

Living in Union with Christ

Session #2 - Taste and See - The Affections and Loving God

**All Saints Church
2024-01-28**

<https://georgekong.me/asc/living-in-union-with-christ.zip>

introductory question

What is the nature of true religion?

Or, what does it mean to really be a Christian?

series overview

- a follow-on to the Union with Christ class
- focus on our experience of knowing and loving God
- survey
- affective
- sharing personal stories

you are here

Sessions

1) Living in the Presence of God - Psalm 139, Psalm 1, proactivity, "bring it on"

2) Taste and See - The Affections and Loving God

3) Union With the Present, Loving Lord Jesus Christ

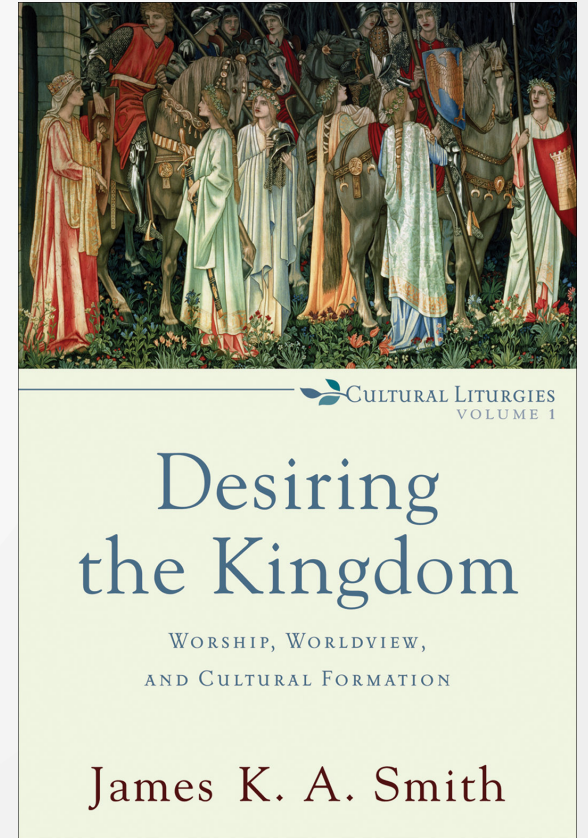
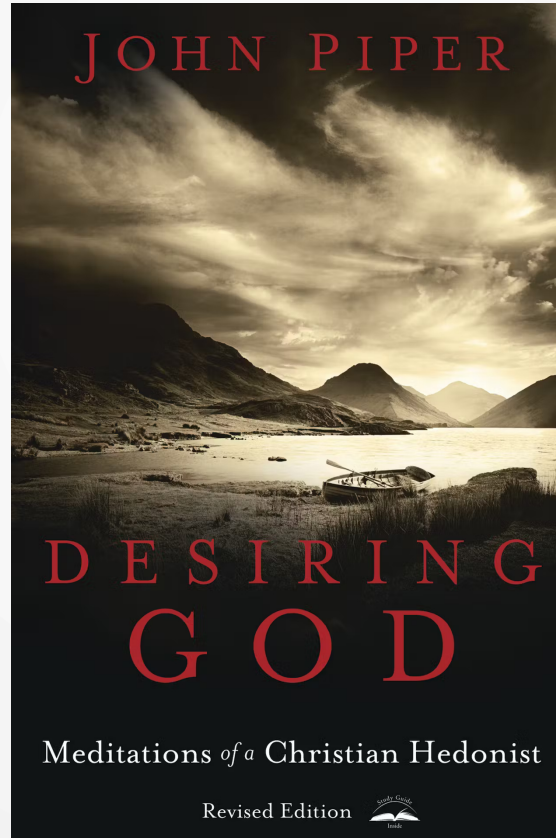
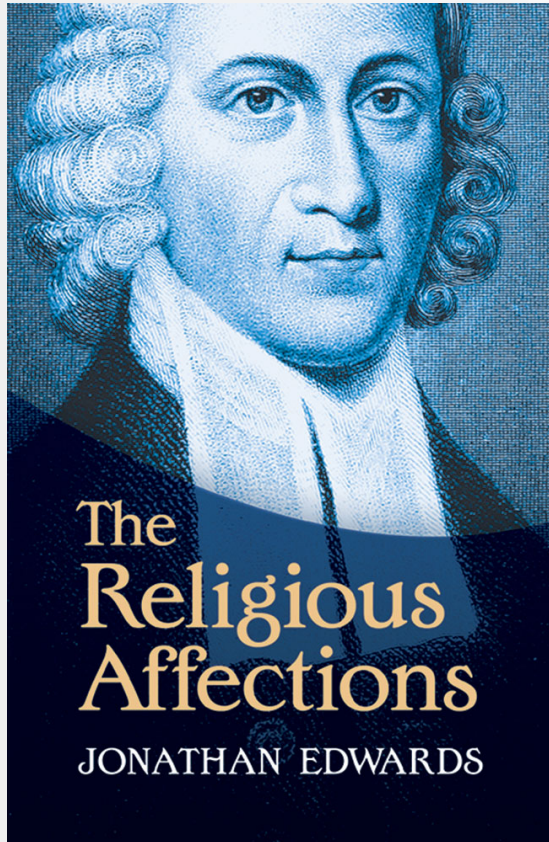
4) Your Sanctification Story in Christ

5) Your Calling in Christ and Christ in Your Calling

6) United with Christ in His Suffering and in Our Suffering

7) United with Each Other Through Christ

books



Edwards - Religious Affections (1746)

- pastor, philosopher, and leader during the First Great Awakening
- the soul has 2 faculties:
 - 1) the understanding - perception, speculation, judgment
 - 2) the faculty by which we are inclined toward or away from things - liking or disliking, being pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting - This faculty is sometimes called the **inclination**. Because it governs actions and decisions, it is sometimes called the **will**. When it is affected strongly, we feel bodily effects like an elevated pulse rate, so its stronger operations are sometimes called the **heart** or the **affections**. In contemporary speech, we typically refer to it as **feelings** or **emotions**. For Edwards, all these words refer to the same thing, and it encompasses love, hatred, joy, sorrow, desire, hope, fear, and anger.
- Edwards' thesis is that "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections," and he cites many Bible texts to support that statement.

"True religion ... consists in holy affections."

Though you have not seen [Jesus Christ], you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. (1 Peter 1:8)

... "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt 22:37-39)

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts... (Ps 95:7-8)

... this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me ... (Isa 49:13)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15)

re-visiting Psalm 139 - inclination toward God

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.

Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!
O men of blood, depart from me!
They speak against you with malicious intent;
your enemies take your name in vain.
Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you
I hate them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies.

Search me, O God, and
know my heart!
Try me and know my
thoughts!
And see if there be any
grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way
everlasting!

Piper - Desiring God (1986)

"Christian hedonism" - The desire to be happy is good and should not be resisted. The deepest happiness is found in God and reaches its consummation when shared with others in love. The pursuit of pleasure is a necessary part of all worship and virtue. The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever.

- Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Ps 37:4)
- Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! (Ps 34:8)
- As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. (Ps 42:1)

Piper - Desiring God (1986)

In the Bible, pleasure, gain, and reward are the motivations for all duty and sacrifice. Pleasure-seeking is commended and commanded.

- The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt 13:44-45)
- If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor 13:3)
- Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor 9:7)
- I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (3 John 4)

Piper - Desiring God (1986)

- Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matt 6:1-4)
- Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matt 6:19-20)
- ... looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross ... (Heb 12:2)

Smith - Desiring the Kingdom (2009)

- ambivalent recommendation - a lot of chaff but the wheat is excellent
- professor at Calvin College - sees students coming from schools that practice world-view education (which mainly focuses on conveying ideas) being captivated by secular messages that address and touch the heart
- we need to develop an "affective anthropology" - an understanding of people that includes the affections - what we love - because what we love affects our behavior more than what we think
- affective communication - conveys a vision of "the good life" - paints a picture of human flourishing that captures our imagination, through images, stories, movies, music, etc.
- "liturgies" - embodied actions - address the affections better than words

how can we affect our affections?

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ... (Gal 5:22-23)

First and foremost, transformed affections are part of Christ's work in us through the Holy Spirit. As we'll unpack more in a future session, Christ's sanctifying work unfolds providentially at different times and in different ways in each of us. At the end of this session, we'll have a few minutes to share with each other excerpts from our personal "sanctification stories" that deal specifically with our love for God.

Like the father who brought his child to Jesus for healing prayed, "I believe; help my unbelief," we can pray "I love you; warm my cold heart!"

Communication is an essential component of affective personal relations. Our primary means of communication with God are reading the Bible and prayer.

how can we affect our affections?

Psalm 34 invites us to "taste and see that the Lord is good!" One way we do that is through Bible texts that show us His love. The texts from our previous class are a great place to start. Psalm 1 invites us to delight in and meditate on God's word, and Psalm 139 is great material for meditation - it shows us God's benevolent personal presence with us and envisions our welcoming response.

Affective music can have a positive effect on our affections: "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart" (Eph 5:18)

We can pray more prayers of praise/adoration and thanksgiving. We can share our joys and griefs with the Lord and tell him that we love him.

Our particular Christian sub-culture prioritizes thinking over feeling. There's much we can learn by visiting and engaging with saints from other traditions.

conclusion

- True religion is all about who and what you love.
- Christian obedience and sacrifice are not motivated out of raw duty, but by pleasure and reward.
- Parents, teachers, and church leaders must address the affections.
- We must pay attention to and cultivate our own affections - "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (Prov 4:23)

my story

- daily prayer meeting in college
- my son's research into college admissions
- Bible texts I chose to memorize

your stories

- Share a moment or situation in which an educational activity, a sermon, a worship service, or some providential event touched your affections and deepened your love for God.
- Can you think of something you could do to deepen your love for God?
- parents, teachers, and church leaders - Describe an aspect of your current practice that targets the affections, rather than the mind. Can you think of something new that you could do to touch the affections?

for further study

- Edwards, *Treatise on the Religious Affections*, free download
<http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/ReligiousAffections.pdf>
- Piper, *Desiring God*, free download
<https://www.desiringgod.org/books/desiring-god>