

# Rising Toward the Bright Sweetness



## Born With the Yearning



Among the famous sayings of the church fathers, none is better known than Augustine's, "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." The great saint states here in few words the origin and interior history of the human race. God made us for Himself—this is the only explanation that satisfies the heart of a thinking man, whatever his wild reason may say... God formed us for His pleasure, and so formed us that we, as well as He, can, in divine communion, enjoy the sweet and mysterious mingling of kindred personalities. He meant us to see Him and live with Him and draw our life from His smile.

A.W. Tozer

**T**he longing is there. In some it may be papered over, or suffering under five coats of hard enamel paint. It may have been stuffed back into the pile of mildewed sneakers and old T-shirts turned into rags that has taken over the furthest recesses of a long-forgotten closet. It may have been banished to the coal bin buried in a darkened corner of the basement—but the longing is still there, in every person, waiting to once again see the light of day.

There is something in every person that longs to rise higher than the dirt at his or her feet. Some may become sidetracked in their quest, coursing down some rabbit trail leading to nowhere, but others have identified the goal of their quest, and have set out down the straight path.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:7-12

The longing to rise is not something detached, a mere wisp of vapor floating about in the ether, or an abstract concept, first lost and later found, in the journals of the past. It is not something that must be discovered, then nurtured or learned, as a brand new idea that surprises. The longing does not begin outside of ourselves, but begins within.

In a believer, the Holy Spirit also dwells within. But that fruitful companion was someone from without who, in a grand moment, became part of the person professing Christ. No one—not even a believer—is born with the Spirit inside, but He is a gift from the Father, received at the moment Christ is believed. The *longing*, however, is a part of us from the womb. We are born with the yearning for God—even if we, in our ignorance, do not know it for what it truly is.

The longing, though congenital, may still surprise. It comes upon us during moments of wonder and grace, moments of rapture tinged with the spiritual. It may take our breath away in moments we understand, but that are too wonderful to contain, such as moments when we cradle our newborn child, or gaze upon the face of a loved one just passed.

Because all of nature is His, it very often comes upon us when we are surrounded by those things for which man is not responsible, such as during a stroll in the early morning wonder of God's creation.

We carry it within. It is as much a part of us as our first breath. To reject it is the same as to cut off an arm or gouge out an eye. To embrace it is to accept the fact that we are forever incomplete without God.

## Naked Before God

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them... And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Genesis 1:1,27-28a,2:25

The Rising takes place only in the painful transparency of abject humility. Before man there may be some small merit in hiding the full measure of the heart's content, but before God the gates of the heart must be swung wide, and its contents spilled out into the glare of light. Thus emptied of the weight of our duplicity and conceit, we begin to rise.

And it is just this weight—the full weight of our own glorification—that binds us so tenaciously in the grip of the soil. Our mind understands what is missing; our deep longing hungers for the bliss of what it once knew. But the heart remains closed upon its dark contents, fearing the examination of the bright light.

## One Step Higher

One Sunday morning long ago a gentleman—a church elder—sat in on our small Bible study, one in which we were discussing prayer. He asked after the nature and duration of our own prayers, then, before we could answer, volunteered that his own were brief, pithy, and to the point. "Lord, here is a bullet list of my concerns, typed up in triplicate for your convenience. Thank you very much. Good day." He didn't see why much more than that was necessary.

Here was a man buried up to his knees in the soil of the earth.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'"

Luke 18:10-13



Every prayer should be at least one step higher toward the bright sweetness. It is a long journey, but small steps count. Every prayer should be an emptying of the heart's contents, a humble revealing of a sinner's dependency on God. Only then do we begin to experience even a small part of the glorious communion the original man and woman once enjoyed with their Creator.

"I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:14

And the longing does not wait for the prayer on bended knee, but considers the person as a whole, inhaling the hours and minutes of a life and exhaling them up to God. Man and woman are born with an emptiness that can only be filled by their Maker, and a longing to rise up from the soil of their birth to meet with Him in a better place—not a place awaiting their ultimate demise, but a place available to them even now, in the Garden of His presence.

