
Be Still.

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION 53

A Sacred Thirst

Jay N. Forrest



“A theology of Christian growth must have room for crises and dramatic workings of the Spirit as well as for the slower maturing of His fruit called sanctification.”

CHARLES E. HUMMEL

“Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

2 Tim. 2:10

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2).

The panting deer is used by the psalmist to express his inner thirst for God. But let us in the beginning call for a distinction in the mind of the reader between a God-void and a sacred thirst.

Every man without God has a void, an emptiness within his being. This inner hollowness leaves within him a restlessness that simply will not be hushed. The vacant chambers of his inner man are without life, peace, and the Spirit of the living God. Rather than face this inner emptiness, the sinner fills his life with noise and every other thing, in an all out effort to drown out this nagging barrenness. There are many God substitutes, all claiming to fill this barren wilderness, but none avail. Man resists facing this emptiness, and so runs from one diversion plan to the next, till it is either too late, or it’s time to face the facts. In the case of the latter, he realises that only God can fill the emptiness in his soul.

The distinction between a God-void and a sacred thirst is vital. For the once born experience the first, while few, even of the professed twice born, really experience the second. It is to our second class of creatures that our text speaks most unmistakably. To those who thirst not, that something is out of kilter, and to those who thirst, to thirst even more deeply.

The Psalmist says that his longing for God was like the longing of the deer for the water. I call this a sacred thirst, by which I mean, that uncomfortable and often distressful feeling caused by a holy desire and pressing need for God and His refreshing presence. This is characterised by a sensation of dryness in the things of the world, which causes the earthly things to ‘grow strangely dim’.

Truly thirsty souls are those who inwardly sense the emptiness around them, and so they run to the Waters of Life. They literally pursue God as God pursues them. In fact, they would never pursue unless pursued. It is indeed a paradox that the God thirsty have found God and yet are always pursuing Him, always having and yet always desiring.

As the smell of a brook, so cool and refreshing, brings a thirst to the deer’s mouth, how much more should God, in whose presence is peace and joy unbounded, drive an arrow of thirst to our dried hearts. What deep affection should flow out of our hearts for this awesome Fountain of Life. It is a truth, this sacred thirst can be satisfied by no less than the glorious presence of the Most Holy God. Truly deep calls unto deep.

Too often we lose this sacred God-thirst and are lulled into the pit of self-satisfaction and religious head knowledge of mediocre Christianity. There are, indeed, too few that thirst deeply for the Divine presence, deeply enough to turn their backs to amusement, recognition, and self-respect. Such a one is but a dusting upon the pages of modern history, and is, no doubt, a thorn in the flesh to religious worldings.

A true sacred thirst will draw one to Christ, to the Father’s loving presence, to a spirit of humility, love, and self-denial. But this is, beloved friend, almost gone from our midst. •



Quotes from

Shadow of the Almighty

by Elisabeth Elliot • PART TWO

“They have cradled you in custom, they have primed you with their preaching, They have soaked you in convention, through and through;

They have put you in a showcase; you’re a credit to their teaching—but don’t you bear the Wild?—it’s calling you.

“The great mistake is in preaching to our fellow-believers, ‘Come ye out from among them and be ye separate,’ with the suggestion that they should come out to us and be separate. It struck me forcibly that only Almighty God can make that exhortation—for only He is above and beyond all our petty walls of party separation. Our exhorting should conform to Hebrews 13:13, ‘Let us go forth unto Him.’”

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.’ ‘In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.’ I think the devil has made it his business to monopolise on three elements: noise, hurry, crowds. If he can keep us hearing radios, gossip, conversation, or even sermons, he is happy. But he will not allow quietness. For he believes Isaiah where we do not. Satan is quite aware of the power of silence. The voice of God, though persistent, is soft...”

Sheep - Destined for the Altar

“We lack the intensity of feeling deeply, that sense of inevitable *must* which Christ possessed, the zeal for God’s house which consumed him. How long shall we sit analysing, questioning, arguing, discussing, before God lays hold on us with power to thrust us out to the billion and a half who have not yet heard? But one can pray—and I ask this of you *all*.”

“We are the sheep of his pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His

courts with praise.’ And what are sheep doing going into the gate? What is their purpose inside those courts? Those sheep were destined for the *altar*. Give Him thanks, then, that you have been counted worthy of sacrifice. Enter into the work with praise.”

Goaded by God

“One word from his righteous lips will speak destruction to this vast rebellion we call the human race. One peal of his vengeful laughter will rock the libraries of our wise and bring them crashing to a rubble-heap. What shall abide that day? ‘He that doeth the will of God abideth forever.’ Church of God, awake to your Bridegroom! When will you learn that fullness without him is vacuum? Oh, the awful emptiness of a full life when Christ stands yet without.”

“God grant us grace that we may learn travailing intercession... Paul wrote to the Philippians that although they were not in bonds, nor in open battle with the enemy, *their faith was*, and he exhorts that they should enter into the conflict of the gospel, since it was given them not only to believe, but also to suffer for Christ’s sake. So let us strive together with them.”

The Test of Free Time

“Mingled feelings of ‘not belonging’ and of thanksgiving for all God’s grace these past four years [of college]. God, preserve me from living a life which conforms to the general pattern. Oh, to live above the world, ‘in public duty and in private thinking’, as J. G. Holland puts it.”

“Confession of pride—suggested by reading David Brainerd’s Diary—must become an hourly thing with me. How vile and base my thoughts have been lately. Not just unkind or unsympathetic, but rotten, lewd thinking that cannot be overcome simply by *willing* to be rid of them. How dare I minister to God’s saints in such a condition? Lord, rebuke my flesh and deliver my heart from evil.”

“I must confess much leanness of soul today, oh Patient Shepherd. How often I have been angered at delay, short-spirited, anxious to criticise. I noticed tonight, too, that one does not live to himself in this regard, but that a little leavening of dissatisfied temper will spread through a group and change outlooks. Then too, Meek Saviour, I must bring a boisterous tongue, roguish lips to Thee for cleansing. Oh to be holy! Just to sense for a moment that I have somehow, however feebly, simulated some measure of Thy character, Lord Jesus. A word from Horatius Bonar spoke to me tonight: ‘Holiness is not austerity or gloom; these are as alien to it as levity and flippancy; it is the offspring of conscious, present PEACE.’”

“Realised today that I am on a very stiff trial—it is the test of free time. The Lord took away all outward activity. No work, no money to spend, nothing to do. I fear lest I should waste such days. Spent this one in writing, reading, and a little prayer.”

“Last night those great, sweeping desires for the glory of God seized on me, seasons when the thoughts pour ahead of the words in prayer and my attitude is as one heaving great gasps of want. Desire is there aplenty. Words are few at such times and faith, I must admit, is not really great. I see the value of Christian biography tonight. It stirs me up much to pray and wonder at my nonchalance while I have not power from God. I have considered Hebrews 13:7 just now, ‘consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith.’ “One of the great blessing of heaven is the appreciation of heaven on earth. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Impelled by These Voices

Impressed with Ephesians 5, ‘understanding what the will of the Lord is’, and Romans 12, ‘proving what is the will of God’. Every moment I may be conscious of and rejoice in the knowledge of God’s will. Obedience to every command puts me on the track and keeps me there. Decisions of course must be made, but as in railroad, so in life—a red signal, a crisis, is lighted only where there is a special need. I may not always be in sight of a ‘go’ light, but sticking to the tracks will take me to where the next one is. Understanding the will of the Lord is believing Him, that he will—in all situations where I have obeyed—make that way His own way, effectual for eternity.”

“These are days of vision for me, days wherein are revealed to me those great ‘oughts’ which must be if Christ is to have glory. Partly they are revealed in what I see around me by way of departure from the Word of God in practice. Partly they are known in the reading of the Scripture as I see the ideal and its beauty in days past. Oh, what manner of men we ought to be in light of what is now on us! Lord, Thou hast spoken once and again in my soul. What ought to be can be. And I believe. Vindicate Thy Name, Thy Word, Thy pattern by accomplishing these many ‘oughts’ I see but afar off.”

“He is God who regards kings and rulers as very small factors in the affairs that concern His work. And I think that we can afford to share that attitude with Him. This is not to say they will not try to shut the door. It is simply to say that God will keep it open, regardless of who tries to shut it, and how hard they try.”

“Men who live and never understand what they were created for may be said indeed to be ‘dead’ as the Scriptures say.”

“I do not wonder that you were saddened at the word of my going to South America. This is nothing else than what the Lord Jesus warned us of when he told the disciples that they must become so infatuated with the Kingdom and following Him that all other allegiances must become as though they were not. And He never excluded the family tie. In fact, those loves which we regard as closest, He told us must become as hate in comparison with our desires to uphold His cause. Grieve not, then, if your sons seem to

desert you, but rejoice, rather, seeing the will of God done gladly. Remember how the psalmist described children? He said that they were as a heritage from the Lord, and that every man should be happy who had his quiver full of them. And what are arrows for but to shoot? So, with the strong arms of prayer, draw the bowstring back and let the arrows fly—all of them, straight at the Enemy's hosts. Does it sound harsh to speak so? Surely those who know the great passionate heart of Jehovah must deny their own loves to share in the expression of His. Consider the call from the Throne above, 'Go ye,' and from round about, 'Come over and help us', and even the call from the damned souls below, 'Send Lazarus to my brothers, that they come not to this place.' Impelled, then, by these voices, I dare not stay home while Quichuas perish. So what if the well-fed church in the homeland needs stirring? They have the Scriptures, Moses, and the Prophets, and a whole lot more. Their condemnation is written on their bankbooks and in the dust on their Bible covers. American believers have sold their lives to the service of Mammon, and God has his rightful way of dealing with those who succumb to the spirit of Laodicea."

The Pattern Tested

Of his first Bible study [in Indiana] he wrote: "I felt at liberty to lay the cards on the table and flatfootedly blurted out something about the New Testament church pattern. Most of them were stunned, but came back eagerly for more. Have been visiting some of their homes since, and find a real stirring among half a dozen families, a hunger for the Word. Many are bound by traditional organisation patterns and, although they feel something is wrong, are fearful of breaking the accepted modes of worship. Of course, I am already branded as a propagator of some new sect, but to this I exultantly reply in the words of the apostle on a similar charge, 'But this I confess to thee, that after the way which they call a 'sect', so serve I the God of our fathers.' I charge you to pray for the saints here. God must do the work of centring their lives in Christ. None know the Scriptures well because of the devilish schemes of the clergy to keep them from thinking for themselves. Do pray for wisdom and grace for me that my witness might be effective for the glory of the Man at God's right hand."

"Ignorance of the Truth is the general status of church-goers hereabouts. I know that my time is limited, and unless someone else moves here to help them, there is little chance of their going on. Oh that God would shake up some of those married couples around Portland with their prim unconcern for souls and saints, dabbling with building lots, houses, jobs, babies, silverware—while souls starve for that they know! God shall not hold us guiltless, either. 'He shall suffer loss.' What is needed here is a family to move in, take work, open the home, and teach the Truth without reference to unscriptural patterns of 'church'. The urge comes on me

at times to write in scathing terms articles for these piddling little magazines of 'comfort and kind words for God's little flock'—Baloney! When are we going to rise like men and face the world squarely? This drivelling nonsense which condones inactivity because of the apostasy of the day needs a little fire to show up the downright ungodliness it hides. We cuddle around the Lord's table as though it were the last coal of God's altar, and warm our hands, thinking that will appease the wrath of the indignant Christ when He charges us with the unmet, unchallenged, untaught generation of heathen now doing their Christmas shopping. It makes me boil when I think of the power we profess and the utter impotency of our action. Believers who know one-tenth as much as we do are doing one hundred times more for God, with his blessing and our criticism. Oh if I could write it, preach it, paint it, anything at all, if only God's power would become known among us! Ichabod."

Where is Thy God?

"For youth there is special wretchedness; for then the powers within conflict most bluntly with the powers without. Restraint is most galling, release most desired. To compensate for these, youth has special powers. 'I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you; and ye have overcome the Wicked One.' Unusual strength is a premium for youth; acuteness and retentive powers are more real in youth; victory sweetest in youth. Lord, let me live to the hilt, exerting all its force, loosing all its fire. In Solomonic wisdom, I would rejoice in youth, yet remember my Creator." "There is that restlessness, that itching, urging discontent in me this morning. The milk of the Word curdles before me or seems to sour within. hatefulness and rebellion against all restraint is not far from the surface; and it is good that I am not alone here. 'Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.'"

"Feel that I must write something tonight in praise of the God of delights. The day passed slowly, all with a sense of waiting on God for His time. All day the sun dropped hints of Spring, and at dusk, exulted in the distinct wall of purple—the Ozark foothills—close-guarded by the unblinking Venus. The night spread black and blossomed brilliantly with stars. I walked out to the hill just now. It is exalting, delicious. To stand embraced by the shadows of a friendly tree with the wind tugging at your coat-tails and the heavens hailing your heart—to gaze and glory and to give oneself again to God, what more could a man ask? Oh, the fullness, the pleasure, sheer excitement of knowing God on earth. I care not if I ever raise my voice again for Him, if only I may love Him, please Him. Perhaps in mercy He shall give me a host of children that I may lead through the vast star fields, to explore His delicacies, whose finger-ends set them to burning. But if not, if only I may see Him, touch His garments, and smile into my Lover's eyes—ah, then—not stars, nor

children shall matter—only Himself."

The Hand is On the Plough

"Terribly depressed after preaching tonight. Felt as though I had no preparation, no liberty, no power. Once I felt compelled to stop during the sermon and tell the people I didn't have a message from God, but then thought better of it, or rather thrust it from thought altogether. I never want to preach that way again. Lord God Almighty, let me speak Thy word as going forth out of Thy mouth. How sadly and slowly I am learning that loud preaching and long preaching are not substitutes for inspired preaching. Oh, it's awful. To see a room full of people, waiting to hear a word from God, and to have no word. And then to try to make up for it by jumbling unripe, untested ideas with old, dry words, and to know that your heart isn't in it. El Shaddai! Deliver! Worst of all, the people can't even seem to tell the difference when I feel the Spirit and when I can't. Either I'm a frightful bluff, or the people are utterly undiscerning . . . maybe all of both."

"Fate and tragedy, aimlessness and just-missing-by-a-hair are part of human experience, but they are not all, and I'm not sure that they are even a major part, even in the lives of men who know no Designer or design. For me, I have seen a keener force yet, the force of Ultimate Good working through apparent ill. Not that there is rosiness ever; there is genuine ill, struggle, dark-handed, unreasoning fate, mistakes and if-onlys. But in them I am beginning to discover a Plan greater than any could imagine."

"Just finished *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. A most intriguing work which raises some problems for a Christian. Realistic, psychologically penetrating, compactly detailed, it represents a literary landmark for me for its style alone. Would that I could be as aroused about experiencing God in life as these modern writers are aroused at just experiencing life. They make no comment, draw no conclusions, point no moral; simply state things as they are. perhaps it is for this very lucidity that they hold such grip on me. Must we always comment on life? Can it not simply be lived in the reality of Christ's terms of contact with the Father, with joy and peace, fear and love full to the fingertips in their turn, without incessant drawing of lessons and making of rules? I do not know. Only I know that my own life is full. It is time to die, for I have had all that a young man can have, at least all that this young man can have. If there were no further issue from my training, it would be well. The training has been good, and to the glory of God. I am ready to meet Jesus. Failure means nothing now, only that it taught me life. Success is meaningless, only that it gave me further experience in using the great gift of God, Life. And Life, I love thee. Not because thou art long, or because thou hast done great things for me, but simply because I have thee from God." ■

T O B E C O N T I N U E D

God Plays Favourites

The apostle John wrote, in the prologue to his Gospel, “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” Another sentence, in his first epistle (4:12), begins exactly the same, “No one has ever seen God,” but follows with this astonishing assertion: “...but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” Older translations render the phrase, accurately, “his love is perfected in us.” It is a rather staggering notion that God has chosen ordinary people as the preferred medium to express his likeness—his love—to the world.

Yet the world God loves may never see him; our own faces may get in the way. I have long been disturbed by Dorothy Sayers’ comment about God’s three greatest humiliations. The first humiliation, she said, was the incarnation, when God took on the confines of a physical body. The second was the Cross, when he suffered the ignominy of death by public execution. The third humiliation is the church.

When I first read her comment, historical images came to mind: the Crusades, pogroms against the Jews, the Wars of Religion, slavery, the Ku Klux Klan. All these movements claimed Christ’s sanction (one slave ship even sailed under the name *The Good Ship Jesus*), but the humiliation continued in our century in places like the former Yugoslavia, South Africa, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland, where some of the earth’s meanest conflicts involved Christians. Closer to home, I need only examine my own life to see the extent to which God humbles himself by dwelling with ordinary people.

Sadly, the watching world judges God himself by the actions of those who bear his name. Charles Swinburne’s poem “Before a Crucifix” describes the “man-eating beasts” that prowled around the tree of faith and kept him from belief.

*Though hearts reach back
and memories ache,
We cannot praise thee for their sake.*

Nietzsche said it bluntly, “His disciples will have to look more saved if I am to believe in their Saviour.” The church is indeed God’s humiliation, making the world safe for hypocrisy.

* * *

Although we cause God humiliation, we also bring him pride. Lately I have been noticing a few fascinating phrases that convey God’s sense of pride, even delight, in people who remain faithful to him. I reviewed those passages, searching for characteristics common to God’s “favourites.” For example, the Angel Gabriel told the prophet Daniel to his face that he was “highly esteemed” in the heavens. In a speech to Ezekiel (chapter 14), God himself confirmed the judgment, listing Noah, Daniel and Job as three of his favourites. Those three make for an interesting trio: one survived a flood, one a lion’s den, and one a personal holocaust of suffering.

In fact, I noticed that most of God’s favourites underwent a severe test of faith. There was Abraham, called “a friend of God,” who spent most of his life waiting impatiently for God to keep his promises. The Virgin Mary, too, “found favour with God,” but, as Kierkegaard reminds us, “Has any woman been as infringed upon as was Mary, and is it not true here also that the one whom God blesses he curses in the same breath?” In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard expounds on the anxiety, distress and paradox that marked Mary’s life.

Of course, the Bible points to Jesus as the one in whom God took most pride. “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,” said a voice like thunder from heaven. He, the Suffering Servant, surely fits the pattern; it was Jesus, after all, who embodied the other two great humiliations of God.

The same pattern of faith under fire surfaces in Hebrews 11, a chapter some have labelled “The Faith Hall of Fame.” There, the author records in grim detail the trials that may befall faith-full people, concluding, “The world was not worthy of them.” Hebrews adds this intriguing evaluation of its impressive assemblage: “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.” For me, that phrase puts a reverse spin on Dorothy Sayers’ remark about God’s humiliations—the church has borne God shame, yes, but it has also brought him moments of pride, and the gaunt saints of Hebrews 11 demonstrate how.

Saints become saints by somehow clinging to the stubborn conviction that God deserves our trust, even when it looks like the world is caving in. The saints of Hebrews 11 placed their hope in a better country, a heavenly one, and for that reason God was not ashamed to be called their God. Paradoxically, faith develops best amid uncertainty and confusion—if you doubt that, read for yourself the life stories of the people recorded there. God’s favourites, especially God’s favourites, are not immune from times of testing. As Paul Tournier said, “Where there is no longer any opportunity for doubt, there is no longer any opportunity for faith either.”

When I finished my study of God’s favourites, one fact stood out above all others. Those people hardly resembled the healthy, prosperous, pampered saints I hear described on religious television. The contrast was striking, and it puzzled me for a time. Perhaps here is the difference: religious television must concern itself with pleasing an audience of thousands, even millions. God’s favourites are singularly devoted to pleasing an audience of just One.

To be commanded to love God at all, let alone in the wilderness, is like being commanded to be well when we are sick, to sing for joy when we are dying of thirst, to run when our legs are broken. But this is the first and great commandment nonetheless. Even in the wilderness—especially in the wilderness—you shall love him.

(Frederick Buechner)

from Philip Yancey’s *I Was Just Wondering*

No Love Without Grief

“Tell us, fool, who knows more of love—the one who has joys from it or the one who has trials and griefs? He answered: There cannot be any knowledge of love without both of them.” (Ramon Lull, *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*)

When I imagine that I want to learn to love God—and to love my husband and others whom God has given me to love—let me test the desire of my willingness to accept trial and grief. If I can welcome them—Yes, Lord!—and believe God’s purpose in them, I am learning the lesson of love. If I cannot, it’s a fair indication that my desire to love is a delusion.

—ELISABETH ELLIOT