

AWAKENING TO GOD

BY ANTONIO BALDOVINOS

“I would rather pay the price to hear God's voice personally, regardless of how difficult the circumstances may be, than to have to settle for always hearing from Him secondhand.”

JOY DAWSON

At 6' 6" and weighing 195 lbs, "Air Jordan" as he was called, left an imprint on the game of basketball forever. As a five-time league MVP, ten-time scoring champion, a six-time finals champion, finishing his career with 32,292 points, and a career average of 30.12 points per game, which is the best in NBA history, Michael Jordan is still considered to be the best basketball player there ever was. After Michael joined his high school team, as a tenth grader, he was cut from the varsity team. This pushed him to work hard and eventually excel to become the greatest basketball player of all time. I could go on and on and tell you everything there is to know about Michael Jordan. As a teenage basketball player and enthusiast, I was familiar with every move, statistic and accomplishment that M.J. ever had. The thing was, I could tell you all *about* Michael Jordan, but I didn't know him at all. I have never even met him, and furthermore, he didn't know me either.

I am overwhelmingly grateful that one of the most intriguing mysteries about God is that He not only knows *everything* about us, but He knows us better than we know ourselves.

“You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, you know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.” (Psalm 139:1-6)

That is just so awesome! This is truly mind-boggling. He knows me this much and wants to be with me all day long and He is watching me all day long. His ears are attentive to my every word, even my every thought. I tell my kids all the time that God can't wait to speak to them all day long. He *longs* to hear from us. He wants a talking and walking relationship with us day and night. God desires to talk to us about everything in our lives. His interest goes beyond the details of our lives; He's after knowing all the inklings of our heart.

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...” (Genesis 3:8)

God created us for His pleasure. He formed us so that we can have divine communion with Him and that we can enjoy the sweet and mysterious mingling of kindred personalities. After all, we were made in His image. He meant for us to see Him and live with Him and draw our life from Him. Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the day. What an unfathomable reality: speaking *face to face* with the Creator of the universe is an incredible thought!

But we have been guilty of “*rebellion*.” In this guilt we have fled as far away as possible from Him and His presence. Instead of running to Him, we ran away from Him.

Yet, who can really flee from His presence? Adam tried to flee from His presence when He sinned, and even Peter withdrew away from Jesus crying at his feet said, “*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!*” (Luke 5:8)

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So now, man's life upon the earth is away from His Presence, torn apart from this anchor, which is our right and proper dwelling place and what He originally intended for us. This state of distance is what has caused our unceasing restlessness within our hearts and with life. There is an intense cry and unsatisfied longing in people that makes them want more. All over the world people want to experience and live in the fullness that was intended for them from the very beginning. The desperate cry is to know God. There is one reason for this: *nothing* else satisfies but Him. He is our exceedingly great reward. We were created to know the uncreated God.

The whole redemptive work of God is to undo the tragic effects of our rebellion, and to bring us back again into right and eternal relationship with Him. This requires our sins to be disposed of once and for all, and that we live in His Presence as before. As Psalm's powerfully states, "*He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.*" (Psalm 103:12). Now that God has really taken care of our sins, when our restless heart feels a yearning for the Presence of God it only takes us to respond to it. God is calling us to spend time with Him.

"My heart has heard you say, Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "Lord I am coming." (Psalm 27:8)

KNOWING GOD

I have traveled to many cities around the world. Throughout my travels I have worked and spoken in hundreds of churches and I have seen one common deficiency: the lack of *knowing God and His presence*. The world is perishing because of the extreme lack of the knowledge of God, and the Church is starving because of the lack of His Presence. The cure for most of our religious disorders would be to enter into His Presence in spiritual experience, drink deep, and to become fully aware that we are in God and He is in us.

The Bible assumes the fact that men and women can know God in the same degree that they know any other person or thing in this world. The same terminology used for describing our physical senses, is used to express the knowledge of God all throughout the Bible. Here are some examples:

- *"Taste and see that the LORD is good..."* (Psalm 34:8 NIV)
- *"All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad."* (Psalm 45:8 NIV)
- *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27 NASB)
- *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."* (Matthew 5:8 NIV)

There are countless more passages all throughout the Bible that give us descriptions and expressions of how we can know God for our own understanding. God wants to reveal Himself to us in even greater ways than these. These are just the elementary and foundational ways to knowing Him. We become familiar with our five senses by exercising them in our physical world. In the same manner we have within us our spiritual senses; we can use them to know God and the spiritual world if we will obey the Spirit's urge and begin to exercise them.

To confirm my earlier observation of the church, I have noticed one sad statement I keep hearing from Christians from the various gatherings and meetings. They say something like this: *"I give financially. I attend church. But I don't really know God."* My question is why do the redeemed children of God know so little about the reality of communion with God that the Bible clearly states we can and should have? The answer: it's because of our chronic unbelief. Faith enables our spiritual senses to function. Where faith is missing or lacking, the result will be inward numbness toward spiritual things. This is the sad and unnecessary condition that a vast

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number of Christians face today.

APPETITES

As I watch people's patterns of life and ways of living, I am truly horrified by what our society feeds on. As we increase our intake of earthly entertainment, we dull our capacity to know God. It's not that we don't want to know God; it's that we are so full from eating the lesser things of entertainment, that we can't see God or taste God when He's right in front of us. We are indulging ourselves with so many hours of television and internet, in and out of the car with secular music, that God Himself is not given room to whisper to us, to reveal Himself and show us who He is.

Moreover, entertainment is not only dissatisfying us, but it is also destroying us. The temporal forms of entertainment that are used by the enemy to dull us to sleep inhibit God from moving in our lives. The Creator of the universe cannot show Himself to us. Most people are feeding themselves with a steady diet of entertainment that has numbed and deadened them to the reality of God!

One of the greatest problems facing the Body of Christ today is that of spiritual boredom. Many churches are made up of people who have been inundated with entertainment and recreation. All week long they are fully engaged and locked into media of all sorts. Pastors feel compelled to compete with the things that grapple for the attention of their church attendees. A night out at the latest blockbuster movie can move us to tears, but the worship service the next morning does nothing to get our attention. We are dulled into expecting temporal and worldly fulfillment, rather than devoting ourselves to fascination on the eternal. It is tragic how we invest what limited passion we have in things that simply do not satisfy.

SPIRITUAL ANOREXIA¹

Although, we have a natural, innate appetite for God and spiritual things, we may not be experiencing the sensations that would tell us we are hungering for Him. Why not? Maybe it's because we have been depriving ourselves of spiritual food for too long. Are you refusing to feed yourself spiritually? If you don't actively seek God and instead ignore this yearning from deep inside, cravings can, and do, eventually change.

When we are physically hungry, our body sends signals through our hunger pangs and cravings that tell us we need to eat. If ignored, these signals at first grow stronger in hopes of pushing us to fulfill the need for food. But if we continue to ignore this appetite for long enough, it will eventually begin to fade and we can actually convince ourselves that we really aren't hungry anymore. That is exactly what the anorexic does. She tells herself she isn't hungry and ignores the signals her body is sending her. Eventually she will have completely numbed her cravings to the point that she no longer desires food. She has so effectively convinced herself that she is not hungry, that her body is now starving to death. Yet she doesn't even realize the danger. So too when we squelch our hunger for God.

This is how it can be with our spiritual appetite. When we are spiritually hungry, we experience the beckoning of the Holy Spirit within us to feast on the things of God. If we ignore our craving for God long enough, we will find the craving for Him eventually begins to fade. We are capable of convincing ourselves that we are doing "just fine," yet we are starving our spirit to the point of spiritual death. Our desires for the things of God fade, and we are no longer able to experience the draw of the Holy Spirit because we have so numbed ourselves to His call. Without even noticing it, prayer has become less important, we no longer thirst after God's word, and we convince ourselves it's no big deal to miss church.

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Both types of anorexics refuse themselves the nourishment they need to sustain life. The only way for both of them to heal and regain a healthy appetite that will help them grow is to pull up to the table and eat. Are you feasting at the banquet table of God? If you want to cultivate and grow your spiritual craving, you must feed it. Psalm 34:8 says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” When you come to the banquet table to feast on the things of the Spirit you will find that the Lord is good and that He satisfies completely. And, although the Lord does not completely satisfy once you taste of Him, you will find yourself wanting more and more of Him.

REALITY OF GOD

God is real. He is real in the absolute and final sense that *nothing* else is. All other reality is contingent upon His, not on what we feel or think. The great reality is God. And no matter what the world tries to offer or tell us, God and the spiritual world are real. Spiritual things are there (or instead we should say *here*) inviting our attention and challenging our trust.

Our trouble is that we have established bad thought patterns. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. We do not deny the existence of the spiritual world, but we doubt that it is really real in the accepted meaning of the word. The real existence of the spirit world is proven by a great story that pulls away the curtain to what we do not see.

Allow me to illustrate this. Elisha, a prophet of God, had made a neighboring nation enraged for warning Israel when the enemies’ army was going to attack them. God instructed Elisha time and again and King Aram would be too late to attack every time. The king finally planned to attack and take care of Elisha. He went at night, while everyone was sleeping and set up his army surrounding Elisha. And then here’s what it says in 2 Kings:

“When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” the servant asked. “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:15-17)

The conclusion is remarkable. The story vividly gives us a glimpse into the true spiritual reality. Aren’t you glad it’s more than what we see, feel and touch? The spiritual reality is more real than what we know. What we don’t realize is that we could live in this reality today, but there is an assault on us living in and comprehending the spiritual world and it’s relativity to us.

The world of senses will intrude upon our attention day and night for the rest of our lives. It is persuasive, determined and self-destructing. It does not appeal to our faith; instead, it assaults our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final. But sin also has clouded the lenses of our hearts so that we cannot see the other, true reality: the City of God, shining around us. The world of sense triumphs time and again. The visible becomes the enemy of the invisible and the temporal the enemy of the eternal. That is the tragic curse inherited by every member of Adam’s race.

Our natural reality tends to make contrasts between the spiritual and the real; but no such contrasts actually really exist. The spiritual is undeniably real.

THE CALL TO ABANDONMENT

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I want to call you to living in the fullness of God. The grace of God calls us to abandonment, not only because God is worthy of abandonment, though He is, but because total abandonment is the *only* way our spirit is alive and energized and safe. It's not just that God is worthy of us being whole-hearted; it's the only way you can live safely. That's how the human heart is made: if we have nothing worth dying for, we have nothing worth living for. If you don't have a cause to which you will give everything, you will live bored.

If you are completely wholehearted, if you have something worth dying for, you have something to live for.

We need an awakening. We need our eyes to be opened so that we can finally actually *see* God. Our desperate cry and our hunger can begin to be fulfilled today. And just as Elisha asked God to open up the eyes of his assistant, the eyes of his understanding, I want to ask God to reveal the spiritual world around us, but more than that; to open up our eyes so that we can see Him! I want to encourage you to pray this prayer and to continually pray this prayer...

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe..." (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Our greatest need is to receive a greater measure of the spirit of wisdom and revelation. This is almost always the greatest need of your loved ones (saved and unsaved), ministries, cities, nations or governments that you pray for. Satan's most common weapon is the opposite of this; he attacks by releasing accusation and deception to confuse our hearts.

Let's break down some of Ephesians 1 more in depth:

"Our eyes being enlightened," explains what it means to receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation. In other words, our minds are enabled to perceive God and God imparts grace to our affections to love God and feel His presence.

"That you may know," (experience) (Eph. 1:18) – to know is to encounter and experience God's glory.

"Revelation," is the unveiling of God Himself.

Here is further definition:

1. The Greek word "*knowledge*" (epignosis) refers to experiential knowledge, which is much more than informational knowledge of true facts about God.
2. To know or encounter God is the essence of eternal salvation (John 17:3; Phil 3:10). *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only God and Jesus Christ. (John 17:3)*

I encourage praying this daily for your own life and for the people around you. If you want God to be revealed to you, begin doing this today.

Begin by praying this right now:

God, I pray that you would give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that I may know you better. I pray that my eyes would be opened in order to know the hope to which you have called me. God, I ask that you would wake me up in areas that I am asleep or cannot see. I ask that you would reveal yourself to me today. I ask that

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you would strengthen my spirit man to come alive and vibrant so that I may see you, hear from you and know you.

Endnote

1. Section “Spiritual Anorexia” from Feeding your appetites by Arterburn