

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

The Sea lion found the effort of walking to the sea quite difficult. He began to wonder if what he had heard from the most high was true. Would he be coming home...to his sea...forever? He was thirsty both physically and in his spirit. Now that he was away from the influence of the tortoise, there began to surface within him many emotions which he had previously suppressed. The longing and waiting for his beloved sea made him groan inwardly as he propelled himself forward on his flippers. As he went, he thought of his tree, the shade it gave him and his waterhole. There was no going back now...he had to let it go. It was painful but at the same time it was good.

11. Letting Go. “*You can be satisfied; you just can’t be sated.*” Pascal

Setting forth on this leg of the journey may be the most surprising...and the hardest. All along John has been encouraging us to uncover, discover, and recover our heart’s desire. In this part we must wrestle with the idea of letting go, surrendering our desire to God. So, to meaningfully speak of ‘letting go’ is for us to enter the arena of strongly embraced possessions and maybe relationships...those things deeply rooted, people and things that define life for us. In order for your heart to live free, you must learn the spiritual grace of detachment—not abandoning your desire but surrendering your will to it. By surrendering, we mean walking away from it. You are searching for the secret of hope—which Paul says often involves groaning and waiting.

John says, it was 3 months after Brent’s death that I took my family on a camping holiday. It included a trip to Yellowstone where Brent and Myself spent our last fly fishing time together. Unbeknown to my family this was the real purpose of the trip. We finally came to my goal—the road over Dun Raven pass. The road was closed; the orange and white barriers were like a prophetic beast out of a nightmare. God began speaking to my sinking heart: ‘Your journey lies along another path. You’ve got to let all that go.’ I knew there was no arguing. I didn’t even try to put up a fight. Remember checkmate? I knew this was a call for me to release my grip and move on.

One thing I have come to embrace is this: *we have to let it go*. The more comfortable we are with mystery in our journey, the more rest we will know along the way. To live in desire is to begin to taste joy indescribable, but much too briefly. I have had glimpses of life as it was meant to be, but they never last as long as I want.

Listen to how Paul describes his experience of the quest. ‘Sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything’. If we will remain open to sorrow, we can know joy. And if we are willing to let go, we’ll discover something most surprising...that all is ours. That is why reaching to possess, is one danger of which the heart alive must be wary. But once we know what we want, we must learn the grace of release.

About thirsting. There is a false, but widespread belief in the church that says to be a Christian will somehow satisfy our every desire. Paul said he had ‘learned the secret of being content’ Phil. 4:12, and many Christians take this to mean he no longer experienced the thirst of his soul. But earlier in the same epistle, the old saint said that he had not obtained his soul’s desire, or ‘already been made perfect’. Quite to the contrary, he described himself as pressing on, ‘straining toward to what is ahead’. These are not the words of a man who no longer experienced longing because he had arrived. They are the account of a man propelled on his

life quest by his desire. Contentment is not freedom from desire, but freedom of desire. Being content is not pretending that everything is the way you wish it; it is not acting as though you have no wishes. Rather, it is no longer being ruled by your desires.

The fact is, at this point of our journey, we have three options (1) to be alive and thirsty (2) to be dead (3) to be addicted. Most of the world lives in addiction; most of the church has chosen deadness. The Christian is called to a life of holy longing. But we do not like to stay there, because there is within the human heart a tough, fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. And we seek to possess so that we do not have to live in thirst, instead of trusting our hearts each day to the goodness of God. To live in thirst is to live in ache. Submitting to our addictions is our attempt to get rid of the ache, and trying to satisfy our insatiable desires takes us farther and farther away from home and God. Pascal said “You can be satisfied; you just can’t be sated.” For example, there is great pleasure in a glass of cab-sauvignon, but a whole bottle is another matter. Our soul’s insatiable desire becomes the venom Pascal warns us of when it demands its fill here and now, when we should be amply satisfied with the many beautiful things life offers us now. If we will only stop and consider, it is clear that God grants us *so much* of our heart’s desire as we delight in him. Not always, not on demand, but certainly more than we deserve. We must learn to seek the giver before the gift. This is the turn in the road we must be vigilant to see and take, while watching over our hearts with loving care. So what do we do now? How do we live with desire we cannot take care of, and heartache we cannot prevent? We groan and wait.

About Groaning. John says, “After turning the car around at Dunraven Pass we headed back down to the Tetons where we camped for several nights. Then, after a sleepless night I got up early and went for a walk. Waves of grief began to sweep over me. It was not just Brent’s death, but his death was the lance that pierced the wound of all the other ungrieved grief in my life. Why had I waited all these years to shed these tears? As I wept, I realised Paul was right. How can we live without groaning? If we do not give our ache a voice, it doesn’t go away. It becomes an undercurrent of our addictions. Pleasure becomes necessary in larger and larger doses, like morphine. John says that quite often grief has to sneak up on us, surprise us during our day. It may come through a few words in a song or a movie. However unexpectedly it shows up, let us accept it as a welcome visitor. The paradox of grief is that it is healing; it somehow restores our souls, when all the time we thought it would leave us in despair. Control is the enemy; grief is our friend. Embracing pain can bring us to a place of more complete healing than we could have known otherwise. And we need to mourn, as this is the only way our hearts can remain both free and alive in this world. This is so because it puts a stop to the constant striving. Grief is the anti-dote to the incessant possessive demand within. We must come to realise we will not arrive in that golden place until we are home with God. But we can be home with God now, because as sons of God we can live in the throne room any time we wish to do so.

To wait is to learn the spiritual grace of detachment, the freedom of desire. Not the absence of desire, but desire at rest. An authentic spiritual understanding of detachment devalues neither desire nor the objects of desire. Instead, it aims at correcting one’s own anxious grasping in order to free oneself for a committed relationship to God. In the posture of waiting we discover that, indeed, we are expanded by longing. This allows something to grow within us, a capacity, if you will, for life, love and God.

In Rom. 8:22-25 Paul talks about groaning and waiting. He ties it all together by telling us the secret of the sojourning heart. He says, in effect, we are to live in hope, and hope is groaning and waiting.

But who wants to groan and wait? There is middle ground however, and that is beauty. John says, ‘After the shock of Brent’s death, intense grief took its place. I could not talk with people or with God. The only thing that helped was my wife’s flower garden.’ He goes on to say ‘ beauty and affliction are the only two things that can pierce our hearts, so we must have a measure of beauty in our lives proportionate to our affliction.’ Beauty is a pure gift and because of this, it helps in letting go. This is so because it is the closest thing to fullness without possessing on this side of eternity. It heralds ‘The Great Restoration’ and perhaps this is why it is so healing.

Surrender. The time has come for us to stop playing chess with God over our lives. We cannot win, but we can delay the victory, dragging on the pain of grasping and the poison of possessing. There are two types of losses in life. The first is shared by all mankind, call them what you will, that of fate, accidents, acts of God. The ones we have no control over. The second kind are chosen losses known only to the pilgrim. These are losses we choose. With a chosen loss, we place on the alter something very dear to us, something innocent, whose only danger is in it’s goodness, that we might come to love it too much. It is an act of consecration, where little by little, or all at once, we give over our lives to the only One who can truly keep them.

Spiritual surrender is not resignation. It is not choosing to care no longer. It is surrender with desire, or in desire. Desire is still present, felt, even welcomed. But the will to secure is made subject to the divine will in an act of abandoned trust. This kind of surrender comes only after a night of wrestling. It comes only after we open our hearts, our deepest selves. The freedom and beauty and rest that follow are among the greatest of all surprises. Read John's account of tasting freedom on bottom of page 194 and all of page 195 of Desire. We must understand this. “I tasted the wonderful freedom a few months ago on a high mountain lake...trout began to rise too numerous to mention. It was the moment fly fishermen dream about. A gentle breeze began to blow. I knew I could not paddle and fish at the same time. I put the rod down but did not take up the paddle. As I drifted, I drank in the beauty around me, and the joy of freedom of my desire. A little voice reminded me that the fish were biting.”

For Reflection

Q1. What does the idea of letting go stir within you?

Q2. Ask yourself these two questions to see if you are a pilgrim or an arranger. What are you waiting for? Is there anything you ardently desire that you are doing nothing to secure?

Q.3 Why must we be comfortable with “mystery” as part of our life?

Q.4 How are you with groaning? Are there any aches you haven't given voice to?

Q5. The spiritual grace of detachment is learning to wait, the freedom of desire, not the absence of desire, but desire at rest. How comfortable are you with this?

Q.6 If you were to let go, where might God take you? Are you willing to go there?

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