

*Seven Desires of the Heart: to Be Included*

I want to begin with a story from Indonesia: It was January, in the year 2000, and Adel, a young Christian wife and mother of two was living peacefully on the island of Dodi.

But Christianity is a minority group in Indonesia, making up not quite 10% of the population. The majority, by far, at 87% of the people, is Muslim. And while many of the people who “register” themselves as Muslim rarely pray, rarely visit the mosque or rarely read the Quran, there are others who are not among the moderate, but *radical* in their beliefs.

For Adel and her family, life was abruptly altered without warning when Muslims from a neighboring community attacked her village, setting fire to every home and hut, searching for and gathering the Christian people together.

In the wake of this violence, the only chance for survival was to flee – *immediately!* Adel snatched up her two children and ran for the jungle, along with her mother and mother-in-law and many others of the village, crawling along the jungle floor in order to maintain their secrecy. Not all were so fortunate, for Adel and her children could hear the horrible screams of friends and neighbors being slaughtered by the invading *Jihadists* who were butchering and killing all Christians with their clubs and machetes.

The ordeal of the hunt by the Muslims went on for many days, searching the jungle area – and every so often Adel and her small group could hear in the near distance the cry and screams of those who were captured, tortured, raped, and murdered – all because of their religious differences.

With the sounds of occasional gunfire continuing, Adel knew she would have the most difficult conversation with her children you can imagine. She had no choice. She had to tell them: “Christina and Anto, please look at me and listen very carefully. If we are caught by those of the *jihad*, they will ask you if you want to become a Muslim. If you say *no*, they may kill you.” Adel looked directly into her children’s eyes. She knew there was only one right answer, but how could children, ages 6 and 9, be expected to be so brave?

Both her children simply answered, “We want to follow Jesus.”

With that, Adel opened the Bible she had snatched from her home before running and read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Finishing the reading, Adel had to ask again, with tears filling her eyes, “Christina, aren’t you afraid they may kill you if you say you are a Christian?”

Christina brought her face close to her mother’s, looked into her eyes and softly answered, “Mom, please don’t worry. I’m not afraid to die.”

At some point in the early days of the chaos, Adel and her children were able to hook up with her husband Methu. They had been separated at the very beginning, and she didn’t know whether he was alive or dead. But their reunion was brief, for in his search for food and water to satisfy his children’s hunger, he was captured and reportedly killed.

Within the same hour, Adel and her children, along with their grandmothers, were surrounded. She and Christina were separated from her son, Anto, who was quickly killed along with the elderly women. With her last bit of strength, Adel shouted to her captives who came near, “The blood of Jesus is all-powerful!”

Adel’s captivity went on into weeks and then months. I can’t describe all that happened. Given the chance to renounce Christianity and express faith in the Muslim religion so that she

might live, Adel refused. The whole time she went through beatings and violence at the hands of her tormentors, she kept saying aloud, “The blood of Jesus is all-powerful!”

Unbeknownst to Adel, her husband Methu was alive. When he had been surrounded and threatened that he would lose his wife and daughter forever if he didn’t convert to Muslim, he answered: “Even though you want to do bad things to my family, I am a follower of Christ, and my faith in Jesus is of much more value than anything you could offer me. It is more precious to me than gold.” He later told an interviewer that a Bible verse came to his mind where Jesus said, “If you disown me before men, I will disown you before My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:33)

How could he renounce the One who taken him from darkness and death and given him light and life!

Eventually, after a few years, Adel was able to escape her captors and find her way to her husband, Methu. Later, he returned to the place of her captivity to reclaim his daughter as the family was reunited after years of torture and mayhem for Christians in Indonesia.

I hear these stories that are taking place now, in my lifetime, and I feel ashamed of the ease and comforts I experience as a Christian man in this land of wealth and prosperity. I know I belong to this family that has suffered so monstrously. I wonder how Adel and Methu, and the hundreds of others who are persecuted could dare to be so bold in their faith! I wonder if I could be that strong, to maintain my faith even under persecution and torture?

To answer how Adel and Methu and their family could be strong – we have to understand what God had done in their lives! Their endurance had to do with the *assurance* they knew that they were included in something *bigger* than themselves! They knew that they were a part of God’s family; they trusted God – whether they would experience life or death, pain or peace. They trusted God with their all!

The persecution of Christians at this point in history is worse than it has ever been at any other time, including the first generations of the Church! In fact, much of the New Testament was written to a persecuted Church in order to encourage them to trust in God so that they might experience the joy and prize of their faith in the after-life!

This is the last installment in the sermon series, *The Seven Desires of the Heart*.

Some would claim that God has made each of us with desires to be heard and understood, to be affirmed, to be blessed, to be safe, to be touched, to be chosen, and to be included – to belong! This is who we are as human beings! We are relational people! We need to be in community with one another, and to know that we have a place here!

Let’s keep in mind that no one goes through this suffering or persecution unless their lives have been changed through the love of God in Christ Jesus! Adel and Methu and many others are giving up their need “to be safe” and “to belong” to *this* world, “to be included” among the human family, in order to be safe and included within the love of God! They receive none of these needs – to be safe; to be included – as they are threatened and persecuted by the world, and yet they receive all of this from God! He is the ultimate source to fulfill our every need!

Typically, we would expect to find fulfillment of our needs from our closest relatives, from our parents, grandparents or siblings. But we run into trouble when we expect too much from those relatives. The human family is limited in how well they can fulfill what we feel we need. And frankly, we should let them off the hook, because it is only in God that we ultimately find these desires met. And only after finding that God meets our desires can we practice meeting

the same desires for others!

If you read more details of Adel's story, you can see that it was because she knew she was *included* in the grace of God's redeeming love that she could endure the trials she experienced. And then, as her family and friends saw her faith, they too, were encouraged in their belonging to God – by Adel and by God!

Our second reading describes the Christian family as a group that *belongs* to one another! Hear the word of the Lord!

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

<sup>12</sup> The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. <sup>15</sup> If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

<sup>18</sup> But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. <sup>19</sup> How strange a body would be if it had only one part! <sup>20</sup> Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

<sup>22</sup> In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. <sup>23</sup> And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, <sup>24</sup> while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. <sup>25</sup> This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. <sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

<sup>27</sup> All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

Do you hear this? You are included in something *BIG!*

We belong together in the same way the parts of the body belong to one another. This is the way God has made us to be. In fact, we find fulfillment as a person when we are included with others in this adventure of faith! Using the example of a body, the Bible makes the most of the importance each of you has in His Church. If what seems like an insignificant part is taken away, the whole body becomes less effective, or less healthy. Vs. 22 tells us: **"Some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary."**

If you think that your gift is more important than someone else's is, that is spiritual pride. We shouldn't look down on those who seem unimportant, and we shouldn't be jealous of others who have impressive gifts. **God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity.** We should use the gifts we've been given and encourage others to use theirs. If we don't, the body of believers will be less effective. <sup>25</sup> **This** (image of the body of Christ) **makes for harmony among the members, so that all the**

**members care for each other. <sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.**

We belong to one another within God's Church!

Being *included* is so important to our children as they go through school! Belonging is something that kids find as they make connections with others in the band, or sports, or choir, or one of the many clubs that schools may offer. *Belonging* binds us together with each other in Scouting or in like-minded hobbies and games. Any of these helps our children adjust and fulfill the need to be *included*!

In a negative way, the strong desire to belong is even behind the rise of gangs. Because many young men in the inner city have no father to belong to or healthy family life, they join gangs to give themselves a feeling of belonging. We wear the shirts and colors of our favorite sports' teams because people long to belong and be identified with the team, or with *something*. We want to be aligned with others who accept us and agree with us!

We have all seen how our culture expresses who is valuable and important because of their appearance and performance. So where does that leave those who are dirty or ugly or uneducated? What hope does that offer the unborn child? Or the elderly? The handicapped? Not much hope for inclusion at all. Max Lucado says, "We become nameless numbers on mislaid lists."

How "attractive" people are or how well they perform is man's value system. But it is not God's. His plan is much brighter. In God's book, you are heading somewhere. You have an amazing destiny.

We're being prepared to walk down the church aisle and become the bride of Jesus. We're going to live with Him. Share the throne with Him. We count. We're valuable.

Jesus' love does not depend on what we do for Him. If there was anything that Jesus wanted everyone to understand, it was this: You are worth something simply because you are a person. That's why Jesus treated people the way He did.

You have value simply because you are! You are His!

It's important that you have faith in what God declared about you: You are fearfully and wonderfully made, a beloved child of God, a unique treasure who is worthy to be valued.

Charles Stanley, a great Southern Baptist preacher said: I have seen only one way for the church to function as it should: Believers must commit to give of themselves because they belong to one another.

"For example, a man resolves to pray and struggle alongside a hurting brother until the burden is resolved or peace returns. Or a woman makes herself available to answer a new Christian's questions about the weekly sermon – the two ladies search the Bible and fill their minds with Scripture. And there are countless other ways to serve others, such as driving an elderly member to worship, leading a group study, or visiting a tired single mom and listening to her concerns.

"Before you become overwhelmed by the variety of needs in your church, let me remind you that loving each other is meant to be a body-wide effort. One person cannot meet every need. But suppose you commit to serving a small group of people whom God brings into your circle of influence. If, in order to care for them, you surrender self-centered priorities, the Lord will bless you with more joy and contentment than you've ever known.

“To serve others before serving yourself is to practice authentic Christianity. I'm certain that if believers commit to reach out to include as many others as the Lord brings to their attention, then a church can be transformed, becoming a healthy body of believers who function together for the glory of God.”

INVITATION:

- Which desires do you most long to have fulfilled? [This becomes your prayer need.]
- Which desires are easiest for you to give to others? [This defines your commitment to others.]