why it is important for you to think through these issues. And as you do, keep this one central truth in mind: God is committed to the healing and the freedom of your heart (Isaiah 61:1). He really is FOR you. When you uncover places of hurt or even a sense of betrayal, hold this truth up as a candle to light your way.

It was in May that the winds began to blow. The sea lion had grown used to the wind, and at first he did not pay much heed at all. Years of desert life had taught him to turn his back in the direction from which the winds came and cover his eyes with his flippers, so the sand and dust would not get in his eyes. He knew that eventually the winds would pass. But not this time. Day and night it came, howling with across the barren lands. There was nothing to stop its fury. For forty days and nights without abate the winds blew. And then, just as suddenly as it had begun, it stopped. The sea lion lifted himself up to have a look around. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

Every single leaf had been stripped from his tree. The branches that remained with only a twig or two upon them, made his tree look like an old scarecrow. And I do not need to tell you that there was no longer any shade in which to take shelter. But worse, oh, much worse indeed, was what the sea lion saw next. The water hole was completely dry.

6. The Divine Thwarter'.

"Devise your plan. It will be thwarted." God

John tells how for five years his annual fly fishing trip was thwarted. The first year it snowed that particular week. Next year he moved the date forward and to a new location high up on the Rio Grande. The day before they were to set out, he received a call saying a mudslide had blocked the road. Fishing was not possible. He says "I sensed God had made a counter move and that my king was in danger." The year after that there was a drought and the fish and water holes seemed to just vanish. John began to think "I am losing the game, but I'm not finished yet." The fifth year, a friend arranged access for him and his small group to a private stretch of the Deschutes river, visited each year by only a handful of fishermen. Old Bill, the caretaker told him "This place has not been fished for six months." John thought "Man, this is going to be the best fishing ever." You know what's coming next. Nothing. We caught absolutely nothing. Bill had a funny look on his face as he scratched his chin. "John," he said, "people come from all over the world to this ranch to fish. I've never had a day like this ...ever." Feeling like Jonah, John said, "Bill, this is not about you or the ranch, I'm sure the fishing will be just great tomorrow, after I've gone." Checkmate!

This is the point at which God most feels like our enemy. It seems he will go to any length to thwart the very thing we most deeply want. Life is hard enough as it is, but to think that God himself is actively working against us can be, to say the least, disheartening. Job cried out "What do you gain by oppressing me. You hunt me like a lion and display your awesome power against me."

However, let's be very clear at this point. It is not that every trial or plan in our life that goes wrong is specifically meddled with by God. Much of the heartache we know comes from living in a broken world with broken people. And we have an adversary, the devil, who hates us deeply. Unless we understand our desperate hearts and our incredible tenacity to arrange for the life we want, then these events will just seem cruel.

When we lived in Eden, there was virtually no restriction on the pleasure around us. We had it all, but then threw it away by mistrusting God's heart, by reaching out to take control of what we most wanted. Adam and Eve set in motion a process in our hearts, a desperate grasping that can only be described as *addiction*.

Addiction is defined as: a state of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves a person's will or desire." Desire has gone mad within us. Addiction, as said in the previous chapter, may seem too strong a term for the faithful Christian. If this is so, then simply let it go and give up the things that provide you with a sense of security, or comfort, or excitement, or relief. You will soon discover the tentacles of attachment deep within your soul, and withdrawal will soon set in. Remember, we will make an idol of anything, especially a good thing. So far away from Eden are we now, and so desperate for life, we have come to believe that we must arrange for it as best we can, or no one else will. God must thwart us to save us.

God placed a curse on the ground - in the field, so to speak. So, it is for men that he strikes a blow in the arena of our labour, our strength. A man's deepest desires always relate to his strength, one way or another, and so the curse for a man strikes him at his core. We know the reality of the curse because every man must face ongoing futility and failure. No matter how much a man achieves, it is never enough. And even if you do seem to beat the odds and secure yourself financially, the curse is waiting for you, around the corner, somewhere else in your life - in your marriage or with your children. That is why a man's worst fear is not measuring up.

For women God promises pain and suffering. This is about more than babies and marriage. For every woman lives with relational headaches and loneliness. So God thwarts a woman where it matters most - in her relationships. Are not her deepest tears shed over issues of failed intimacy? A woman's glory is her heart for others, her keen commitment to maintaining relational connections. A woman's impostors are nearly always aimed to fill that ache for love, or pretend she doesn't need love. The writers of soaps know this only too well. And, the worst fear for a woman is abandonment.

The hardest truth for both men and women to learn is: *we cannot out run the curse*, even though we all spend most of our waking hours fighting it with all we've got. We say, sure other people suffer defeat, other people face loneliness, but not me. I can beat the odds. Others get divorced, lose their jobs, kids go off the rails, get into financial difficulties, but not me. When are we going to learn? It simply can't be done. No matter how hard we try, how clever our plan maybe, we cannot arrange for the life we desire. Take a break, set this down, and ask yourself "**Will life ever be what I so deeply want it to be, in a way that can never be lost?**"

Thus, the second lesson we must learn, and in many ways the hardest to accept is: *We must have life; we cannot arrange for it*. But, how do we accept 'it can't be done' with an open heart? How do we sustain desire in the face of ongoing failure and loneliness? It all depends on what we do with hope.

Misplaced hope. *"In this world you will have trouble"* No kidding! Jesus, the master of understatement, captures in one sentence the story of our lives. But he adds, *"But take heart, I have overcome the world."* John 16:33 So why are we not more encouraged, at least for a little while? The reason is that we are *still* committed to arranging for life now. Isn't there a disappointment that John is not going to tell us the seven secrets of how to have a really great life now, today! It can't be done. Not *yet*. And that *yet* makes all the difference in the world because desire cannot live without hope. But you say "But hope in what? for what?" Peter said *"Set your hope fully on the grace given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."* John says, he does not know whether to laugh or cry when he reads this. Fully? We don't even set our hope partially on the life to come! Heaven may be coming, great, but what is it, and who really knows? For most Christians heaven is a backup plan. It is an investment we have made for the future but know nothing about. We are still committed to getting life now. The primary error of most Christians, is that they have not researched at all what Jesus says about his plan for us and our world. And it is because of this they do not understand our role with Christ in his 1000 year reign and our future on this planet governing the universe with Christ and the Father. This is a monumental teaching failure of the current church system and leads to disenchanted, apathetic Christians just waiting to be raptured, instead of being energetic, motivated believers getting on with the task of implementing his kingdom now. If you do not have this revelation firmly embedded in your heart, then how can you have hope? And you can only desire what you hope for!

Back to John's story. Why does God thwart us? Why did he interfere with John's annual fly fishing obsession? John says "It seemed so unfair, so cruel. I mean we're just talking about fishing, for heavens sake. It's not as if I were trying to have an affair. Or was I? The day after the disastrous Deschutes fishing event, John was driving back through the gorgeous country of central Oregon. He stopped his 4 wheel drive just to drink in the beauty of this countryside, the warmth of the sun, the horses grazing, the smell of hay in the meadows, his long buried desire for a ranch of his own surfaced, and out of his heart the thought came to him *"I really could be happy here without God."* He was stunned. The thwarting had finally worked, now he could see what God was after in his heart. All the pieces fell into place. He said to himself *"Oh, now I understand."* God must take away the heaven we create or it will become our hell. John said afterwards "I had not realised before that I really hadn't desired to be an eternal person." He added *"I returned home a different man, not entirely healed, not fully delivered, but still, something deep in me had shifted. The arranging had begun to stop. My eyes were beginning to lift beyond the horizon towards those eternal pastures."* Two weeks later his best friend Brent was killed in a climbing accident. Afterwards, John says, he began to see the hand of God in preparing him for what was coming.

When we see and hear in the news of the daily tragedies that occur, how can we possibly continue to bet on arranging our life in the face of such an overwhelming enemy as death? You could say, it is certainly a testimony to our unlimited capacity for denial. We can come to terms with the death of the aged, but when life is cut short prematurely or in full bloom, we are at a loss to explain it. Each death can only begin to be understood within the larger story God is telling us. Much of that story remains a mystery.

We must come to terms with this second lesson *"We must have life; we cannot arrange for it."* For if we don't the spell will not be broken and we will never discover true hope. John says in one of those truly honest moments, he understood, *"there's nothing now but heaven"*. The distress in the lives of many good believers is the failure to realise and use their holy

imagination of the life that lies before them...the life that lies endlessly for us in the kingdom God. And so, desire cannot live without hope. Yet we can only hope for what we desire. There simply must be something out there on the road ahead of us, that offers the life we prize. To sustain the life of the heart, the life of deep desire, we desperately need to possess a clearer picture of the *that* life which lies before us.

For Reflection

John 16:33b "In this world you will have trouble.... But take heart I have overcome the world."

1 Peter 1:13 "Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed"

Q1. What is it God thwarts? What is John referring to in his comments about playing chess? What chess game are you playing with God?

Q2. Which of your prayers has God not answered? What needs or desires has he seemed to ignore? What is your heart's real reaction to that?

Q3. On a deeper level, what would feel like death for you to lose in your life right now? What would cause your heart to sink if God told you to give it up?

Q4. What is your reaction to both a) the curse of man b) the curse of woman. What are your deepest fears as a man or as a woman?

Q.5 What is the second lesson we must learn?

Q6. Why does God thwart our plans? Why does he take away the heaven we create? And if he has taken it away, have you come to a place in your heart where you can say, honestly, ...thank you God for thwarting me?