

## Animate Talk 2 – Flesh and Blood

What we're looking at is ways in which we can breathe life and open ourselves up so that God can breathe life into our relationship with Him and be transformed by this relationship. It is something that is profoundly, profoundly, important, and mostly neglected by the modern western church. Already we've had a number of reports of people who've just testified about the impact this is having on their spiritual life. A whole new world is opening up to them. So I'm encouraging you to be a part of this entire series, to be involved in the booklets that we've made for the series and to be really invested in this. Be open to God just rocking your world, because He's a living and true God and wants more than just a cerebral relationship with us.

This message is entitled 'Flesh and Blood'. These first two weeks are sort of foundational to the rest of the series. We'll get into more particular applications of this as we go on, but this again is a foundational piece; Flesh and Blood.

Let me start with a word of prayer. Father I thank You for every person who is in this auditorium, every person who is listening via the computer or pod casting or television or any other means, whoever is listening and whenever they're listening, our prayer God is that You would open up our minds and their minds, and our hearts and their hearts, our lives and Your life. That we would be entirely; body, soul and spirit surrendered to You and that You would be a living Lord, active in our life, communicating to us on a moment by moment daily basis and that we be transformed by this relationship. Help us Lord God to lower all defences, to let You in, to explore new things, and new ways to encounter You and transform us to be Your radical, sold out, beautiful kingdom people. In Jesus name we pray. And all God's people said Amen.

I want to start with a passage and a quote. The passage comes from John, chapter 1, verse 14. It really is the proclamation of the centre of the Christian faith, when John says that the Word, referring to Jesus Christ, became flesh, became human, united himself with flesh and blood. The Word, God Almighty became flesh and made His dwelling among us; us - other flesh and blood creatures. And we have seen His glory. We didn't just theorise about His glory, read a book about His glory, had an idea about His glory – we've seen His glory. Think about that.

And then there's a quote from Richard Foster who is probably in my estimation the most insightful author on the spiritual disciplines in our age, from his book; 'Finding the Heart's True Home' he says this: 'To believe that God can sanctify and utilise the imagination is simply to take seriously the Christian idea of incarnation.' Incarnation refers to the event when God became a human being. God became concrete, enfleshed, tangible, experiential. Open up your imagination for God to utilise that, sanctify that, become a means by which you relate to God is simply to take seriously that God is the God who incarnates Himself, makes Himself concrete, tangible, experiential.

I want us now to listen to a poem, written and read by a friend of mine, Terri Churchill and the poem is entitled, 'Words'. Listen very carefully.

*I've been trying to reach You,  
Climbing a tower of words  
Babbling words  
Dead ink.  
My heart cannot speak this language  
So it smiles politely and nods its head  
And pretends to understand  
But Your words are not like this.  
You opened Your mouth and creation said 'Yes'  
And appeared from nothing  
Day and night, oceans and land  
And me*

*All this with a few words  
I want to hear You this way  
I want to hear You in flesh and blood*

*And blinding colours  
And music that carries me to You.*

*Can You carve Your meaning into my heart?  
Will You say to this motionless ink 'Rise and walk'*

It's powerful. We try to climb a mountain or tower of words. It doesn't get us to God. It's like trying to build the tower of Babel to reach the heavenlies but it doesn't work. Because it's not the language our heart speaks. Here are some words: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son', they are true words, they are powerful words, they're inspired words but if they remain only words they are, as Terri says, motionless ink. People can know these words and believe in these words and it does nothing to them. I mean how many people have believed these words, and recited these words and confessed these words, even studied these words; 'God so loved the world' and yet they didn't feel, they didn't experience God's love? Do you really know the meaning of love if it's not on the inside, not flesh and blood? You can try to climb the tower of words but it will just be babbling if it remains that, because your heart doesn't speak that language. If words and abstract truths are all that you have to go on, you smile politely, you nod your head, you go to church, you pretend to understand, you know when to say 'Amen' and clap your hands but you haven't got off the ground. You're not closer to God. What we need are words that are flesh and blood, words with blinding colours, words that are music that carry us to the throne of God. What we need is something more like this; study this work of art.....God so loved this woman.

If you place yourself in the position of this woman, this is a lady caught in the act of adultery in John 8, dragged dishevelled into the centre of the marketplace, surrounded by her self-righteous accusers holding stones, because the law said she should be stoned. Put yourself in the position of this shamed, humiliated woman, scared that her life is about to come to an end. They bring her to the one person on the planet who actually has the right to do this, the one sinless person; Jesus Christ. She is perhaps expecting to experience the most austere, harsh look of all from Him, but instead, He looks into her eyes...He looks into your eyes with compassion and He stands in the gap and He protects you. He puts His hand upon your head and He says 'I will protect you from your accusers'. You are that woman and now 'God so loved the world' becomes enfleshed, becomes concrete. It begins to enter on the inside as we associate with this concrete picture. One of the values of art is that it does this, it enfleshes truth, it is a concrete tangible.

Here are some more words 'You are forgiven'. Wonderful words, true words, inspired words, proclaimed throughout the New Testament, but those words, if they just remain words are motionless ink, dead ink, babbling words. They will not bring you closer to God in themselves, the person can believe these words and it will mean nothing to them. How many people have believed these words, have recited these words, confessed these words, studied these words 'You are forgiven' and yet they walk through their life with some degree of condemnation and unforgiveness in their life. The words were never incarnated in them, never became experienced reality, do they even really understand what the words mean if they haven't experienced it. You can try to climb the tower of words but your heart doesn't speak that language. If words and abstract truth is all you have to go on, you smile politely, you nod your head, attend church, you know when to say 'Amen', you pretend to understand, but you haven't got off the ground. You are not closer to God because you know these words. What we need are words that are flesh and blood, words that are blinding colours, words that are music that carry us to the throne of God. What we need is something more like this.... Study this picture.

Can you place yourself in the position of this man? With an anvil in one hand and the spikes in the other because he was one of the ones who crucified Jesus and you are that person and I am that person because every sin helped drive the spike into his wrist and his ankles. And when we're exhausted by the hard work of crucifying the Saviour; sin is exhausting. And if we can finally come to the end of ourselves and collapse in His arms, He is there, and He whispers the words 'I forgive you and I will hold You up, You are my child'. Can you put yourself in the position of this man? It is not information that impacts us, that's not the language of the heart, it is flesh and blood; concrete, tangible truth that gets on the inside of us, and changes us. When God speaks as Terri noted, it's not primarily to convey information. When God speaks, reality occurs. As Terri so eloquently put it 'You opened Your mouth, creation said 'Yes' and appeared from nothing, day and night, oceans and land and me, all this with a few words'. When God speaks reality occurs, flesh and blood, stars and sun, animals and air, quarks and quasars, mountains and meadows, clouds and canyons, concrete, tangible, experiential reality. When God speaks that's the way His words look; they are flesh and blood, concrete, tangible words. And it's not just once upon a time that God spoke that. It is now. The Bible says in

Hebrews chapter one that 'the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining (note the tense there) here and now all things by His powerful word'. What it means is that you and I are right now held in existence, sustained in existence by the powerful word of Jesus. You are not an abstract concept, you are not a piece of information, you are flesh and blood, you are tangible, you are experiential. That's the kind of word that God holds in existence each and every moment. And now remain mindful of the fact that, that power that holds you and I in existence this very moment, moment to moment, that powerful word was most perfectly expressed on Calvary, when Jesus gave His life for us. Which means that you and I, right now in this moment, are held in existence by perfect, unsurpassable love. The breath you just took is a gift from God, an expression of His perfect love. Every nanosecond you exist, He's sustaining you by His perfect love and you are not an abstraction, you are not a piece of information, you are concrete, flesh and blood, tangible, experiential truth. God's love sustains, brings into existence and sustains concrete, tangible, experiential, flesh and blood truth. God loves concrete, tangible, experiential truth. He creates it. He pronounces it good.

That view by the way, is the opposite of what the ancient Greeks used to believe. Ancient Greeks like Plato had a disdain for flesh and blood, for the concrete physical world. They saw matter, the physical world as at best being imperfect, somewhat unreal, and some of them saw it as absolutely evil. So they believed that God has nothing to do with the physical, flesh and blood world. For that reason they put abstract truth up on a pedestal above concrete, experiential truth. For Plato and other ancient Greeks, maths was the highest form of knowledge, because it's the farthest removed from the concrete, tangible world. Plato had above the door of the academy where he taught 'All who enter here must study mathematics'. It was the queen of science for the ancient Greeks, because it was removed from the physical world. And then, as we mentioned last week, they divorced the mind from the heart. The mind they thought was simply pure rationality and math is its appropriate form of thought, but the heart is the emotion and they looked down on emotion. They put the mind over the heart and they saw emotions as a sort of inferior thing. Why? Because they realised that emotions are impacted by the concrete physical world. Emotions come and go based on what's happening to you and emotions are looped into what you experience and what you sense and what is tangible to you. Emotions are looped up with the physical world that is at best somewhat unreal and imperfect and what some of them saw as absolutely evil, so they judged emotions as being inferior to pure rationality. And God was divorced from all of that. God was absolutely apart from this world and God was, "above" having any kind of emotions or being impacted by anything in this physical world and that view unfortunately exercised quite a significant influence on church history, on the church's theology. It is one of the reasons why most of the main theologians in church history define God as sort of an abstract, mathematical principle. God is above emotions, God is above movement, God is above time, God is above passion, God is above being affected by anything. God looks more like a mathematical principle than the living God of the bible. But how different is the living God of the bible?

The living God of the bible loves flesh and blood. He creates it, He sustains it moment by moment. The God of the bible is very much involved in this flesh and blood world and throughout the bible, He doesn't give us some abstract, mathematical truths, some propositions about Himself. He gives us this narrative, full of life, full of passion. He is a God who is deeply affected by what goes on in the ebb and flow of our life. We impact Him and He impacts us and there is emotion and passion all over the place. When God communicates himself to us, it's not with abstract mathematical like proposition, no He communicates Himself to us using vivid metaphors that activate our imagination and gives us ways of thinking and picturing Him and experiencing Him. He portrays Himself as the groom of a lover, He portrays Himself as a shepherd, a fortress, a rock. When He calls people out He doesn't tell them to philosophise about Him, He gives them visions and He gives them dreams. And the word by the way that is translated sometimes as 'vision' and sometimes 'dreams' is the word 'to see', it's a seer. But they are not talking about seeing with physical eyes, no, visions and dreams are what occur in what today we would call our imagination. That's how God concretely impacted His people and communicated Himself to His people. He uses a wide variety of concrete tangible ways of leading His people: He is a pillar of fire, He is a cloud of smoke, He is the angel of the Lord and things like that. God is a God who loves, creates, involves Himself in the flesh and blood world. And the story culminates when God not only loves the flesh and blood world but He becomes part of the flesh and blood world. He immerses Himself into our flesh and blood, concrete, tangible, experiential world. The Word, John says, became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we have seen His glory. God becomes concrete, tangible, physical flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ. And this is the centre of the Christian faith. John in particular can't get over exalting the tangibility, the concreteness of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Look how he opens his first epistle; it's amazing.

In the first epistle of John, he says “That which was from the beginning”, referring to the eternal Word, “which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **looked** at and our hands have **touched**, this we proclaim concerning the word of life. The life **appeared** and we have **seen** it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you that eternal life has **appeared** to us. We proclaim to you what we have **seen**, and what we have **heard**”. Ok, John we get it! But this is a million miles removed from the Greek view of God, where you go to God by thinking abstract philosophical thoughts and God is seen as a mathematical truth, that’s above motion and emotion. John is emphatically celebrating the tangibility, the concreteness of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Over and over again; we’ve seen, we’ve heard, we’ve looked, we’ve touched, He’s appeared, we’ve seen, we’ve heard, we’ve looked, we’ve touched, He’s appeared, over and over again. And even after the resurrection, Jesus’ body is transformed for sure, but even after the resurrection its concrete, its tangible, its experiential. He says this to His disciples; “Look at my hands, look at my feet, it is I myself, touch me, and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have”. Forever God has taken it upon Himself this incarnate form. God is not an abstract, mathematical timeless, emotional principle. He is not the opposite of this concrete world. He loves the physical world, He made the physical world. He sustains the physical world, and in the fullness of time He became part of this physical world. In Christ, God is tangible, concrete and experiential.

The reason why that is, among other things, so important is that we are made in this image of God, a God who has this impulse to become incarnate, this impulse to be involved in flesh and blood. We are wired by our Creator to be transformed and moved by concrete experience rather than mere information. We now know from neuroscience, though we could have known it, and many have known it just by doing introspection, but we now know from neuroscience that the Greeks had it exactly wrong. They divorced abstract thinking from the emotions and the heart and mind were two separate faculties, but we now know from neuroscience, and you can find this out just by looking inside yourself, we think, our thoughts are concrete, we think with concrete, experiential images, not with abstract information. All of our thought has an emotional component to it, the mind and the heart, as I said last week are simply two aspects of the same thing, we think by replicating concrete experience in our minds; we think with all five senses. When we think about something we re-experience something in our mind. When I think about my wife Shelly, I don’t get a bunch of information in my head that tells me where she was born and what her physical characteristics are like or what her personality is like, its not abstract information, no. When I think about my wife Shelly it goes something like this; I see her, I sense her, I feel her, sometimes I smell her, I can taste her... all five senses are involved when I think about Shelly. The same set, this is what we know from neuroscience, the same set of neurons – the neural net which is activated when I’m in Shelly’s presence get reactivated when I’m not in Shelly’s presence, but I’m thinking about her. The difference is that, when I’m just thinking about her and she’s not around, she’s not there to provide the external stimuli to activate the neurons, my own thinking does that, but I re-experience her on the inside. That’s how we think about everything, you can’t think otherwise. Now if you ask me about Shelly, I have to give you information, I will tell you about where she was born and her physical characteristics and how gorgeous she is, and her personality and things like that, but I give you the information because I can’t give you what I’m actually doing inside my head. I can’t give you the experience. I can just give you abstract information. Now here’s the thing, we think with concrete images at one three thousandths of a second, most of it we’re not aware of and so people often think that the information that they give about a topic when they’re asked is the information that they have in their brain. They think that we think with information because that’s what comes out of their mouth when they’re asked a question, but as a matter of fact, the information that we give to others is always at least one step removed from what’s actually going on in our heads, its abstract. So it doesn’t have the concrete power of the actual images that are taking place in our heads and all of this information, all of these concrete images are associated with emotions, the heart and the mind are not two separate things, they are one. In fact and here’s an important principle; the more life-like, the more concrete, the more vivid, the more experiential the image is as we are thinking about it, the more power it has in our life.

A couple of weeks ago I was in Vancouver, doing a conference and in the afternoon we went out and toured the city, a beautiful city with these mountains all around it and we were looking at some of the mountains and I had a passing thought about Shelly, and I thought ‘gosh I wish she was here’, but it was a little tangent; ‘oh I wish she was here’, but it wasn’t like, real profound, it was just a passing thought. Later on in that day I had an occasion to enter into that thought and think about her more deeply. I imagined what she was doing at this time, I envisioned her playing with our granddaughter and it was vivid, it was concrete, it was experiential, much more so than the first thought I had about her and now my heart was moved and I missed her and love was evoked inside of me. The more concrete, the more vivid, the more experiential our images are, the more power they have to impact us. This is why advertisements are so powerful, advertisers don’t give you a whole lot of information, have you noticed that? They give us concrete, vivid images. They may have to give a little

bit of information for legal purposes and that's why they read, you know at the end of those medication advertisements at about a million words per second... and they're hoping you don't notice that part, but they want you to get the image, it's the image that matters. Its why so many of our commercials have sexual themes to them because people seem to (I'm told) have an easy time getting very vivid with sexual imagery, so advertisers try to associate their product with sexual imagery, whether it has anything to do with that or not, and usually it doesn't. You see, what they're doing, and if you're an advertiser, God bless you, you're of unsurpassable worth and you have to make a living, fine, but the rest of us... What they're doing is they're implanting images in our brain, and its kind of like when you're on the internet and you go on certain sites, they install cookies, you heard about this? Cookies on your computer which will pop up with these advertisements that you didn't invite there but are there, and they're hoping that those cookies will somehow, those advertisements will lead you to their product. What these folks are doing through a lot of different venues is installing cookies in our organic computer, called our brain, between our ears. They are hoping under the right triggers their advertisement will pop up, concrete, vivid imagery that will move you with some kind of emotion and orientate you towards their product. Its not information that impacts you, its concrete images and the advertisers know how the brain works and so they communicate with concrete images.

This is also why memories can be so powerful in our life, for better or for worse. We go through real profound experiences, like traumas. Our brain locks that in and it wants to do us a favour by protecting us from that ever happening again. So under the right triggers, it could be a smell, it could be the look of somebody, it could be anything; under the right triggers your mind will re-flash the image. Whether its visual, whether its kinaesthetic; you sense it, whether its auditory; its what you hear, it can happen in a lot of different ways – we're all wired differently, but in some way you represent that trauma. 'Represent' look at that word, 're' 'present'; you make present again that trauma, that image. It happens so fast; one three thousandths of a second, you don't know that you're re-experiencing that trauma, but you feel it, you feel it. There are some women today who walk around and the cookies have been installed, and a couple of dozen times a day they are re-experiencing let's say a rape. They don't know that they're doing this, but they struggle with this fear that they have, or the anger that they have, or the depression that they have. The brain thinks its doing them a favour and will keep on doing that until it gets reprogrammed. Until we take authority and bring every thought captive to Jesus Christ. But notice, its not information, no one gets information about what happens in the past, they re-experience it; its concrete, vivid, experiential. Here's what's sad, science now knows how the mind operates and the world knows how the mind operates, and advertisers certainly know how that mind operates with concrete, vivid imagery, but the church to a large degree does not. Under the influence of Greek philosophy we still tend to exalt abstract truth over concrete, experiential truth. Under the influence of the naturalistic world view, many still dismiss imagination as just make believe, as just child's play, fantasy, pretend. Then more recently under the impact of the new age movement, which in its own way uses imagination, some Christians are absolutely terrified of the very word 'imagination' or the word 'visualise'. They've got cookies installed there that the minute you say 'imagination' their fear button gets pushed and they have a lot of trouble even listening to what you're saying. I've heard from some of those folks and the result of this is this, the world knows how the mind works and communicates in concrete, vivid imagery, we have all these memories and all these advertisements coming at us with this concrete, vivid, experiential transforming imagery and much of it contains lies. Things that are not consistent with the truth of who God is and who we are in Christ, but because its concrete and vivid it moves us in non-Kingdom directions. That is what we identify as real and all that we have to fight that with are abstract truths and sometimes some oughts and shoulds attached to that. It explains why there are so many believers who believe the truth and yet everything about their being says 'its not real'. That's why there are so many who believe the truth and yet they find themselves pulled in such strong ways to live in ways that are contrary to the Kingdom. To engage in sin and sell out to the values of the culture because that feels real to them, this seems like a mere belief. You can't fight concrete, vivid, experiential images in the mind with abstract truths and a list of oughts and shoulds. It is time folks that we recover a flesh and blood theology. It is time we take back the imagination for God because God is the author of the imagination. He wired the imagination; He is the one who wants to own the imagination. He want us to us that precious imagination as a way of relating to Him. What we need is to experience God in flesh and blood, with blinding colours and music that takes us to the throne of God. We need a Lord that we can, with John, touch and see and hear and experience. We need God to speak into our motionless ink; rise up and walk, animate, take on life, become incarnate, become experiential and be transformed. You may be thinking to yourself 'Is that possible because Jesus, the physical Jesus, has gone. John could say that because he knew the historical, physical Jesus, but now He's ascended so we don't have that. God is invisible and even the truths about our identity in Christ and all that, those are intangible, so how can we have a flesh and blood theology?'. The answer to that, ladies and gentlemen is the inner sanctum. That's why God gave it to us. The inner sanctum; this place of the imagination is the place where we bridge the concrete, flesh and blood place where we live with the spiritual truths that are proclaimed in the Bible.

Here we experience God, Jesus, our identity in Christ and every other spiritual truth in concrete, flesh and blood, tangible, blinding colour kind of ways. This isn't inferior to the abstract truths as the Greeks thought, this isn't just make believe as the naturalistic world of view might incline you to think, and its certainly not a New Age conspiracy. This is biblical truth, the truth of the Bible so just by way of review. We saw this last week in 2 Corinthians 3, listen to this carefully, its speaking about non-believers. Paul says "their minds were made dull", He's talking about the mind "a veil covers their hearts" remember? In the biblical world view, heart and mind are not two separate things, it's two sides of the same coin, two sides of the same reality. "If our gospel is veiled" he says "it is veiled to those who are perishing because the god of this age has blinded the mind of unbelievers so they cannot see" ; in their minds, "The light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of God". Non-believers have blinders over their imagination so they can't enter into the reality, the concrete reality of who Jesus is, they can't see that in their minds. By contrast Paul says, whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil, over the **mind**, that's what he's talking about here, is taken away. "So that we, with unveiled faces contemplate" as I said last week, the word means to behold and reflect in the mind, "we behold the Lord's glory and as we do that we're being transformed into His image with ever increasing glory. For God made His light shine in our **hearts**, to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Jesus Christ". Those who have turned to the Lord have something of a capacity that those who haven't turned to the Lord don't have. We're able to see and experience in our mind, in our hearts, the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. As we see and behold His glory we're transformed into that glory; we take it on from one degree to another. The key to experiencing God in a concrete, transforming way is exercising the vision of our unveiled heart and unveiled mind and beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

You find this theme in various ways throughout the New Testament. For example in Hebrews, chapter 2, a verse I didn't get to last week, he says "let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith". Well Jesus has been gone for decades, when the author wrote this, so what kind of seeing is he talking about? I can imagine someone who maybe didn't get this in the audience going 'so we're supposed to fix our eyes upon Jesus, where is He? Is He in the crowd? Will Jesus stand up? I've got to fix my eyes on You'. The author would say 'no, that's not the kind of seeing I'm talking about'. What kind of seeing is he talking about? He's talking about the same kind of seeing Paul was talking about. It's a seeing in the inner sanctum, in the mind, the heart, the imagination. And as we fix our spiritual eyes on Jesus, all that is His by nature becomes ours by grace and now we can run with perseverance the race that is set before us. It's what you see in your mind that determines the direction that you go. Another verse; Colossians chapter 3, listen to this carefully, Paul says "Since then you have been raised with Christ" glorious truth "set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God". Set your minds, remember heart and mind are not two separate things "set your minds on things above, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God". The word 'phroneo' there translated 'mind' includes the imagination, in fact in some contexts it is translated just as imagination. So he's talking about setting our whole mind, including our imagination on things above. Here's the thing, the truth, the gospel truth that Paul proclaims here is that we are in **fact** raised with Christ Jesus, we have in **fact** died to the way of the world; the flesh way of living in this world, we have in **fact** been placed in Christ Jesus, our life is in fact hidden in Christ Jesus in the heavenly realm. But those would be lifeless ink to you, mere words, babbling unless your imagination, your whole being is set on these truths in the way that you're experiencing these truths. What you need is to, with your unveiled capacity, in your mind and heart, get a glimpse of, concretely, vividly, what you look like when you really manifest the truth that your life is hidden in Christ. What do you look like? What do you sound like? How do you do your life differently? See it in your mind's eye, in the sanctified imagination. What do you like when you walk as a person who has been raised with Christ Jesus, who has in fact died to the ways of the world, who is in fact filled with God's Spirit, who is in fact seated with Christ in heavenly places? It's not just knowing it that's going to transform you, it's can you get on the inside of that and let it get on the inside of you and begin to experience it in concrete, vivid, tangible ways? The imagination is the bridge between the invisible spiritual world and the world of flesh and blood. It is as they said throughout church history, the inner sanctum. Despite the heavy influence of Greek philosophy on the church's theology, there have been people throughout history who have seen this.

For example one was Orogen, and this is all the more surprising because Orogen was very influenced by Plato, and yet he says this in his homily on Genesis, this is occurring in the early third century, listen to this, "let us therefore, always fix our gaze on this image of God" referring to Jesus, "so that we might be able to be reformed in its likeness, by contemplating" which is beholding in the mind "the divine image in whose likeness God has made us. We will receive through the word and His power that form which He had given Him by nature". What Orogen is saying here is this; as we gaze in our mind, in our imagination on the glory of God, the image of God, all that is His by nature begins to be ours by grace. As we are able to behold, experience

concretely the grace of God towards us, we become more gracious. As we see His love towards us, we become more loving, as we see His joy over us, we become more joyful. We are transformed from one degree of glory to another just as Paul says. What Oregen is hitting on here is this, and note this is the third century now, way before the New Age movement, notice that, but he is saying the incarnation, the enfleshment of God is not simply to be of an advantage to those who happened to have the good fortune of being alive when Jesus was a historical person down here on earth. That would be weird wouldn't it? If Jesus says 'if you see me you see the Father' and the only ones who can benefit from that are the twelve people who were around hearing it for the first time, for everyone after that its of no value whatsoever. No, when Jesus says 'when you see me, you see the Father' He is giving a truth. It's recorded in the book of John, chapter 14, He is giving a truth that is of benefit to believers throughout history. If we utilise the unique spiritual capacity that we have to see in the Spirit; see with the mind and the heart. How can you see what God is like through the person of Jesus Christ, if you don't see Jesus? It's true that He's not physically here but we have got the inner sanctum that is the bridge between the spiritual realm and the physical realm. J I Packer who is a great man of God and a great theologian and says some wonderful things, in his otherwise great book 'Knowing God', gets it exactly wrong, when he says... he encourages believers to never try to envisage concretely God or Jesus or anything of the sort. That's like telling me 'Greg, make sure that you love your wife, for sure and think about her but never picture her, never get a concrete image of her, don't experience her in your mind'. Well how else do I think about her then? That's what it means to think! Though he doesn't realise it that's what it means for him to think as well. But what is means is that the incarnation is of no value to any who are coming to faith after Christ ascended to heaven. We're back to the Old Testament thing where God is this sort of invisible thing. The whole value of having God come down in a concrete, tangible, experiential way and say 'if you see me, you see the Father', well then that's just ruled out unless we're able and allowed to encounter the living, incarnate God in our heart, in our mind, in our imagination, and that's what Paul's talking about, and that's what Oregen is talking about. This they both say is the key to transformation. You become what you see in your heart and mind.

Another is St Frances of Sales, a sixteenth century author, who says 'by means of the imagination' listen to this, 'we confine our mind within the mystery on which we meditate, that it may not ramble to and fro just as we shut up a bird in a cage or tie a hawk by his leash, so that he may rest on the hand.' St Frances – sixteenth century; a long time before the New Age movement, talking about what? Imagination. What he realises there is that, as many of us can testify, unless we're using the imagination in our prayer, our brain's going to be fluttering around all over the place like a bird let loose in a room. And many of us can testify to that. Now we know neurologically why that's the case; we're wired for reality, and we identify reality as what's concrete, what's flesh and blood, and so if your relationship with God is abstract, when you're praying you're talking to an abstraction. And guess what? Your minds going to say 'let's turn to more important things that are real like the laundry list or the groceries you need to get, or how you're going to discipline your first grade son when he gets home... those things are real. This here this abstraction, we don't experience this as real and so our minds are always darting all over the place, and then we indict ourselves for that happening 'how come I can't be disciplined and concentrating?' Well what St Frances sees here is that the issue is that the things of God have got to become concrete, vivid, we need our prayer life to become as vivid as the beer commercials that we see on television, alright? Something concrete, experiential. And when you do that, when you're talking to Jesus and you sense Jesus, and you can hear Jesus and you're seeing Jesus, now you're mind's thinking 'ok this is real, I'll pay attention to this'. That's what St Frances is getting at; now the bird is in the cage and there is some attention there.

St Ignatius of Loyola is another sixteenth century writer, long before the New Age, he had these retreats that people would go on for a whole month, spiritual exercises and they all involved imaginative prayer; cataphatic prayer it was called in the church tradition. He says this; 'its not knowing a lot, but grasping things intimately and savouring them that fills and satisfies the soul'. Its not how much you know, it's the little that you do know, is it true, and do you experience it, do you savour it? Is it experiential? That's so profoundly true. In his work called 'Spiritual Exercises' which is simply a modern translation of this retreat he had, here's a little snippet, he says 'when you pray, pray with all five senses'. I want to encourage you to do that. All five senses are involved in this, when you worship, worship with all five senses, and when you read the Bible, read it with all five senses. He says 'see the persons with the eye of the imagination'. For example when you're reading the Bible, **see** them with the eye of the imagination. 'Imagine hearing what they say, imagine I smell and taste the infinite savour and sweetness of the Divinity', look at the experiential quality of this. 'imagine touching by embracing and kissing the place where the persons step or sit as you're reading a gospel narrative. Enter into it with all five senses.

I want to ask the worship team to come on up and we're going into another time of worship and as we do this I want to encourage you to use all five senses and envision the One we're singing to and praising. Envision what we're singing about. You may envision or just sense the presence of God in this room, holding you in existence every millisecond, just be aware of that, that's the use of the inner sanctum, the imagination. As the rain falls on the top of this building, you may... at the last service I used that to envision the Lord soaking me in His love, just concretely soaking me in His love. The Holy Spirit will lead you. Our job is simply to open ourselves up and say 'Lord make your truth tangible, concrete, experiential, not motionless ink, but blinding colours; music that carries us to the throne of God, flesh and blood'.

Holy Spirit we now ask You to, You're the God who had the impulse to become God incarnate. A God who's innermost being longs for tangible expression, help us to receive You in that way and experience You deeply and be transformed by Your glory. In Jesus' name.

### *Music*

Amen. Amazing Lord, amazing love, isn't he? I was thinking about a flood, His mercy rains, that could be motionless ink, a tower of words we're trying to climb, but the Lord gave me this vision of a torrential flood, wiping away everything in its path, just flooding everything in its path and it just drowns me, just drowns me ...*applause*... The God who loves you, and forgives you, has mercy on you like the biggest, massive flood, the biggest tsunami you've ever seen. That's all directed towards you.

I want to encourage you to be relating to God in all five senses. Have special times that you set aside, where you can just be with the Lord, put on some music, encounter him with all five senses. Throughout the day take spiritual truths and don't just have them be lifeless ink, but rather let the Lord say 'rise up and walk, animate, become flesh and blood, blinding colours, music that carries you to the throne of God'. See Him, taste Him and sense Him.

There is a seminar on the weekend so we encourage you to do the assignments and in this series the assignments are those books. Terri Churchill has just crafted some great exercises for groups and for individuals. The groups are going through the group practices and I want to encourage everyone to go through all the practices, whether you're in a group or not. If you don't have any of those books, stop by and pick those up at the hub, and be part of what God's doing here. Get online, check out the online community. Share your stories with others. But let God on the inside, incarnate, enfleshed on the inside and manifest it to the world around us.