

An Expedition into the Love of God

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2 Thessalonians 3:5

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ.

How do we express love much less measure it? What superlatives do we muster to define this unexplainable force? Is it possible for us to exhaust what this word love means and come to its end? Can we journey its height, width and depth and say we know it? Can we say, "Let us set our sails and explore the far reaches of its tides. And when we have crossed its span, we shall find its shores and we will know its boundaries?" Is this possible?

How do we pitiful creatures explain love? Is it a mother nursing her suckling babe? Perhaps, but this is only a demonstration of love and not love's meaning. With this expression we have only begun to launch out into love's waters. We have not yet left the shores. Can we define love as a young couple embracing? Again, perhaps, as long as we realize we have left much more unsaid about love. Can we say it is a New York firefighter running into a smoldering World Trade Center, risking his life that he might save a stranger? Ah, maybe we are getting close and have come to love's meaning, but again this is a demonstration of a type of love and even in this act we have not found love's heart.

Look back two millenniums and watch an unconventional Jewish rabbi die a cursed death. He was unconventional since he was not trained in the rabbinical schools of His day. He was Holy Spirit tutored. He was also unconventional for another reason. He was God. And on what is more like a low lying hill than mountain the God-man died. Is it here we finally find love's meaning? Is this expression of love so full that we leave this holy sight satisfied that we know all of what love is?

At the risk of sounding blasphemous I must say no. Not even Calvary's expression of God's love is all that can be said of love. If anything, we leave this sight mystified; we leave stupefied; we leave shaking our heads amazed, as Charles Wesley was when he wrote, "Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, should die for me!" I look at my Savior's love for me and still find it mysterious. No doubt the Savior's blood stained cross is love's heartbeat. It is the fountainhead flowing straight from the Father's heart. Christ's death is the emblem of supreme love. But remember Paul's words of Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The death of Christ is a demonstration of love; but it is not its definition. From this demonstration gushes infinite streams and rivers of divine articulation that human comprehension cannot fathom. We cannot conceive the fullness of this kind of love. How dare we think we can navigate these waters all the way to their origin?

Therefore, I still ask what is love? What is its nature and essence? What are the banks that contain its waters?

Since love's display in the cross doesn't give us a full understanding of love, let us then travel back beyond the envelope of time. Perhaps in timeless ages before the worlds we can discover love's completeness. Look into the gazing eyes of a Father as He intently looks upon His Son with eternal affection that vocabulary cannot transmit. You cannot sneak a glance into this holy beholding of the Son by the Father and the Son's return gaze and not leave unaffected. Surely there has never been nor will be such a perfect and passionate love as the Father has for the Son and the Son for the Father. But this eternal love relationship is also a mystery that boggles the faculties of human reason.

And so we are back to our question, how will we ever hope to know the meaning of love and find its borders? How can we poor and shallow-hearted souls ever expect to go further out into love's ocean? How can we ever hope to leave the shores, sail beyond the docks and sound the depths of love? Quit frankly, it is impossible, for God's love is infinite and without banks or borders.

Perhaps a question of equal proportion is how could we unloving creatures ever experience this love ourselves? How could loathsome and vile beings such as we are think we could be so loved by God? And since we are dealing with questions that are too enormous for us anyway, let me throw out another. Should we hope to experience more of God's love than we have already experienced? Can we contain any more of infinite love in these thimble-sized hearts of ours?

While my appointed task is beyond me to explain and beyond any of us to understand, I want to give you and me hope of knowing and experiencing more of our Father's great love for us. I want to direct your attention to a verse of Scripture from 2 Thessalonians that I came across in my devotions. And for a great while I have wrestled with this verse, and I have turned this one verse over and over in my mind until I have had to quit because I thought my mind was going to malfunction. The text is 2 Thessalonians 3:5, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

If God will be gracious to us, I will attempt to share with you a journey that each of us should be endeavoring. It is a journey into the deeper regions of God's love for us. I want this time together to be very practical because this is what the Christian life is supposed to be about. Far too long we have been stripping away from abundant life its abundance. I am persuaded that one of the reasons the Charismatic movement has found a significant footing in American Christianity and has been exported to other nations is because we mainline evangelicals have reduced our faith to cold intellectualism only. The passion has been removed. The heart has been removed. And when the heart is gone, then the body is dead. So I invite you to board my tiny vessel to embark into waters we have never sailed.

The first observation from our text is to realize who Paul is addressing and who he is encouraging to take this voyage into God's love.

I. THE VOYAGERS

It is obvious that Paul was writing to the Thessalonians. You certainly didn't need me to help you determine this. But what I want to highlight for us is the fact the intended audience was a Christian audience. What is the importance of this information? Extremely important if we are to understand what Paul is saying.

Could it not be said that since this is a church to which Paul is writing and praying for that they had already been directed into the love of God? Well, of course! How could a Christian not have already experienced God's love? I cannot forget the day of my conversion and the remarkable amount of love I experienced. I was physically overwhelmed with such feelings of love that I was broken by God's love for me. The Holy Spirit directed me into the love of God and directed God's love into me. I understand that we all are unique individuals and God deals personally with everyone whom He saves. Therefore we all experience the love of God when we are saved to different degrees. But to one degree or another there is the experiencing of the love of God even if it is in an almost undetectable state. I think of the promise in Romans 5:5, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." I am certain in my conviction that this is the privilege of every believer.

Why then would Paul pray for the Thessalonians in such a way if they had already been directed into the love of God? The reason is Paul knows that there is more of the love of God for the believer to experience. The Christian life is an expedition into God's love that will never cease, not even in eternity. Throughout the ceaseless ages we will be continually exploring and enjoying the love of God. Oh what delight of all delights heaven must be! It is a great joy on this earth to have been given a wonderful wife or husband who expresses their love to you in tangible ways. It is their passion to not only love you but to make sure you know they love you. All the time they are finding ways in which to express to you their affection. Surprises abound. Each day is an exciting day to look forward to being loved by such a spouse. But oh, can you even try to imagine what joy awaits us in God's eternity? The Master Lover with His bride in habitual communion expressing His love. Time could not be long enough to contain such demonstrations of love so that God will have to throw time aside and give us eternity for our honeymoon with our Bridegroom. Now and forever we will be experiencing His love for us.

Is there more of the love of God that we can experience after the love of salvation has been introduced to us? Oh yes, an infinite amount ahead. Truly places and regions, which human souls have yet to traverse, await us. God so loves you and me as His beloved that He is content to shower us with more and more love.

Paul prays for the Ephesians in a very similar manner in Ephesians 3:19, "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Don't say you have experienced all of God and His love when you got saved. That is a cold and dead religion's theology! I ask again, can a man exhaust the love of God? Could our shallow hearts contain the infinite ocean of God's affections? Hardly! And so eternity is ours to receive it, and we shall never come to its end.

This is my message---you cannot dare risk being satisfied with whatever knowledge you have up to this point received. Whatever knowledge of God's love you have, intellectual and experiential, must be considered tokens of something more and not the full measure.

It is true if you are truly saved that there is a thirst for Christ and for communion with Him that will not be satisfied. The Christian will always know an unsettled spirit even though the Lord is our portion. Even though Jesus said, "*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*" (John 4:14) There will always be a hungering and thirsting.

Jesus was not meaning that one taste from His fountain of water satisfies forever and quenches all future thirst. Think about what that would mean. It would mean you would experience such a pervading and lasting satisfaction that you would never go back for more. If we interpret Jesus to mean this then we have nailed our vital and necessary fellowship with Christ in a box and have no need of it. Listen, if one drink satisfies, you don't need a fountain! Yet that is what Jesus said would be springing up in the inner man of the believer. One drink does not end the quest. What Jesus said is that with the drinking in of Him and His love is an endless supply of water, everlasting water, which will dwell within in us and will be there for us to drink continually. It's like tasting something really delicious that you have never had before; you cannot be satisfied with one taste but want more. To drink from the fountain of God's love is to want to never leave its streams.

I cannot tell you what a strength it is to me to think that God desires me and that His love for me is so massive that it cannot be exhausted nor measured. Why be discouraged, my friend, if God loves you. Don't let appearances or fickle feelings convince you God cares less for you than someone else. Don't be led astray thinking His love for you has lessened. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

He then answers, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35, 37-39). Set your heart upon the journey. Paul is praying that these beloved believers would be on the quest or expedition into the interiors of God's love. That's the voyage. This is what I am praying for today.

The SECOND observation from our text is that if we are to experience the love of God in a much fuller dimension, we need,

II. A NAVIGATOR

If we are to understand our God's love for us and experience it in a much fuller and intimate way we need a guide, a navigator. But to whom do we look? Even the Apostle Paul would dare not

assume this position. He prays for the Thessalonians, “and the Lord direct your hearts.” Evidently, Paul did not consider himself able for such a task. If ever there was a man inspired in the deep things of God, it was Paul. Peter said of Paul’s epistles that some of them were difficult for even him. Yet, Paul dares not set his hand to the helm of this ship. Why? Surely he had gone as far up the river of God’s love as any man and thus he could lead us. But Paul knows he cannot lead us where he himself has not gone before. Perhaps we can follow him to the regions of God’s love that he himself had already traversed. He can look back at us and say, “*Follow me as I follow Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 11:1) But ultimately the blessed apostle knows that there is a greater one than he that must captain our vessels and navigate us deeper into the interior of love. And so he prays, “may the Lord direct your hearts.”

It is our Namesake that is our guide. Christ the Lord knows the love of God perfectly. He knows ever bend in the river and every isle in its ocean. Could ever we have a better guide? As a man on this earth He walked in the full measure of infinite love. He experienced all of His Father’s love for Him. He had to have been divine Himself in order to taste all of God’s infinite love. For only an infinite being can contain infinite love. No wonder Paul refuses to assume the role of guide. Step aside, Paul, for the infinite Christ is suited to take the helm and lead us. It is the Lord Jesus that has demonstrated to the world infinite love in an infinite sacrifice. What other reason could it have been that caused Him to tear off His glorious robes of divine splendor and put on the garb of humanity, if not love? What could pull Him away from the reign of Creator and be created a little lower than the angels? He never stopped being the Creator, He just became the created. Who can figure out such love? And why such condescension? It is because He had experienced the sweetness of the Father’s love and He desired that we taste it also.

Why is it that at the age of twelve our Lord was subject to a husband and wife’s undeserved rebuke and yet He did not retaliate but submitted? Why should the Creator of Mary’s life be submissive to Mary’s womb and Mary’s authority? Only love can explain such submission. Without doubt His three years of ministry changed the world. John said it best that all the books and libraries could not contain the good that came from His labors. We all recognize the significance of His ministry. But have you ever wondered about all of His years of obscurity? He lived more years cloaked in silence than He did in the public eye. How do you hide God? Greater success will be yours if you try to hide the sun than the Son of God. And yet hidden away in obscurity was Jesus. They say silence is golden but here silence is priceless. It was eternal love in action!

Could it have been anything but love that constrained Christ to the ridicule and public censure of so-called religious leaders? Think about it. A Body of Divinity cannot be found more complete than Christ Himself in bodily form, and yet He was subjected to the wrong headed and wrong spirited theology of men. He was dragged before a throne where a puny and spineless man named Herod was dressed as a king with a king’s crown. The Galilean king then interrogated the King of Kings. What shameful mockery. Herod should have not dared to wear a crown in the presence of Heaven and Earth’s King. He should have vacated the throne and bid our Lord to sit, but in the most appalling arrogance he sat on the throne and judged Him who will sit on a great white throne and judge kings and presidents. What irony and all because of our Lord’s great love.

From Herod's devious court Jesus is taken to Rome's proconsul. Pilate became infuriated with Christ's silent submission and barked, "Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" (John 19:10) It was Pilate who should have bowed at the feet of Christ and sought His mercy. Instead he trifled with Christ trying to get Jesus to seek mercy from him. Only love has the explanation.

His back was given to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. Evil appeared to have its way with Him. Should He have thought one thought of judgment against them, they would have instantly been destroyed. But love filled His mind and constrained His heart. To Calvary He went. Surely He is more than capable to guide us into love's depths. His credentials need no review for no else is so qualified as He. Only God can direct us into His love. Therefore Paul intercedes on the behalf of his friends that God would do so. Paul may not have been qualified to lead them, but he could pray for them. He positioned himself as intercessor. Let us take this position as well and pray for one another, and ourselves, "Oh Lord, direct our hearts into the Love of God."

I call to your attention my THIRD observation concerning my text and our expedition,

III. THE VESSEL

We have to have some type of vessel to ride the tides of love. What is the object Paul is praying for direction into the love of God? The heart. "And the Lord direct your hearts." I find this fascinating and enlightening. He does not say the mind but zeros in on their hearts. In our day we live in a time of many extremes in the practice of Christianity. Some claim that the intellect is the only reliable means in which to experience our Lord. They give no credence to emotions of any kind. Those of this type tend to be very astute in the Bible and doctrine. Some become great scholars giving a great deal of light on God's Word. Others emphasize the emotions and tend to be very demonstrative about their faith. If they can't feel it, they don't want it. These dear people give a great deal of heat to the faith of Christ. But many of them have no time for studying doctrine. They confess that studying theology tends to dryness and boredom. Some have gone so far as to state that the leadership of the Holy Spirit is more important than the Bible. And so you have this dichotomy in Christian circles, light versus heat.

It would appear that Paul is leaning towards the heat side when he singles out the heart to be the instrument leading into God's love. You would think so if you interpret heart to mean emotions. Certainly there are some verses in the Bible where the word heart is used to talk about feelings. But this is not what Paul means.

The word heart incorporates more than just the emotional aspect of man's nature. It includes the mind, will and emotions. In other words it incorporates all that a man is within himself. It is the person itself that resides within the body. In Romans 10:9 it says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." If heart only means feelings, how can one believe something with their feelings

and not with their mind? It cannot be done. In this case the word heart would incorporate more than feelings but also include the mind. Hebrews 4:12 it says, “For the word of God is . . . a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Clearly the heart has the capacity to think, therefore, it must include the mind. In fact, without the mind our love cannot grow. In Philippians 1:9 Paul says, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.”

Paul is addressing the inner man, which includes mind, will and affections. True spiritual growth cannot bypass either the mind or the emotions. Paul is declaring with this one word, heart that we need both light and heat. The more that we grow in the knowledge of God and His love, the more our passion will intensify for God. Let me use the word heart here to mean emotions. I often say that you can know you had an encounter with the Holy Spirit when truth from God’s Word swells your heart with joy. Paul does not move the love of God out of the realm of the emotions and appeal only to the intellect. Neither does he remove love out of the realm of the intellect and appeal only to the emotions. Genuine love will reside and work in both the mind and emotions.

Let me move to my FOURTH observation.

IV. THE JOURNEY

There are three components to this journey we must examine. The first component is to define our destination. The destination is the love of God. Paul prays that the Thessalonians will journey further into the love of God. We are now back to my earlier question. How do we define or explain love? There is certainly nothing in you or me that compels Him to love us. There is nothing good or lovely about us that would attract the holy love of God. You and I love out of need and want. Surely if you were perfectly self-sufficient you would need no one and therefore you would value no one. There would be absolutely nothing in them you valued because you had all that is valuable to your existence. And yet God who is perfectly and absolutely self-sufficient loves out of His fullness and not of need or want. God needs nothing and never wants for anything. Yet He is able to love without finding value in any of us.

I have consulted every systematic theology book that I have and have read many varied explanations of love. Which leads me to the conclusion that we really are not sure how to define love. Jonathan Edwards said concerning defining love:

As to a definition of Divine love, things of this nature are not properly capable of a definition. They are better felt than defined. But yet there may be a great deal of benefit in descriptions that may be given of this heavenly principle though they all are imperfect.

John said, “God is love.” Surely love must be as unexplainable as God is and yet John gives us this insight about God for us to better understand Him. Therefore, there must be some handle on love that we can grasp. I have heard and used definitions like, “Love is meeting someone’s needs

without seeking anything in return.” Or, “Love is a decision.” But these definitions do not really tell me what love is but what it does. And so, after a couple of months of meditating and mulling this word over and over I want to put to you for your consideration a definition of love that is definitely imperfect, as Edwards has stated about any illustration or definition.

Love is the ability to treasure and delight in something or someone.

Already my definition is wrong, if you consider God’s love for us, which is not merited upon anything about us, except to say, God treasures and delights in Himself and His perfect nature. Because God is the most valuable of all persons and things in the universe, God is His own greatest treasure. God cannot delight or treasure in something more than Himself since there is nothing more valuable than He is. Therefore, it is possible that God’s love flows out of this love for Himself and values or treasures all things that He has created because all things are seen in relationship to Him. In other words, if all things are created by God for His good pleasure, then their only value to God is that they are products of His creative powers which radiates His glory. God loves humanity because humanity is a reflection of the creative genius of God.

When you see a man, albeit even a homeless man, an unshaved, an unkempt and unclean man, you are looking at a marvel of God’s creation. Therefore, God does not love us for what we have made of ourselves but He loves us for what He has made. However, I know this is not perfect and is flawed with errors. I think it is very close though to describing the way God loves as well, as we God’s creatures, love.

A book that I would recommend to you is Henry Scougal’s book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, written in 1789. I came upon this book while reading Arnold Dallimore’s biography on George Whitefield. Dallimore writes that Scougal’s book was instrumental in leading Whitefield to a biblical understanding of conversion and the Christian life. On the front cover of my copy is a quote from Whitefield that says, “I never knew what true religion was till God sent me this excellent treatise.” Scougal defined love as, “Love is that powerful and prevalent passion by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined, and on which both its [the soul’s] perfection and happiness depend.”

We have some 18th century language to wade through here. According to Scougal, love is a passion or affection that influences and controls all the other faculties, which would include the mind, will and emotions. Passion to the 18th century theologian was an intense and foundational inclination or desire. It is like hunger is to our eating. When we get hungry, we eat but we usually do not sit down and just eat anything. We eat what we crave or desire. Daily there are hundreds of competing interests that filter into our hearts, and the will must determine which it will choose. And it will always choose based upon the degree and value it places on each one of those interests. Love, or the ability to treasure or delight in someone or something, will choose the interests that it considers the most valuable and delightful.

So in other words love is the motivation of the will. Love is always the will’s motivation. It will either be a love for God that promotes His glory or a selfish love that promotes our glory.

You may object to my definition and say, “I delight in ice cream, but I wouldn’t say I love it.” You wouldn’t? You’re telling me you have never driven up to a Dairy Queen or Baskin Robbins and said to someone, “I love ice cream”? You do know that the Bible says that no liar shall enter the kingdom of God? Of course you delight in ice cream or you would never eat it. You just do not delight in it as much as you would your children. Therefore the ability to love gives one the ability to prioritize his or life. We prioritize based upon the value or joy we derive from our priorities. Whatever is your top priority is your chief love. This is exactly what our Lord taught us when He said, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* (Matthew 6:21)

If Scougal is close to being right, and I think he is, then love must be the innate ability or “passion,” as he called it, to value or treasure others and things. To the degree you treasure someone or something is the degree you love them or it.

Another objection to my definition of love is that it sounds very self-centered. It appears selfish rather than sharing, taking rather giving. Since we have been taught to think virtuous love is unconditional or unselfish we would naturally be opposed to such a definition. But in my defense, I argue that my definition is not selfish but rather is truly others-oriented. I am so confident in my idea of love that I am willing to say that any other concept of love is selfish. If love is the ability to treasure or delight in someone or something and I say “I love my wife,” then am I not attributing to her great honor? Not because she is loved by me but because I deem her valuable and cherishable. It is saying she is a treasure beyond numerical price. For, you see, I wouldn’t take all the gold in Fort Knox for her nor all the tea in China.

You cannot separate love from happiness. Here is where most definitions of love get into trouble. They separate happiness from love. In the attempt to try to be unconditional and without self-interest (thinking this is virtue) we have abandoned real love for a heartless and passionless love. Have you ever heard love is a decision? I used to believe in such. I have counseled others with this notion that love began as a decision. Again it involves the intellect, but it does not solely reside there.

The person I love may not always bring me happiness but still you cannot pry happiness from love. An enemy is not known for bringing you happiness. But loving your enemies brings some degree of pleasure. How? The answer is, loving others and valuing them as an act of God’s creation, realizing He has a sovereign purpose with their lives, brings you happiness. Your greatest joy and delight is the very act of loving God and others. Or in other words, your greatest happiness is seeing others happy. In the case of loving an enemy, you value the good of the enemy and this is your delight. This, my friends is not selfishness but virtue in action.

Our ability to love makes it so that we will always be valuing something in order to experience happiness. You and I will always be in the pursuit of the experience of happiness. God has intended that our happiness exist by experiencing Him and His greatness. We are to treasure and delight in Him supremely. Our love for God pivots not what God does for me but upon the worth and value of God. Our happiness is in seeing God glorified. Which means seeing others and ourselves

experiencing His worth in our lives. Now if this is not your journey, then you are pursuing a different goal. You're sailing on different waters. You are so designed by God to love, and if it is not Him you are treasuring and delighting in, then you are loving something else.

Now if the Thessalonians had experienced this, why was Paul concerned to pray this way for them? The answer is simple. It's all about God. The more we experience the love of God for us, the more we will in turn love Him. The motive of God's love is the valuing and treasuring of Himself above all others. Thus if our hearts are being filled with God-like love we, of necessity, will be filled with the same ability to treasure and value God. The more I am loved the more I can love as He loves. This kind of divine love begins to rearrange my priorities. The more I experience His love, the more I begin to value things as He does. The greatest thing the Lord can do for us is to cause us to experience His love—to cause us to enjoy the things He most delights in. What is that? His self and His glory!

Do you want to love God more? Then press deeper into His love for you. The principle never changes, *"We love Him, because He first loved us."* (1 John 4:19)

The second component of our journey is the fuel for the trip. We have already discussed that our hearts are the vessels, which need to be directed into the love of God. But what is the fuel that will launch and propel our vessels out into these deep waters of divine love? Again we take note that Paul prays for God's intervention, which means you and I are not sufficient to propel or even paddle these hearts into God's love.

Up to this point I have described love within a very general description. I have described an ability that is within the heart of every human being. The ability to love is given to all men freely. However the ability to love God is not found in any human heart. The soul of man is devoid of the desire or ability to treasure and value the Lord God. The sinner has not possibility or hope of turning his ship around and sailing into the infinite sea of Heavenly love because there is nothing within him to understand the excellent worth of God and treasure that worth. Man has not only inherited the ability to love, but he has also inherited the ability to hate. Man's innate values are so warped and distorted that he truly finds God detestable and holiness a thing to be avoided. No matter what preaching he might hear that stings his conscience or disturbs his heart, he cannot love God and he doesn't want to love God.

Therefore, if man or woman is to love God supremely they must have a much more powerful external motive to invade their hearts that would give them the desire to treasure and delight in God more than they love themselves. The prophet Ezekiel records the words of God this way, *"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh"* (Ezekiel 11:19).

Hebrews 8:10 speaks further of this promise, *"For this [is] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."* **So the fuel for our heart's journey must**

be supplied by the Lord. It is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God that changes our hearts from a selfish love that revolves around ourselves to godly love that centers on the supreme value of God. We Christians are also in need of the Lord's work of grace to lead us deeper into the love of God, which leads me to my third component of our journey.

The third component is the map, which our Navigator and Captain Jesus Christ will use to direct our hearts.

The map is the Word of God. Paul says in *Philippians 1:9* "*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.*" In *2 Peter 1:2* it says, "*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.*" The more knowledge of God that is received into the mind of a believer, the more valuable and delightful God will appear to the believer. Henry Scougal put this way.

The true way to improve and ennoble our souls, is, by fixing our love on the divine perfections, that we may have them always before us, and derive an impression of them on ourselves.

This is exactly what Paul says in *2 Corinthians 3:18*, "*But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*" The Spirit of the Lord is changing us from glory to glory, but what does that mean and what does He use? I suggest He uses the Word of God. In *2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6* Paul is defending his gospel and his authority to preach it.

It is a law of our nature that we are shaped in manner and custom by the persons with whom we associate the most closely. We become very similar to them in opinions; we copy their habits, we imitate their manners. With time, their sentiments unknowingly in most cases, become our sentiments, and their ways our ways.

The doctrine is clear, Christians advance in love by the contemplation of the glory of God as it is revealed in the gospel. And that is why Paul is praying for the Thessalonians: that the Lord by His Spirit through the revelation of Himself in the written word would transform them. I am convinced that we do not love God apart from His loving us, apart from His radiating beauty, apart from His transforming light. The more we experience His love the more we love Him. The more we understand His excellent and marvelous attributes, the more we love. The more I know of His exquisite nature, the more I experience His love. As my mind, by the Holy Spirit's illumination, understands truth, the more my heart swells with joy. The Lord is the only one that can direct us into the love of God.

Some of you say you know the love of God personally, when what you really mean is you have experienced the benevolent and universal mercy that God shares with His creation. You have never experienced the love of God personally. You do not have the love of God in you. Please do not be confused. Because God has showered you with goodness does not mean you have begun to launch out into the love of God. God has shown mercy to all men. What we have been talking

about today is a supernatural experiencing of the love of God, which can only take place in a new man that God creates in you.

So this is the journey and more of it lies ahead of us than behind us. We have only begun to sail off into the billowing tides of love. What must those men have experienced the night that they feared their vessel and lives were lost when wind and wave soared across the sides of their boat? What thoughts must have penetrated their minds as Christ stood and with spoken word stopped the oncoming gales? Surely they too could then recline and sleep knowing they were safe and secure with Him who is Master of nature and sea. Tonight we sail in our boats with the same One. At times the ocean of God's love is so calm and still, we slice through the water with ease. But oh there are times when God's love seems more like rage than love. Rough waters and swift currents bobble our vessels like a cork on water. Adversity strikes and suffering beats upon our bow and stern. Shall we fear in lack of faith also? Or shall we recline secure and unalarmed for our Master is our Captain? We should not be afraid for His faithful navigation leads us farther into the love of God.

Do not cease the journey! Do not be satisfied with what you have thus experienced. Press deeper, higher and explore the wonders of His love for you. Turn every devotional into an expedition. View every verse read as an excursion into a place you have never been before.

This is what the body of Christ needs. It is not larger ministries or a more sympathetic environment. We need not larger buildings or budgets. Nor do we need more expertise in the laws of leadership. What we need is the mercy of infinite love to melt these cold, cold hearts of ours and ignite a passion for a Father who is faithful even when we are faithless. We may train our minds, but we must never cease to exercise our hearts to journey into the deeper waters of God's love. He is a God to be loved and a God to be loved by!

O God of infinite and immeasurable love direct our hearts into the sweeter waters of your love and make us never to be satisfied but a people in love with you and that the quest of our hearts is more of the same—you, O God!