

# RECOVERING THE ABUNDANT LIFE

A RESOURCE OF KEEPING COMPANY WITH JESUS  
WRITTEN BY GAIL JOHNSEN

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*Before you read: What two words would you use to define the spiritual as it is to you, as it defines your reality? (Be honest. It's not how you think it should be. We are not looking for Sunday school answers, but honest ones.)*

*Share your words with your group. What seems to be the overall tone or theme of the words that were shared? Do you think this is what Jesus meant when he said that he came to give us fullness of life?*

*How did our spiritual life become something less than what Jesus intended?*

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## THE SACRED ROMANCE

WRITTEN BY JOHN ELDRIDGE

*Some years into our spiritual journey, after the waves of anticipation that mark the beginning of any pilgrimage have begun to ebb into life's middle years of service and busyness, a voice speaks to us in the midst of all we are doing. There is something missing in all of this, it suggests. There is something more.*

*The voice often comes in the middle of the night or the early hours of morning, when our hearts are most unedited and vulnerable. At first, we mistake the source of this voice and assume it is just our imagination. We fluff up our pillow, roll over, and go back to sleep. Days, weeks, even months go by and the voice*

*speaks to us again: Aren't you thirsty? Listen to your heart. There is something missing.*

*We listen and we are aware of...a sigh. And under the sigh is something dangerous, something that feels adulterous and disloyal to the religion we are serving. We sense a passion deep within; it feels reckless, wild.*

*We tell ourselves that this small, passionate voice is an intruder who has gained entry because we have not been diligent enough in practicing our religion. Our pastor seems to agree with this assessment and exhorts us from the*

*pulpit to be more faithful. We try to silence the voice with outward activity, redoubling our efforts at Christian service. We join a small group and read a book on establishing a more effective prayer life. We train to be part of a church evangelism team. We tell ourselves that the malaise of spirit we feel even as we step up our religious activity is a sign of spiritual immaturity, and we scold our heart for its lack of fervor.*

*Sometime later, the voice in our heart dares to speak to us again, more insistently this time. Listen to me—there is something missing in all this. You long to be in a love affair, an adventure. You were made for something more. You know it.*

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**W**e all share this same dilemma—we long for life and we’re not sure where to find it. We want the abundant life Jesus promised but often our journey leads us elsewhere. The guide we have been given is the desire set deep within, the desire we often overlook or mistake for something else or even choose to ignore.

“We are not integrated. We are distraught. We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to fulfill them all. And we are unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow. For over the margins of life comes a whisper, a faint call, a premonition of richer living which we know we are passing by. Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens, we are further strained by an inward uneasiness, because we have hints there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power.” ~Thomas Kelly’s *A Testament of Devotion*

In our longing to know God and walk in his ways most of us have followed some kind of prescribed formula for spiritual success. We believe the right doctrines, live upright lives and attend church consistently. Yet for all our personal strategies for personal transformation, they do not ultimately achieve what we had hoped for. What we have failed to realize is pushing and shoving do not bring life to our souls. Unknowingly we have distracted ourselves from our heart’s true desire...God himself.

The truest thing about you is your desire to know and encounter, in a real, meaningful way, the living God. It’s not your wounds or your brokenness or your self-sufficiency. You were created to be in close, deep friendship with the One who made you. Yet, too few of us ever experience this kind of life marked by such intimacy.

So where do we start our journey? With Jesus. We have made Christianity about so many things: right methods, right doctrine, right behavior, right belief, principles for living, getting life fixed, rules, laws, evangelism, end times, spiritual warfare, and on and on it goes. But Jesus did not come to give us a religion or a set of beliefs, or even a better way of living, he came to give us Himself.

Everything in Christianity hangs on the person of Jesus. The entirety and testimony of Scripture points to Christ (John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 31, 44-45). The Holy Spirit's role is to reveal Christ to our hearts (John 15:26; John 16:13-15). The apostles' message (Acts 5:42) echoed Paul's message when he wrote, "We proclaim him..." (Col. 1:28 NASB). Indeed, Paul's message, passion, and unction of his life jumps off every page of his writings and is echoed throughout Church history, "For me to live is Christ..." (Phil. 1:21) and "I want to know Christ..." (Phil. 3:10).

What are the implications for us? We get a dramatic picture of it in one of Paul's great prayers: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:16-19).

Paul's great prayer in Eph. 3 was for the Spirit to reveal the unfathomable, glorious, limitless, radiant, loving Christ to our hearts. It is not a doctrine of Christ but a spiritual seeing that we need. Paul reasoned, if we could experience Christ...having an inward revelation in our hearts by the Holy Spirit and allow this inward knowing to occupy our hearts...Christ would be enough. In other words, everything in the Christian life stems from such a revelation.

Being a Christian was never a matter of becoming a religious person but rather living with the awareness of Christ as an ever-present reality in our lives. There is so much more to being a disciple than believing and trusting Jesus from the onset; it is a life-long, interactive, an engaging way of living with Jesus himself that allows us to live with a very real sense of his nearness, availability and fathomless love. This is the confidence that grounds our lives and allows us to experience fullness of life as God intended and the abundant life Jesus died to give us.

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### **Reflection Questions:**

*...we have hints there is a way of life vastly richer.* This is the life we want. This is the life Jesus promised. And yet it is the life not found in striving, so perhaps we should say it is the life we are not striving for but attempting to give into. The heartache comes not because we don't think this kind of life is livable, but

precisely because we know it is. We have seen it, and occasionally tasted it.

Deep within each one of us, is a longing for God...not what you want to do *for* Him but to experience God himself. Read Mark 10:46-51:

*Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large*

*crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

*Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

*Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.*

*"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."*

How do you answer Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?"

What longing(s) has God placed deep in your heart? Can you think of a picture that might best express that longing?

### **Spiritual Practices:**

**Read** Paul's wonderful prayer again recorded in **Eph. 3:14-21**. Read it every day...with a different translation (available online). Approach the text with openness, attentiveness, and surrender. Sit with it. (This will take time!) "Walk with it" throughout your day. Journey your thoughts. Allow the text to sink deep into your heart.

Then rewrite it in your own words as it speaks to your heart. Share it with your group.

### **Additional Resources:**

*Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* by Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola