

A Beautiful Ache

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In continuing my theme on God's love, I asked myself, "What situation most profoundly impacted me with a deeper understanding of God's love?" The event that comes to mind was an unusual and memorable experience. It happened during a private time of silent reflection. In my mind's eye, I saw Jesus standing before me. He brought his hands up to his chest and opened his rib cage as one would open a hinged clamshell. Inside, I saw his beating heart. As I gazed upon his heart with astonishment, I was transported into its interior and found myself in a stormy ocean. With each forceful beat of his heart, the turbulent waves surged and crashed against me. I understood that these waves were God's love for me. But this love was wild, powerful and unrelenting, not the tender, maternal love we normally ascribe to God.

In my book, "Four in the Garden," I wrote a scene based on this experience. Here is an excerpt:

"As each fierce wave engulfed me, I sensed an intensity of love, untamed, driving, even painful. I felt Creator's raw desire for me, a perpetual ache of intense yearning for union. Beyond imagining, and yet so real, I discovered Creator's love to be powerful, passionate, and relentless, coursing through His being like a mighty river that carves canyons in pursuit of its destination. In this vision, I was the target of Creator's ardent pursuit, of His anguished longing to be united with Him."

What strikes me the most is the intensity of God's longing. It surpasses strong desire. It's an agonized yearning that seems unquenchable. It's the longing of a lover for their beloved. It had never occurred to me that God aches for me, aches to be united with me as if the entire universe suffers until this love is consummated.

The Bridegroom's Longing

The Bible refers to God's people and church as Christ's bride. Paul writes, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I am

speaking with reference to Christ and the church." – Ephesians 5:31-32. Paul infers that Christ and his church shall become one in the way that a husband and wife become one. He is using the example of marriage to describe our relationship to God. I believe that the sacrament of marriage is given to us to foreshadow our eventual union with God. The Bible mentions a wedding feast to celebrate this future holy union. "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb (Jesus) has come..." – Revelation 19:7.

We see an example of Jesus' longing in Matthew 23:37. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." Jesus longed to gather God's people to himself. God, the Father, shares this same longing.

God longs for this union with the intense yearning of a bridegroom who looks forward to his wedding night. God aches for intimacy with us, for a space where both are vulnerable and see each other's naked selves, stripped of concealments. Our destiny is for intimate union with God. This future mutual "knowing" is expressed in Corinthians 13:12. "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face (with God). Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." I believe that God desires to be fully known by us, but only to those who seek to know him.

Being Desired

For a long time, I believed that God loves me, but this experience impacted me because I came to understand that God also desires me. Not only desires me, but passionately yearns for me. I didn't know that God could feel such intensity of longing or ache with anguished desire. Sometimes, I forget that God can feel any passion at all. This experience removed any doubts I had about God's feelings for me. I now know how much he wants me, more than any person could ever want me. And I understand how Jesus could be so willing to die in my behalf. His longing to gather us to God was a driving force for him. He still longs to gather us to God, to join us into holy union with

himself. The people of Jerusalem were not willing. If we are willing, we will know God and be fully known and loved.

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