

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

8. The Grand Affair.

"Happiness can be found neither in ourselves nor in external things, but in God and in ourselves united to him." Pascal

This chapter is about God's love for us. His holy, violent, passionate love for us. It is about his longing and desire for intimacy with each of us. As such, this chapter seems to be an interruption in our journey of desire. The sea lion has nothing to say. I am not surprised. God does not want 'small talk' from us, he wants to rip off our clothes, so to speak, and have intimacy with us. Scary!

Within our hearts we carry many desires. But the deepest of them all is our longing to be loved, to be loved by another human being. This desire within each of us has been set there by the father. It is in the deep centre of our being that we call the heart. While our desire for human love is valid it is a shadow or substitute for being loved by him.

The desire for human love has caused the human race more pain than any other, and that is why the offer of a life in a community of real love, is the most stunning of the promises given to us about our future. To fully appreciate what promise there is for our hearts in the coming kingdom, we must grasp two things - how deeply we desire to be loved and what God has promised us in that regard.

In creating a man and a woman in his own image, we know God was up to something more than just making a masculine and feminine representation of his person. Every attribute of a man and a woman when combined gives us a picture of our heavenly father. It may not be a very good picture but it is given us so that we have better understanding of his complete nature. Also, in showing us the incompleteness of a man or woman by themselves, God is hinting that he is incomplete without union with us. He does not need us but his ultimate plan is to have a family of his own.

To demonstrate this union, God's design was that the two should become one flesh. The physical oneness was meant to be the expression of a total interweaving of being. John says "The passion that spousal love evokes is instinctive, irrational, intense, and dare I say immortal. I mean, Troy didn't go down in flames because someone lost a pet!"

What are we looking for in the opposite sex? There are many physical images given to us in Song of Songs. Like "Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills; my lover is like a gazelle or a young stag" and "your mouth is lovely, your two breasts are like two fawns." God does not muck around in his descriptions, but there is much more than just the physical attraction.

In the opening scene in the film 'Last of the Mohicans' we see Nathaniel. It is a pure image of God's masculinity in motion. Then, we get a glimpse of Cora, the heroine, she is British, dark eyes and beautiful and the contrast between her and the warrior hero is evocative. In a later scene in the movie, Nathaniel says to Cora, before he leaps into the waterfall to avoid capture, 'wherever you go, wherever you are, I WILL find you'. Does this sound like God's pursuit of us? I will find you, whatever it takes, and you will be my bride. It is small wonder that human love, including its sexual passion, surpasses all others as the source of the world's most beautiful poetry, art, and music. John says, granted, much of it is hyperbole, expressing more dream than reality. But that is precisely the point. It's not just hormones. It is a clue to a deeper reality, a reach for something that does currently exist. This exotic intimacy is given to us as a picture of something else, something truly out of this world.

We see in this stunning portrait of total union, the man and the woman becoming one, and this is precisely what God is seeking with us! God creates mankind for intimacy with himself, as his beloved. Throughout the Old Testament we see God relentlessly pursuing his bride - the Jews. Time and time again they are 'adulterers' but because of his pure love he still wants them back, and fights for his beloved. When Jesus arrives on the scene, he announces himself as the bridegroom. We, the beloved, have become betrothed to the bridegroom.

The consummation of the affair. The older Christian vows contained these amazing words: 'with my body I thee worship'. Maybe our forefathers understood sex far better than we do! To give yourself over to another, passionately, nakedly, to adore that person body, soul and spirit-what else can this be but worship? Why else would sexual ecstasy become the number one rival to communion with God? The best impostors succeed because they are nearly indistinguishable from what they are trying to imitate. We worship sex only because we don't know how to worship God. This spiritual intercourse with God is the ecstasy hinted at in all earthly intercourse, physical or spiritual.

We know men in particular have a hard time in relating to the bridal imagery used in scripture. We have grown cynical, as a society, about whether intimacy is still possible outside of sex. We live for an experience of worship that fills our beings with a joy that is so deep in awe that we are barely aware of ourselves - many people have a hard time conceiving this kind of intimacy with God.

It is a mystery almost too great to mention, but God is the expression of the very thing we seek in each other. We bear his image; we are a living portrait of him. Indeed we are, and in a most surprising place-in our gender! This would not go down well with the gender benders. John says -follow me closely now. Gender - masculinity and femininity is how we bear the image of God. God does not have a body, so it must be at the level of the soul, our spirit-the eternal part of us that reflects God in us. There are numerous examples in the Old Testament of God's strength. Is he not the source of all masculine power? Is he not a great warrior? Men bear that image of God in their dangerous, yet inviting strength. Woman, too, bear the image of God, but in a much different way. Is God not a being of great mystery and beauty? One of John's students enquired, 'Is there sex in heaven?' He replied "It would be better to ask, Is there worship in heaven?"

It is a manifestation of the humility of God that he creates a kingdom so rich in love that he should not be our all, but that others should be precious to us as well. He gives us the joy of community, of family and friends to share in the Sacred Romance. Is it not the nature of true love - to be generous in love? When we come to discover that others mean so very much to us, we find that, there is no joy like the joy of reunion because there is no sorrow like the sorrow of separation. To those we love and wonder if we shall ever see them again, is this not our deepest grief. John says of grief ' I have tasted grief and drunk from its bitter cup...but much of our grief comes because we have not dislodged that 'if' from our hearts. Once we grasp the disregard that Jesus and the new Testament writers had for 'physical' death it suddenly makes sense...that Jesus abolished death - he simply did away with it!

God has a great reunion planned. The setting for this will be a great party, the wedding feast of the Lamb. Get a picture of an Italian wedding for starters. There will be feasting and dancing...and there is drinking. Jesus said I will not drink again until the kingdom of God comes - then I will pop the cork! What a party! Imagine catching up with all those folks and

sharing yarns long into the night (is there any night?). It may go on for days...weeks... months... forever. It is time to start dreaming about this party and getting ready for it.

For Reflection

Q1. How often do you feel deeply and truly known, or do you at all?

Q1. What is it you are looking for in the opposite sex?

Q2. God gave us sex as a picture of something even deeper? What's your reaction to that idea?

Q3. Does the thought of a deeper intimacy with God entice you or scare you?

Q4. What is your idea of worship? What has been your personal experience of it?

Q.5 What does it mean to know God as your lover?

Q.7 Do you think you will be at the wedding feast of the Lamb? Will you be a wedding guest or an onlooker?