

Fill these hearts

Christopher West

The Way to Heaven is through desire!

1. West begins this book speaking of the “universal ache” as humans we all long to have fulfilled. He goes on to say “We are created for bliss, for ecstasy and our hearts know it. According to Christian faith, the ecstasy we yearn for at the deepest level of our being is precisely what God wants to give us eternally.”

- What does it mean to be drawn by desire? What are some ways we can be conscientious of the role desire plays in their lives?

2. God is the single purpose of the heart. He is the source of all desire. Desire communicates God’s thirst to draw us into communion with him.

- What things encourage holy desire? What are some types of barriers that you have experienced or know of that can prevent this type of communion?

3. West makes reference to Brother Lawrence’s example “of seeking God in all things.” If we do not practice the presence of God we practice the presence of another: the world, the flesh, the enemy of human nature.

- Have you had the temptation to habits, experiences, desires to which you wanted to respond based on your own familiarity and your own wisdom? What are some challenges you anticipate living this way? What small steps can you take to live in his presence to begin receiving what he has prepared to give you?
- How does Jesus speak to you daily through the desire(s) he has placed on your heart?

4. “When Christian teaching is presented without beauty, the heart is turned off and shuts down, even if what is being said is truth.”

- How does truth without love shape our desires?
- When are you more likely to play the stoic in the face of your desires?
- Stoicism (“follow all these rules or you are going to hell”) often uses fear of God as a way to manipulate and control. What are some steps we can help our directees make to conquer those lies about God and live in the truth of God’s love?

5. God created us so that every desire we have will ultimately point to our essential longing for deep intimacy with him.

- In the face of what desires do you tend to adopt the attitude of the fast food dieter (the addict)?

6. The mystic sees his or her desires as a door to heaven and understands that by connecting with the deeper realities to which our desires point we can find true fulfillment.

- Why is this statement important to understand?
- How does it influence our own lives?

7. On one of West's retreats his retreat confessor and retreat master shared with him how Mother Teresa in particular had taught him "the connection between depth of desire and depth of prayer".

- How might this "connection between depth of desire and depth of prayer" influence the way you live your life?

8. How can we foster radical dependence (trust in God) in ourselves? How does trust in God relate to growing deeper in prayer?

9. "In the desert, and even more so on the cross, Christ stared human hunger, fear, and poverty in the face, felt it 'to the depths,' and refused to grasp at fulfillment apart from the Father's providence. In other words, he refused "relief" for his suffering. Temptation always offers relief from suffering: 'If you are the Son of God, come down from that cross' (Matt. 27:40). If Christ had done so, he would have rejected his posture of 'receptivity' before the Father, and the 'second Adam' would have committed the sin of the 'first Adam' all over again. In this context it makes sense why suffering, as I once heard it said, means 'continued receptivity.' Christ 'stayed in the ache' and maintained faith in 'the gift.' He accepted fully the abject poverty of the human condition and his complete and utter dependence on the Father amidst the worst imaginable onslaught of temptations to grasp at satisfaction and 'relieve' his sufferings. 'No,' he said. 'I will not deny my posture of receptivity before my Father. I will not grasp to feed my hunger. I know who my Father is, and my food is to do his will. I will trust. I will not put him to the test. I will not come down from this cross. I will worship him and him alone. For he is my inheritance and my cup; he alone will give me my reward. He will not be long in satisfying the desires of my heart. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. Into your hands I commend the satisfaction of my desires.'"

- How do we develop this posture of receptivity and find courage to remain continuously open (receptive) in the face of temptation?
- How does this demonstrate our utter dependence on God? What is necessary to live this radical dependence?
- How does suffering fit in with God's design for our lives? How we stay in the "ache" of "suffering" and maintain "faith in the gift"?

10. "“Circumcision of the heart” speaks of the need in both men and women to “cut away” whatever hides or covers the most intimate “anatomy of our hearts” and keeps our most intimate center from being exposed to God. “Dilation of the heart” speaks of the need in both men and women for our hearts to be stretched to their maximum capacity—to the point that they are large enough and open enough to receive and even “give birth to” infinity.”

What ways in addition to what we have already discussed in question 8, can we use as encouragement for “nakedness” and “dilation” to God?