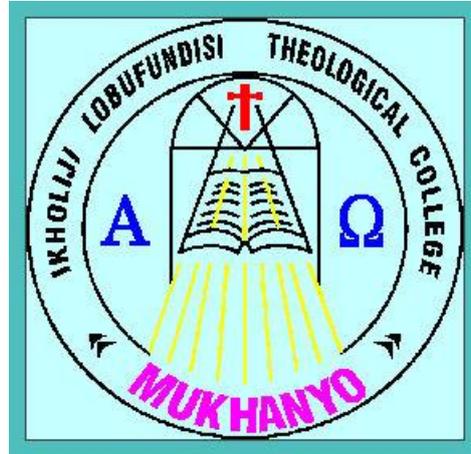


# Mukhanyo Theological College

## KwaMhlanga, South Africa



## Study Guide

for

## Spiritual Formation

DPT 112

**Dr. Jack C. Whytock**

**2009**

This curriculum is part of the Mukhanyo Distance Programme offered by Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC) based in KwaMhlanga, South Africa, focusing on reformed theological education for pastors and ministry leaders. For further information please visit our website at [www.mukhanyo.co.za](http://www.mukhanyo.co.za). © 2009 Jack C. Whytock

## **Preface**

### **A Word to Students and Facilitators:**

This Study Guide is to accompany the DVD lectures for the distance course on Spiritual Formation which was filmed at Mukhanyo Theological College, South Africa, in 2009. Many thanks to the film team for their fine work and all the skills they have shown with the editing.

The Study Guide follows the class lectures in the order they were given. On occasion it provides some additional comment. It also includes articles together with study questions for the student to read and answer. Bible verse memory sheets have been included in two Bible versions. Students are also free to select their own Bible version and substitute such for their memory work. This Study Guide was designed to be used as an all inclusive workbook with the lectures and for supplemental reading as a textbook.

A special word of thanks to Jack's personal assistant, Christina Lehmann, who has done all the typesetting for this Study Guide – without her work this would never have been finished.

We welcome your comments for future changes so that a subsequent edition of this Study Guide may hopefully improve upon this work. Please email us at: [haddingtonhouse@eastlink.ca](mailto:haddingtonhouse@eastlink.ca) .

### **A Word to Facilitators:**

We have included five articles with questions on pages 11-21, 25-32, 50-65, 72-86, and 87-98. Encourage students to read the articles as you proceed through the course and complete the assigned questions. Take them up for discussion as a class. Through the Study Guide, blanks for other questions have been made on occasion. Please encourage their completion and discussion. Extra classes could be held in which you discuss the two appendices. That is left to your discretion.

In the Lord,

Jack and Nancy Whytock

**SYLLABUS DPT 112**  
**Mukhanyo Theological College**

**Module Name: Spiritual Formation**

**Module Code: DPT 112**

**Instructor: Dr. Jack C. Whytock**

**Course Description:** This course explores and teaches what constitutes true biblical spirituality and formation. It also explores and teaches the means to Christian growth and the formation of Christian character.

**Course Objectives:**

- That the student will know and clearly understand what is true biblical spirituality
- That the student will know that the goal of the Christian life is continual transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ
- That the student will know the ways to Christian growth that the Lord uses
- That the student will know that true Christian spirituality must be total in one's life and calling and issue as an overflow from the heart for a healthy and wholistic Christian life

**Course Topics:**

1. Healthy Christian Spirituality Rests on the Balance of the Christian Stool: Doctrine, Experience and Practice
2. Healthy Christian Spirituality Rests on the Foundation of the Gospel Coin  
(God, Man, Sin, Christ, Holy Spirit, Faith, Repentance and Conversion)
3. Clarity on the Terminology for Christian Spirituality:
  - True Spirituality
  - Spiritual Formation
  - Character
  - Christian Community
  - Spiritual Disciplines
4. Spiritual Formation and Listening to the Word
5. Spiritual Formation and the Christian Community
6. Spiritual Formation and Prayer
7. Spiritual Formation as Totality of Life: Purity, Singleness, Marriage and Family
8. Spiritual Formation and the Overflow as Witness, Mission and Vocation
9. Spiritual Formation and the Life of Renewal
10. Spiritual Formation and Suffering
11. Spiritual Formation and Children

**Course Requirements:**

- Attendance and participation in all class lectures and discussions and making additional notes and comments in this Study Guide as appropriate.
- Completion of the assigned readings and study questions as found in the Study Guide.
- Class quizzes.
- Bible memory work as directed in this Study Guide.
- Final examination.

**Course Texts:**

The instructor/facilitator will assign the students articles from the Study Guide or other materials as directed.

**Course Bibliography:**

As found at the back of this Study Guide.

**Course Assessment:**

Participation in class	10%
Class Quizzes and Memory Work	<u>40%</u>
<b>Semester Grade</b>	<b>50%</b>
Final Examination	<u>50%</u>
<b>Total Course Grade</b>	<b>100%</b>

Date: May, 2009

## Table of Contents

<b>Bible Verse Memorization Work</b> .....	1
<b>Key Doctrines to Study</b> .....	3
<b>Topic #1, Healthy Christian Spirituality and the Christian Stool</b>	
Vocabulary .....	4
Lecture Notes .....	5
Article: Whitney, “Do You Thirst for God” .....	11
Article Study Questions .....	21
<b>Topic #2, Healthy Christian Spirituality Rests on the Foundation of the Gospel</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	22
Article: Ryle, “The Marks of Regeneration” .....	25
Article Study Questions .....	31
<b>Topic #3, Terminology for Christian Spirituality</b>	
Vocabulary .....	33
Lecture Notes:	
Spirituality.....	34
Spiritual Formation .....	36
Character .....	39
Community .....	40
Spiritual Disciplines.....	44
<b>Topic #4, Spiritual Formation and Listening to the Word</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	47
Article: Ryle, “Growth” .....	50
Article Study Questions .....	64
<b>Topic #5, Spiritual Formation and the Christian Community</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	66
Article: Whytock, “The Call to Personal Biblical Meditation” .....	72
Article Study Questions .....	85
Article: Mack & Swavelly, “Using Our Spiritual Gifts” .....	87
Article Study Questions .....	97

<b>Topic #6, Spiritual Formation and Prayer</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	99
<b>Topic #7, Spiritual Formation as Totality of Life: Purity, Singleness, and Marriage and Family</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	104
Lovelace Chart .....	106
Student Work Assignment: The Four Biblical Purposes of Marriage .....	108
Lecture Notes, continued .....	109
David Branon’s 10 Commandments for Guiding Your Children.....	111
The Monkeys’ New Houses.....	112
<b>Topic #8, Spiritual Formation and the Overflow in Witness, Missions and Vocation</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	114
<b>Topic #9, Spiritual Formation and the Life of Renewal</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	121
<b>Topic #10, Spiritual Formation and Suffering</b>	
Lecture Notes .....	123
<b>Topic #11, Spiritual Formation and Children and Youth</b>	
Lecture Outline .....	140
<b>Appendix A, God’s Credentials for Church Leaders</b> .....	141
<b>Appendix B, Fasting</b> .....	146
<b>Select Bibliography</b> .....	149

## Bible Verse Memorization Work

### *NIV Bible Version*

- **Romans 8:29**

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

- **2 Corinthians 3:18**

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

- **Romans 5:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope.

- **Psalms 42:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, O God.

<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?

- **1 Timothy 4:16**

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- **Mark 1:15**

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

- **Acts 2:42**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- **Psalms 119:34**

Give me understanding, and I will keep your law  
and obey it with all my heart.

- **1 Peter 4:10**

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

- **Proverbs 18:24**

A man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

## Bible Verse Memorization Work

### ESV Bible Version

- **Romans 8:29**

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

- **2 Corinthians 3:18**

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

- **Romans 5:3-4**

<sup>3</sup>More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope . . . .

- **Psalms 42:1-2**

<sup>1</sup>As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
so pants my soul for you, O God.

<sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God?

- **1 Timothy 4:16**

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- **Mark 1:15**

. . . “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

- **Acts 2:42**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

- **Psalms 119:34**

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law  
and observe it with my whole heart.

- **1 Peter 4:10**

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace . . . .

- **Proverbs 18:24**

A man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

## Key Doctrines to Study

**Q** What is true conversion?

**A** True conversion is heartfelt sorrow for sin and a sincere turning to Christ as Saviour and Lord.

– from *Compendium of the Christian Religion*

**Q** 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ?

**A** Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

– from *The Shorter Catechism*

**Q** 87. What is repentance unto life?

**A** Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

– from *The Shorter Catechism*

**Q** 98. What is prayer?

**A** Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

– from *The Shorter Catechism*

**Q** 1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

**A** That I am not my own,  
but belong—  
body and soul,  
in life and in death—  
to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,  
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way  
that not a hair can fall from my head  
without the will of my Father in heaven:  
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him,  
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,  
assures me of eternal life  
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready  
from now on to live for him.

– from *The Heidelberg Catechism*

## Topic #1 Vocabulary

**Match the following words with the definitions below them:**

1. **subjective** (adjective)–
  2. **sound** (adjective)–
  3. **experimental** (adjective)–
  4. **hypocrites** (noun)-
  5. **nominalism** (noun)-
- a. A belief in something in “name” only. Usually applies to Christianity.
  - b. Correct, orthodox
  - c. Expresses a person’s unique experience or point of view.
  - d. People who know the right thing to do, but do not do it.
  - e. Describes someone who has an acquaintance of certain facts (knowledge) by way of experience.

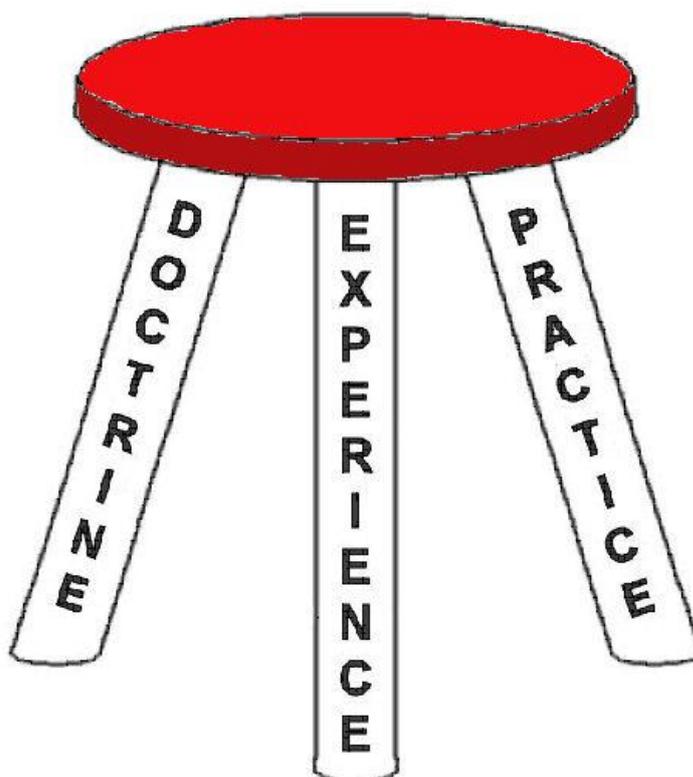
**Use the five words above to complete these sentences. Use each word only once.**

1. Paul says in Romans 7 that we know the right things to do, but sometimes we don’t do them. We are all \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Our pastor is a faithful Bible teacher; he gives us \_\_\_\_\_ teaching from the Word of God.
3. Sarah explained to us that at one time she only knew facts about God; since she has seen God answering her prayers, she has an \_\_\_\_\_ knowledge of Him.
4. When I talk about the things the Lord has done for me, I am explaining my \_\_\_\_\_ understanding of the Lord and His character.
5. If Christians do not live any differently from non-Christians, then we will not brightly shine forth the light of the gospel. We will simply be known for \_\_\_\_\_.

## Topic #1 – Lecture Notes

### Theme: Healthy Christian Spirituality Rests on the Balance of the Christian Stool: Doctrine, Experience and Practice

**Introduction:** Christians in former generations used to say the Christian life is like a three-legged stool. The three legs of the stool taken together as a unity constitute healthy, balanced and unified Christian spirituality. It is when one leg of the stool is over-emphasized to the detriment of the other two that our Christian lives become distorted and not what they should be. The goal of this course is to help you to consider your spiritual health. The illustration of the three-legged stool is a tool to aid us in a better understanding of a healthy Christian life.



#### **1.0 Leg One – Doctrine or Bible Teaching**

**1.1** “Doctrine” is a biblical word [*didaskalia*]

See 1 Timothy 4:16: “Watch your life and doctrine . . . .”

and

Titus 2:1: “Teach . . . sound doctrine.”

**1.2** Sound doctrine is true to the Scriptures.

**1.3** Sound doctrine follows a straight line without deviating from the Bible.

(Orthodoxy means straight or sound.)

Illustration: a straight wall vs. a leaning wall

**1.4** Sound doctrine is opposed to false teaching

– False doctrine is taught by false prophets and false teachers (1 Tim. 1:10)

**1.5** Every Christian must have sound doctrine on the Great Bible Story, which can be summarized in three words:

- a. CREATION
- b. FALL
- c. REDEMPTION

**1.6** Now ask yourself, can you fill in the answers to each of these doctrinal questions with a true answer? Do you have sound doctrine on each of these?

a. Who is God?

---

---

---

b. Who is man?

---

---

---

c. What is God's revelation?

---

---

---

d. What is sin?

---

---

---

e. Who is Jesus Christ as a person?

---

---

---

f. Why did Jesus die on a cross?

---

---

---

g. Who is the Holy Spirit?

---

---

---

h. What is the new heart?

---

---

---

i. What is the church?

---

---

---

**1.7** We must know the Bible and have clear biblical teaching/doctrine. *However*, if we stop there and only concentrate on the leg of doctrine, we will have a proud, “dead orthodoxy”.

**1.8 Summary:**

- a. Doctrine as Bible teaching will lead to a healthy knowledge and understanding of all basic Bible doctrines.
- b. A study of doctrine will help us think more clearly and grow to where we have summary theological statements in our thinking.
- c. Doctrines are the “tenets” and framework of your faith.
- d. Beware of the danger of knowledge leading to pride and dead orthodoxy. (1 Cor. 8:1)

## 2.0 Leg Two – Experience

2.1 “Experience” is that which is more subjective. It is experimental or experiential.

2.2 Here we are talking about our experience as a relationship with our Lord and with His children, etc.

2.3 Experience will emphasize “the touch of grace” in our lives:

“I have been pardoned.

I have a new heart.

I know the Lord. I know His holiness.

I know His love for me!”

2.4 Scripture: **John 17:3** – “know”

Illustration: J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chapter 2:

“I walked in the sunshine with a scholar who had effectively forfeited his prospects of academic advancement by clashing with church dignitaries over the gospel of grace. ‘But it doesn’t matter,’ he said at length, ‘for I’ve known God and they haven’t.’ The remark was a mere parenthesis, a passing comment on something I had said, but it has stuck with me, and set me thinking.” (p. 21)

### 2.5 Aspects of the Experimental Christian Life:

- a. The experience of **God’s Redeeming GRACE**
- b. The experience of **PRAAYER**
- c. The experience of **Praise, Joy & Worship**
- d. The experience of **Fellowship**
- e. The experience of **the Lord’s Providence**
- f. The experience of **the Lord’s Gifts**

(There are other aspects, but this list makes the point.)

### 2.6 Summary:

- a. The psalmist often speaks of the experience of his personal communion and longing for the Lord. Give examples from the Psalms of experiential faith: \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

b. How do you personally relate to each of the six aspects noted of the experimental Christian life? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. There are dangers when “experience” becomes overly dominant in defining the Christian life. What may be the results? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d. How are feelings, experiences and relationships that we encounter to be evaluated? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **3.0 Leg Three – Practice**

**3.1** Applying biblical insight with wisdom and discernment to our overall Christian living and to the specifically unique situations of our lives.

**3.2** This is *praxis* – the practice of living out our faith.

**3.3** We immediately know the condition of not having *praxis* – it is called at the worst hypocrisy or nominalism.

**3.4** There are also inherent dangers when *praxis* becomes the all important centre of the Christian life. When it is not held together as a unified whole with doctrine and experience, it can lead to a social gospel, do-good religion.

**3.5 1 Timothy 4:16** – “Watch your life and doctrine . . . .”



practice/application of truth

As with doctrine and experience, practice has many aspects.

### **3.6 Aspects of the Practice of Living out the Christian Life**

- a. **Personal Spiritual Warfare** with the triad of:
  - the world
  - the flesh
  - the devil

Eph. 2:2-3; 6:10, 11; 1 John 2:14-17
- b. **Doing Good Works:** God calls us to works of service and testimony. It glorifies God and speaks to the world. James 2:24
- c. **The Love of Neighbour**  
 “Neighbour-love seeks the neighbour’s good.”
- d. **Marriage and Family** – Applying Christian standards here often comes into conflict with experiential elements.
- e. **Church Life** – Worship, local church community life, church’s mission, etc.
- f. **State** – Respect, prayer.  
 Leaven of society  
 Involvement or disengagement
- g. **Vocation/Calling**

### **3.7 Summary:**

- a. Our faith must be practiced. Without practice there is hypocrisy, etc.
  - b. There must be a “standard”/rule for our practice.
  - c. Practice separated from doctrine and experience leads to \_\_\_\_\_
- 

## **4.0 The GOAL: Healthy, Balanced Christian SPIRITUAL LIFE**

**4.1** The three-legged stool is one stool. Do not separate doctrine from experience, doctrine from practice, etc.

**4.2** This is the Christian life.

## **STUDY ARTICLE ASSIGNMENT**

(See questions on page 21.)

### **DO YOU THIRST FOR GOD?<sup>1</sup>**

**Donald S. Whitney**

**1.0**

*So holy desire, exercised in longings, hungerings, and thirstings after God and holiness, is often mentioned in Scripture as an important part of true religion.*

Jonathan Edwards

**1.1**

“Lord, I want to know You more,” sang Mike, just before the sermon. One of my seminary professors from years back, who was guest preacher at our church that Sunday morning, sat next to me on the front pew and listened transfixed. As Mike continued to sing, I could hear my older friend sigh occasionally. When the song was over, T.W. sat motionless for so long I thought he had forgotten that he was now supposed to preach. As I turned to remind him I saw his shoulders lift and fall with the slow draw and release of his breath. Finally, he opened his eyes and stepped thoughtfully to the pulpit. He looked down for what seemed to be a full minute before he could speak. And then, “Lord, I *do* want to know you more.” Departing from his prepared words for awhile, he spoke of his thirst for God, his longings to know Christ more intimately, to obey Him more completely. Here was a man who had followed Christ for more than fifty years still captivated by the sweetness of the quest. In his second half-century as a disciple of Jesus, the grace of growth still flourished in him.

**1.2**

It's been ten years since that Sunday morning. I've seen T.W. at least annually since, and the things of God have not diminished their magnetic pull on his heart's aspirations. Two months ago I found myself sharing a shuttle bus ride with him from a denominational convention back to our hotel. Though nearly seventy now, and weakened by cardiac surgery, his eyes flashed as he talked half an hour about what he was learning about prayer. Even as his body decays, his longings for God display the growing strength of his soul.

**1.3**

The Apostle Paul must have similarly impressed others in his day. Despite all his maturity in Christ, all he had seen and experienced, late in life (in Philippians 3:10) Paul wrote of the passion that propelled him: “that I may know Him.” What is he talking about? Didn't he already know Jesus more closely than perhaps anyone else ever will? Of course he did. But the more he knew Jesus, the more he wanted to know Him. The more Paul progressed in spiritual strength, the more thirsty for God He became.

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is a reprint taken from *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, by Donald S. Whitney, copyright 2001. It was on the Center for Biblical Spirituality website, <http://biblicalspirituality.org/pthirst.html>

**1.4** With a similar thirst, the writer of Psalm 42:1-2 prayed, “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. When shall I come and appear before God?” Does this describe your thirst for God? If so, be encouraged: whatever else is transpiring in your Christian life, your soul-thirst is a sign of soul-growth.

### **THREE KINDS OF SPIRITUAL THIRST**

Though it is not every moment felt, in some sense there is a thirst in every soul. God did not make us to be content in our natural condition. In one way or another, to one degree or another, everyone wants more than he has now. The difference between people is the *kind* of thirsty longing in their soul.

#### **2.0 Thirst of the Empty Soul**

**2.1** The natural, that is, unconverted man or woman has an empty soul. Devoid of God, he is constantly in pursuit of that which will fill his emptiness. The range of his mad scramble may include money, sex, power, houses, lands, sports, hobbies, entertainment, transcendence, significance, education, etc., while basically “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Ephesians 2:3). But as Augustine attested, “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” Always searching and never resting, the empty soul turns from one pursuit to another, unable to find anything that will fill the God-shaped vacuum in his heart.

**2.2** Thirsting and searching, the empty soul is blinded to his real need. Nothing or no one on earth fully and lastingly satisfies, but he doesn't know where to turn except to someone or something else “under the sun” (as opposed to the One beyond the sun). Like Solomon, he discovers that no matter who or what he at first finds exciting, ultimately “all is vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

**2.3** A Christian observes the man with the empty soul and knows that what he is looking for can be found only in the One who said, “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst” (John 4:14). Occasionally an empty soul searches in more serious-minded or spiritual ways that lead some Christians to think that he is thirsting for God. But the world has no such thirst. “There is none who understand,” God inspired both King David and the Apostle Paul to write, “there is none who seeks for God” (Psalm 14:2 and Romans 3:11). Until and unless the Holy Spirit of God touches the spiritual tongue of the empty soul, he will never want to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). Just because a man longs for something that can be found in God alone doesn't mean he's looking for God. A man may pine for peace and have no interest in the Prince of Peace. Many who claim they are questing for God are not thirsting for God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, but only for God as they want Him to be, or a God who will give them what they want.

**2.4** The irony of the empty soul is that while he is perpetually dissatisfied in so many areas of his life, he is so easily satisfied in regard to the pursuit of God. His

attitude toward spiritual matters is like that of the man who said to his complacent soul in Luke 12:19, “Soul, you have many goods for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” Whatever the empty soul may desire in life, he never has what the eighteenth century pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, called “holy desire, exercised in longings, hungerings and thirstings after God and holiness”<sup>1</sup> as the Christian does. The eternal tragedy is that if the empty soul never properly thirsts on earth, he will thirst in Hell as did the rich man who pled in vain for even the tip of a moist finger to be touched to his tongue (Luke 16:24).

### **3.0 Thirst of the Dry Soul**

**3.1** The difference between the empty soul and the dry soul is that one has never experienced “rivers of living water” (John 7:38) while the other has and knows what he is missing. That is not to say that the dry soul can lose the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, indeed Jesus said that “the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into *everlasting* life [John 4:14, emphasis added].

**3.2** How is it then that a true believer in Christ can become a dry soul when Jesus promised that “whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst” (John 4:14)?

**3.3** Pastor/author John Piper was reading this verse one Monday morning and cried out, “What do you mean? I am so thirsty! My church is thirsty! The pastors whom I pray with are thirsty! O Jesus, what did you mean?”

**3.4** As he meditated on the text, the illumination which seemed to come from the Lord upon His Word was perceived by Piper this way:

When you drink my water, your thirst is not destroyed forever. If it did that, would you feel any need of my water afterward? That is not my goal. I do not want self-sufficient saints. When you drink my water, it makes a spring in you. A spring satisfies thirst, not by removing the need you have for water, but by being there to give you water whenever you get thirsty. Again and again and again. Like this morning. So drink, John. Drink.<sup>2</sup>

**3.5** A Christian soul becomes arid in one of three ways. The most common is by drinking too much from the desiccating fountains of the world and too little from “the river of God” (Psalm 65:9). If you drink the wrong thing it can make you even more thirsty. In particularly hot weather, my high school football coach would give us salt tablets to help us minimize the loss of fluids. During one game he experimented with stirring salt into our drinking water, hoping the diluted form would expedite the benefits of the salt. Bad idea. At halftime I drank until my stomach swelled and I was too heavy to run well, yet I was still thirsty.

**3.6** Similarly, perhaps it was because the psalmist had drunk too much of the world's briny spiritual water that he wrote twice in one chapter about longing for God

with all his heart while closely asserting his resolve not to wander from the Lord's Word (see Psalm 119:10, 145). Too much attention to a particular sin or sins, and/or too little attention to communion with God (two things which often occur in tandem) inevitably shrivel the soul of a Christian.

3.7

Another cause of spiritual dryness in the child of God is what the Puritans used to call "God's desertions." While there are times God floods our souls with a sense of His presence, at other times we dehydrate by a sense of His absence. Let me quickly say that His desertion of us is merely our *perception*, for the reality is just as Jesus promised: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). When feeling deserted by God, however, the Christian believes himself to be in the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4), or somewhat like Jesus when He cried from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). The words of David in Psalm 143:6-7 describe the emotions of those who try to pray from such a spiritual desert: "I spread out my hands to You; my soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Answer me speedily, O Lord; my spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, . . ." (Psalm 143:6-7).

3.8

For reasons not always made clear to us, the Lord does sometimes withdraw a conscious sense of His nearness. Since this is not the place for a lengthy treatment of the subject<sup>3</sup>, the best concise counsel I could offer is that of William Gurnall: "The Christian must trust in a withdrawing God."<sup>4</sup> When the sun goes behind a cloud it is no less near than when its rays are felt. However, for the specific purposes of this book and chapter, remember that it is a good thing that you are able to discern the seclusion of God's presence. Such spiritual sensitivity characterizes spiritual health.

3.9

A third cause of spiritual aridity in a Christian is prolonged mental or physical fatigue. Both cause and cure are usually obvious enough, so I won't elaborate on them. What I do want to emphasize is that a believer may not sense spiritual growth when fatigued or burned-out, but instead brood under shadowy thoughts about the reality of his relationship with Christ. And yet, much may have been learned in the very battle that caused the fatigue, things which, when the sunlight returns to the soul, will be seen as significant spiritual turning points. Again, don't forget that the longing for fresh water is itself a sign of progress.

Regardless of the cause, the dry Christian soul is like the believer of Psalm 42:1-2, thirsting for God "As a deer pants for the water brooks." When you are in this condition, nothing else but the living water of God Himself will do. My daughter was three when she separated herself from me while we were in a child-oriented restaurant. She wanted to play with some of the game machines instead of eating. Though she had run to the far side of the restaurant, I could see her and was following to return her to the table. Suddenly she realized she didn't know where she was or where I was. Panic-stricken, she began crying and calling for me. The store manager could have offered her unlimited play on every machine and given her every toy prize in the place, but nothing would have appealed to her without my presence. Everything else was meaningless to her without me. Once we were reunited, for a few moments

she was content just for me to hold her, just to have me back. That's the cry of the dry soul. Other things may have distracted you, but now the only thing that matters is a return of the sense of your Father's presence.

#### **4.0 Thirst of the Satisfied Soul**

**4.1** Unlike the dry soul, and as self-contradictory as it may sound at the moment, the satisfied soul thirsts for God precisely because he is satisfied with God. He *has* “taste[d] and see[n] that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8), and the taste is so uniquely satisfying that he craves more.

**4.2** The Apostle Paul personifies this in his famous exclamation, “that I may know Him” (Philippians 3:10). In the preceding lines he has been exulting in his present knowledge of and relationship with Jesus. He announces, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (3:7-8). Then, just one verse later, the apostle cries out, “that I may know Him.” Paul was soul-satisfied with Jesus Christ, yet thirsty for Him still.

**4.3** Thomas Shepard, founder of Harvard University and an influential New England minister, explained the cycle of satisfaction and thirst this way: “There is in true grace an infinite circle: a man by thirsting receives, and receiving thirsts for more.”<sup>5</sup> Knowing Christ well is so spiritually thirst quenching because no person, possession, or experience can produce the spiritual pleasure we can find in Him. Communion with Christ is incomparably satisfying also because there is no disappointment in what you find in Him. Moreover, the spiritual gratification you find in Him initially is never ending. On top of these, the Lord in whom this satisfaction is found is an infinite universe of satisfaction in which one may immerse himself to explore and enjoy without limitation. So there is no lack of satisfaction in knowing Christ, but neither has God designed us so that one experience with Christ satiates all future desire for Him.

**4.4** Here's how Jonathan Edwards described the relationship between the spiritual good enjoyed in fellowship with Christ and the thirst for more that it produces:

Spiritual good is of a satisfying nature; and for that very reason, the soul that tastes, and knows its nature, will thirst after it, and a fullness of it, that it may be satisfied. And the more he experiences, and the more he knows this excellent, unparalleled, exquisite, and satisfying sweetness, the more earnestly he will hunger and thirst for more, . . .<sup>6</sup>

**4.5** Has your worship and/or devotional experience lately provided you with ravishing tastes of what A. W. Tozer called the “piercing sweetness”<sup>7</sup> of Christ, only to leave you with a divine discontent for more? Would the following prayer of Tozer reflect your own aspirations?

4.6

O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made thirsty still.<sup>8</sup>

Such desires, Christian brother or sister, are marks of a growing soul.

## THE BLESSING OF SPIRITUAL THIRST

“How blessed are all those who long for Him,” declared the prophet Isaiah (in 30:18, NASB). “Blessed are those,” reiterated Jesus, “who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). A thirsting desire for the Lord and His righteousness is a blessing. How so?

5.0

### God Initiates Spiritual Thirst

5.1

The reason a person thirsts for God is because the Holy Spirit is at work within him. If you are a Christian, two people live in your body, you and the Holy Spirit. As 1 Corinthians 6:19 explains, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” And the Holy Spirit is not passive within you.

5.2

For example, just as you can choose to put thoughts in your consciousness, so can He, and He does. For instance, as you can decide to think for a few moments about what you should do this evening, so He can plant thoughts in your mind about God and the things of God. Such work is part of how He causes a Christian to be “spiritually minded” (Romans 8:5).<sup>9</sup> Another part of that ministry is to cause you to have Godward thirsts and longings (such as “Abba, Father;” see Romans 8:15), as well as other signs of spiritual vitality.

5.3

Charles Spurgeon, the peerless British Baptist preacher of the 1800s, elaborated on the blessing of thirsting:

When a man pants after God, it is a secret life within which makes him do it: he would not long after God by nature. No man thirsts for God while he is left in his carnal [i.e., unconverted] state. The unrenewed man pants after anything sooner than God: . . . It proves a renewed nature when you long after God; it is a work of grace in your soul, and you may be thankful for it.<sup>10</sup>

6.0

### God Initiates Spiritual Thirst in Order to Satisfy It

6.1

God does not fire a thirst for Himself in order to mock us or frustrate us. He Himself declared, “I did not say to the seed of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in vain’” (Isaiah 45:19). What’s true for the physical lineage of Jacob (Israel) is also true for his spiritual descendants, i.e., those who believe in Israel’s Messiah, Jesus. God creates a

thirst for Himself so that He can satisfy it with Himself. “For He satisfies the longing soul,” is the promise of Psalm 107:9, “and fills the hungry soul with goodness.” Jesus assured, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they *shall* be filled” (Matthew 5:6, emphasis added).

6.2

Jonathan Edwards argued that Scripture plainly teaches that “The godly are designed for unknown and inconceivable happiness.”<sup>11</sup> And, “No doubt but God will obtain his end in a glorious perfection.”<sup>12</sup> If God has indeed made us for an unimaginable fullness of joy, and has implanted longings for it, then surely:

God has made man capable of exceeding great happiness, which he doubtless did not in vain. . . . To create man with a capacity that he never intended to fill, . . . would have been to have created a large capacity when there was need but of a smaller; yea, it makes man less happy, to be capable of more happiness than he shall ever obtain. . . . [C]an any think that man, . . . was intended in his creation to be left in this respect imperfect, and as a vessel both partly empty and never to be filled? . . . It appears that man was intended for very great blessedness, inasmuch as God has created man with a craving and desire that can be filled with nothing but a very great happiness. . . . God did not create in man so earnest a desire, when at the same time he did not create for so much as he should desire. . . . [A] desire that could never be satisfied would be an eternal torment.<sup>13</sup>

6.3

Edwards maintained, of course, that this “craving and desire” was a Christian’s thirst for God, a longing which can be thoroughly and finally satisfied only in the eternal, undiminished, and face-to-face enjoyment of the Lord Himself in Heaven. Therefore, writes Edwards,

Seeing that reason does so undeniably evidence that saints shall, some time or other, enjoy so great glory, hence we learn that there is undoubtedly a future state after death, because we see they do not enjoy so great glory in this world. . . . [A]ll the spiritual pleasure they enjoy in this life does but enflame their desire and thirst for more enjoyment of God; and if they knew that there was no future life, [it] would but increase their misery, to consider that after this life was ended they were never to enjoy God anymore at all. How good is God, that he has created man for this very end, to make him happy in the enjoyment of himself, the Almighty.<sup>14</sup>

6.4

Once beholding His glory, believers will testify that “They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures” (Psalm 36:8).

Do you thirst for God? Thirst is a God-planned part of the growth of a soul toward its Heavenly home.

## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR THIRSTING AFTER THE THIRST-SLAKER

If you possess a true thirst for God, you will long to long even more. As Edwards insisted, “true and gracious longings after holiness, are no idle ineffectual desires.”<sup>15</sup>

### 7.0 Meditate on Scripture.

7.1 Note “meditate,” not merely read. Many languishing souls are assiduous Bible readers. Without the addition of meditation, warned the great man of prayer and faith, George Muller, “the simple reading of the Word of God” can become information that “only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe.”<sup>16</sup>

7.2 Think of the incessant flow of information through your mind on a daily basis—all that you see, read, and hear. Most of us struggle with “information overload,” unable to keep up with the constant input of data. If we are not careful, the words of the Bible can become just another gallon of words in the ever-increasing current through our thought. As soon as it passes by, pushed on by the pressure of the flow in the pipe, we remember little (if anything) of what we've just read, for now we must immediately shift our focus to what's now before us. So much processes through our brains, if we don't absorb some of it we will be affected by none of it. And surely if we should absorb anything that courses through our thinking, it should be the inspired words from Heaven. Without absorption of the water of God's Word, there's no quench of our spiritual thirst. Meditation is the means of absorption.

7.3 Spend twenty-five to fifty percent of your Bible intake time meditating on some verse, phrase, or word from your reading. Ask questions of it. Pray about it. Take your pen and scribble and doodle on a pad about it. Look for at least one way you should apply it or live it. Linger over it. Soak your soul slowly in the water of the Word, and you'll find it not only refreshing you, but prompting a satisfying thirst for more.<sup>17</sup>

### 8.0 Pray through Scripture.

8.1 After you read through a section of Scripture, pray through part of that same passage. Whether you read one chapter of the Bible per day or many, afterward choose a portion of your reading and, verse by verse, let the words of God become the wings of your words to Him.

8.2 While it is possible to pray through any part of Scripture, I particularly recommend, regardless of where in the Bible you have done your reading, that you turn to one of the Psalms and pray your way through as much of it as you can. The book of Psalms was the God-inspired hymnbook of Israel. In addition, twice in the New Testament (see Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16) Christians are commanded

to sing Psalms. Unlike any other book of the Bible, the Psalms were inspired *by* God for the expressed purpose of being reflected *to* God.

**8.3**

Say, for example, you begin praying your way through Psalm 63. The first verse is: “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” You could enter into prayer by confessing that the Lord is your God, thanking Him for being your God and gracious, then simply exulting in God as God. Next you could express your soul's thirsts and longings for Him, acknowledging what a blessing it is to have a God-given thirst for God, etc. Perhaps then you would ask the Lord to plant a thirst for Himself in your children, or in someone with whom you've been sharing the Gospel. On you would go through the psalm, praying about whatever the text said and whatever occurs to you as you read it. If nothing comes to mind while pausing over a verse or verses, go on to the next.

**8.4**

The poetic, visceral, and spiritually transparent elements of the Psalms often combine in ways that send the soul soaring and that inflame passion for God. They deal realistically with the full range of human emotions, and can take you from wherever you are spiritually and lift your spirit Heavenward. Nothing so consistently renews my longings for God and catapults me into experiential communion with Him as praying through a Psalm.

**9.0 Read thirst-making writers.**

**9.1**

After the God-breathed words of the Bible, read the time-tested works of those Christian writers with a thirst-making pen. If you can find the collection of Puritan prayers and devotions called *The Valley of Vision*<sup>18</sup> you will be blessed by reading it meditatively. Don't neglect John Bunyan's classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Read the more devotional pieces of Puritan writers such as John Owen, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Brooks, John Flavel, and Thomas Watson. Enjoy the books and sermons of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon, for they will be treasured as long as the church is on the earth. For more recent publications, A.W. Tozer's small books are both convicting and exhilarating; John Piper's writings are a burning blend of spirit and truth.

**9.2**

As He has with my friend T.W., may the Lord bless you with a great, lifelong thirst for Himself, for surely He intends to satisfy it with Himself.

### Endnotes

1. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, Perry Miller, gen. ed., Religious Affections, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 104.
2. John Piper, *A Godward Life* (Sisters, Ore: Multnomah, 1997), 84-85.
3. For further reading on God's desertions, see Joseph Symonds, *The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul* (1671; reprint ed., Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996).
4. John Blanchard, comp., *Gathered Gold* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1984), 100.
5. Thomas Shepard, *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, as quoted in Edwards, 376-377.
6. Edwards, 379.
7. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Christian Publications, 1948), 8.
8. Tozer, 20.
9. For further reading on spiritual mindedness, see Donald S. Whitney, *How Can I Be Sure I'm A Christian?* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 67-80.
10. C. H. Spurgeon, "The Panting Hart," Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 14, (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1869; reprint ed., Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1982), 417.
11. Jonathan Edwards, "Nothing Upon Earth Can Represent the Glories of Heaven," The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 14, {Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729}, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 143.
12. Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, 147.
13. Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, 151-152.
14. Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, 152-153.
15. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 378.
16. Roger Steer, ed., *Spiritual Secrets of George Muller* (Wheaton, Ill: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1985), 62-63.
17. For further reading on meditation on Scripture, see Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 43-51, 67-72.
18. Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

### Study Questions:

1. In this article there are three kinds of thirst defined. List the three types and give a 2-3 sentence explanation of each one.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. “The reason a person thirsts for God is because the Holy Spirit is at work within him” (pg. 16, 5.1). Give 2 Scripture references to support this quotation. Explain how this statement helps us as we evangelize unbelievers.

---

---

---

---

3. Psalm 107:9 reads: “For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” What can you say to someone who says they really want to know God, but they don’t think God has chosen to have a relationship with them?

---

---

---

---

4. List the 3 practical steps to take to increase your thirst for God. Explain how each one will be helpful.

---

---

---

---

5. Memorize Psalm 42:1-2. Explain how this passage has increased your thirst for God.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---