

INTIMACY WITH GOD

We've all had a strong longing. Like when we feel lonely and wish for someone to talk to.

- How do you feel when you long for someone to talk to? How do you feel when everyone you most love isn't available?

God has a longing too. Something author Brennan Manning refers to as "The Furious Longing of God" in his book by that name. God longs for intimacy with us. We've been told countless times and know He loves us more than we could ever imagine. More than we can imagine, yes. But could we try to understand somehow? Maybe we could learn to understand how much God loves us and longs for us to spend time with Him.

Think of Jesus, God made human:

"...being in very nature God, [He] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:6-8)

Think of how He taught and how He healed and how he loved, even to the point of suffering a painful death for us on the cross. Could there be any better example of love than Him? Imagine if Jesus came to eat with us at our Living Room table. What would He say? What would He share? How would He show compassion for our pain?

This is a "peer" support group. That means that we all share experience of emotional pain.

- How would Jesus fit in with us?
- Would He understand what we are going through?
- Might He even share with us some of His own pain? Do you think He would?

Although the word "furious" is often used to express a kind of anger, it has another meaning as well. As in "a furious storm," the love of God suggests intense energy or fury. Manning shares how G.K. Chesterton spoke of the "furious love of God" describing the enormous vitality and strength of God, "seeking union with us."

When you hear the phrase, "God's furious longing for us:"

- Does that make you feel you "should" pray?
- Does that make you feel you "must" pray?

- Does it give you a desire or longing to pray?

Quite a few years ago - in the midst of a depression - I called a friend and, in an emotional state, told her how ashamed I was of myself. In response to her questions, I told her I didn't want to live anymore. I had been having suicidal thoughts. She expressed her concern for me and told me she would always love me - no matter what I did or said. How amazed I was to hear her say that, especially in light of how I had been feeling! How deeply that touched me! And I know that didn't come from her alone. It came from God.

It took awhile for this to sink in, but over the next while I gradually started feeling joy. Knowing how much I was loved gave me a joy that grew - a treasure within me - a treasure I now wanted to share others.

My depression still comes back periodically. I still feel shame periodically. I often don't feel good about myself. That's all part of my disorder. But I am convinced in the end, that God does love me and longs to spend time with me. And I long to spend time with Him. I always want to be reminded - and to fully sense - how much God loves me.

God says to each of us, "I'll always love you, no matter what you do or what you say or how you feel. I long to have you close to me."

Would you like to pray?

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, 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."

Ephesians 3:17-19