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CHAPTER 1

LONGING FOR THE AGE TO COME

We have all read . . . the story of the man who has forgotten his name. This man walks about the streets and can see and appreciate everything; only he cannot remember who he is. Well, every man is that man in the story. . . . We are all under the same mental calamity. . . . We have all forgotten what we really are.

—G. K. Chesterton

As G. K. Chesterton notes above, we're all familiar with stories in which someone has forgotten who he or she is—whether it's a fairy tale about being stolen from the royal family as a child or a contemporary story of someone suffering from dementia in adulthood.

In many of these stories, the woman has moments when she vaguely remembers her heritage or original state, but then quickly slips back into the darkness of her mental calamity. And often in these stories, there is someone who loves the woman with an unflinching love—someone who is longing for her and working to bring her back to her true reality.

To paraphrase G. K. Chesterton, we are all like the woman in these stories.¹ Due to sin, we have suffered a mental calamity, like

spiritual amnesia, if you will. We have forgotten who we really are. We have forgotten God and His glorious design for us. But there are moments when our hearts are stirred with deep desires to return to someone great . . . something glorious for which we seem to be made, but we cannot find our way home because our hearts and minds have become darkened toward God due to our sin against Him (Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:18). Something has gone wrong with the human race—something is not right within us or in the world.

But we are not without hope. God breathes clarity and understanding through the truth in His Word. And what we learn in the Bible is that humanity does indeed have glorious origins. And there is Someone who loves us and is working to bring us back to our true reality; namely, Jesus Christ.

In view of this good news, let's consider four desires that are common to humanity, desires that point to our glorious origins; desires that cause us to long and yearn for the far greater life God designed for us to share with Him.

A QUEEN WITHOUT A KING

Many women desire a relationship with a kinglike man. We want to be united with someone who is stunning; someone who will love us, lead us, and protect us as we take grand adventures with him. This is a natural longing, built in because God is the King of the world and He made us to live in a glorious relationship with Him.² But humanity threw off God's lordship and love, exchanging God the Creator for the lesser, created things. So we set off to find someone or something in creation to make us happy and help us flourish rather than God.

When we begin to recognize that our experiences in this world do not align with our grand desires, we become disillusioned.

And if we do not grasp the reason for our grand longings to be in a relationship with a glorious King and why our lives fall short (which is because of sin—our own and that in the world), we will respond in a destructive way. We'll begin to recalibrate our standards. In other words, we will lower our criteria and set off on a new journey—not to find the perfect One, but just to find one who will do.

Though we try to silence the yearning in our hearts to find the perfect One, our desires will not have it. They will continue to protest with loud cries of dissatisfaction and discontentment, pleading with us to remember that we are in fact made for a great King. Perhaps you have heard people articulate the tension between our grand longings and fallen lives with the common phrase, “I feel like a queen without a king.” Can you relate?

When God created humanity, He made us in His image so we could know Him and relate with Him.

A QUEEN WITHOUT A CROWN

God bestowed great dignity and worth on us by creating us in His image. And we see remnants of this truth in our common human desire for a sense of dignity. People want to be valued and perceived by others as having worth and honor. Yet we may find ourselves struggling with feeling unimportant, undervalued, disrespected, and living in undignified ways. So let's take a closer look at where dignity comes from and why it seems that we have fallen from it.

When God created humanity, He made us in His image so we could know Him and relate with Him. But He also made us in His image to be like Him. Does this take your breath away? If it doesn't, perhaps you do not yet have eyes to see the glory of God that has been stamped on you—and on every man, woman, and child.

All throughout Scripture, God makes a distinction between humanity and the rest of creation by setting us apart as having special worth—not in and of ourselves, but because we bear His image. There can be no higher form of dignity than being made in the likeness of the Dignified One! Let me say that another way: God is the most excellent and glorious Being. And we are made to image-forth His likeness throughout the world.

John Calvin said it was already a great thing that God gave man the highest place among creatures, but “it is a nobility far more exalted, that he should bear resemblance to his Creator, as a son does to his father.”³ Calvin concludes it is not possible for God to act more generously to man than by impressing His own glory upon us.

The Bible sometimes uses “crown” to symbolize the honor and dignity God bestowed on human beings by making us in His image and giving us the high privilege of reflecting His character and rule throughout the world. For example, in Old Testament times, high priests in Israel as well as kings wore crowns.

But when God's people live in ways that are contrary to the dignified King, the Bible describes our loss of dignity and honor this way: “The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned!” (Lam. 5:16).

A QUEEN WITHOUT A KINGDOM

We also have longings to be part of something great and to accomplish grand works, to cultivate, develop, and rule over something significant. We want to develop our children, cultivate our home, build a business, lead inspiring movements, and much more. Yet why do our lives often seem mundane and meaningless?

When God created us in His image, He also gave us the mandate to subdue the earth and rule over it as His representatives in subjection to Him (Gen. 1:26–28). But humanity became prideful. When we threw off God’s rule over our lives, we lost the right to rule in subjection to Him. In other words, we lost dominion. Now we are like deposed kings and queens in a fallen world, who pridefully seek to build our own kingdoms, for our own glory, and for our own fleeting fame.

A QUEEN WITHOUT A CASTLE

A fourth longing common to women—and to humanity in general—is our desire to live in a beautiful and safe place and to have access to abundant material resources, perhaps remembering our original home, the garden of Eden. But the garden of Eden was more than just a place of beauty and bounty; it was the place where the King lived in a rich relationship with His people. Its abundance was not only due to its resources and beauty, but because it was the place where humanity lived in the presence of God. But when humanity was unfaithful to Him, we were exiled from our glorious home with Him.

Creation was subjected to futility, and humanity has experienced a poverty of place⁴ ever since. In many ways, we have

experienced a poverty of material resources as well. In a sense, our souls seem to know that we have more glorious origins. But friction is apparent between our longings and our fallen lives, causing us to groan for a better world and a sense of true home.

UNBLUSHING PROMISES

The Bible reveals that there are ancient roots and future cords connected to these longings that continue to tug and pull on our hearts. In other words, the reason we long for a King, crown, kingdom, and castle is because we were made for God and His kingdom. When humanity became arrogant and attempted to have these things apart from God, our desires became soiled by sin. But that's not the end of the story—indeed, it is only the beginning!

Jesus, the only Son of God, died to pay the penalty for sin. Those who repent of their sin and put their trust in Jesus for their salvation will be forgiven and reconciled back to God. Jesus came to lead us back to the indescribable pleasures of knowing Him so our hearts will echo David who said, “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance” (Ps. 16:5–6). And we are called to the adventure of new life with Him: “You make known to me the path of life; in your [God’s] presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (v. 11).

The gift of salvation and its many blessings begin today in the lives of those who believe. God begins re-creating us in His image and redeeming our lives to reflect His good design for us. And while we do dream of building families, dwelling places,

and careers/ministries for the exaltation of His name, we must remember that we are living in a fallen world that is perishing (1 Cor. 7:29–31). In other words, we need to dream and build in view of the Age to Come. Jesus contrasts “this age” with “the age to come” in glorious ways. And to use C. S. Lewis’s words, Jesus makes “unblushing promises of reward” that will be enjoyed by His people in the Age to Come.

GAZING BEYOND THE STARS

The Age to Come is described as a gift for God’s people. It will be an age when believers in Jesus Christ will enter into the full measure of blessing that comes from living under God’s good rule, which will be manifested throughout the new world.⁵ In Matthew 12:32 Jesus refers to two ages when He says “either in *this age*, or in *the age to come*.” In Luke 20:35–38 Jesus says that those who “are considered worthy to attain to that age” will become immortal. Let me slow down and say that again: we will never experience death again!

And Jesus promised that those who have left everything to follow Him and advance the gospel will receive a hundredfold “now in this time,” and “in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:30). As we can see, Jesus makes a clear distinction between this age and the Age to Come. And we are called to set our minds on the things that are above and to live in view of them (Col. 3:2).

Therefore, I want to invite you to dream beyond the stars with me! Let’s enter into the vivid pictures in the Bible of far greater things to come. Let’s consider the age of crowns by mentally gazing upon the King. Let’s marvel at the royal family God is creating who will rule with Him forever. Let’s walk through the majestic city of

God, which will become the famous metropolis of the world.

Then we will come back down to earth by considering inspiring ways to live and prepare for our coming King and His kingdom now. Our purpose here is not to focus on when these events will happen or how they will unfold—let’s savor the fact that they will!

KINGS, QUEENS, CROWNS, CASTLES?

I love how C. S. Lewis describes Jesus as “unblushing” in His promises of reward. When a person is embarrassed, he or she may blush. And isn’t this true of how we may feel when we begin to believe and share Christ’s claims concerning the King, crown, kingdom, and castles to come? God’s promises and rewards are so grand that they can make us blush to repeat them for fear of being perceived as living in a fairy tale ourselves.

In my pre-Christ days I would have rolled my eyes and smirked with distaste toward an adult nonfiction book that discussed kings, queens, crowns, and castles. I had always had a strong taste for reality and living authentically with it.

But the only reality I knew was our fragmented, fallen reality, and authenticity meant acknowledging—at some level—that we are a broken mess. Therefore, to talk about the stuff of royalty in application to broken people would have been embarrassing and seemingly delusional—like insecure women trying to be something they are not.

After graduating from college, I moved to Houston, Texas, to begin my postgraduate career. By this time, I had tasted enough disappointments from creation’s inability to fulfill my desires that I had begun recalibrating my standards at frighteningly low

levels and settling further into the sinful slums of the world. But then one night a coworker invited me to a Bible study. Through a series of events that took place over a four-month period, I heard and believed the gospel for the first time. And something powerful took place in my life. I was awakened to reality, much as the apostle Paul describes:

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”
(Ephesians 5:14)

Looking back, I can see irony all over that moment. For being such a lover of reality, I had been living in La La Land. Due to sin, my mind was darkened toward God. I knew God existed, but that reality seemed dull to me. Thus, I lived as though I was the center of my own universe. I also knew I was sinful and broken. But I had created a false reality by thinking there would be no penalty for my sin. I flattered myself by believing that I would be received into heaven because I had never done anything heinous like taken the life of another—even though I had broken all God’s other good laws! And though I would have agreed that God is the ruler of the universe, I determined for myself what was right and wrong and how I would live each day.

But when I heard the gospel, I was awakened to reality, where God is gloriously alive and active and the world is bright

When a person is reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, she will begin to experience such depths of love in her relationship with Him that she does not need anything else to satisfy her.

with beauty, adventure, and a good future for those who live in submission to Him. Jesus graciously brought me out of the fragmented truths and false realities I had created for myself. At the time, I did not have a biblical vocabulary to articulate what was happening. I could only describe what I was experiencing.

I remember fumbling to find words to describe the experience to my unbelieving friends. “I feel like I am alive for the first time in my life. When I was at the Bible study listening to the message, it was as if someone took a defibrillator and jolted me to life—everything looks brighter, the world seems beautiful . . . I don’t know how to explain it, and I know it sounds strange . . . but I don’t feel hate in my heart anymore . . . and I want to start knowing God.”

It wasn’t long before my life began to give evidence to the fact that something truly did change within me. When my friends and I went to clubs, I didn’t want to partake in all the same things I did before, but I was happy to dance sober by their side. And it did not take long before the dark and dingy atmosphere of our gatherings became distasteful compared to my new life with God, who was beckoning me to bright adventures with Him. Looking back, I can see that my life was bearing witness to the truth of Scripture. The Bible perfectly explains what happened to me when I heard and believed the gospel (see Eph. 2:1–5).

A SOCIETY OF PRAISE

When a person is reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, she will begin to experience such depths of love in her relationship with Him that she does not need anything else to satisfy her—the thought of kingdoms, crowns, and castles fade away due to the pleasures she experiences in the presence of her King.

These moments are foretastes of what life will be like *all the time* when we live face to face with Jesus. But when we spend time with our King through His Word, He begins to tell us astonishing news. He tells us about secondary rewards that He will lavish on those who love, seek, and obey Him—which begin now and will be consummated in the Age to Come.

For example, God promises to reward those who seek Him with citizenship in His majestic city, membership in His royal family, significant roles in His kingdom, and more. So how does this all work together? Is Jesus reward enough, or does He bless us even further and give us rewards in creation?

Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

God created the physical world to reveal Himself to us (Rom. 1:20). C. S. Lewis helps us understand how creation leads us to worship God by describing the things in creation as “signposts” that point us to God.⁶ In other words, when we look at the vast universe and splendorous stars, we know the God who made them is powerful and divine. The universe is filled with glorious features that tell us who God is and what He is like so we can enjoy Him more fully.

However, fallen humanity uses creation wrongly. We seek created things to be our substitutes for God, which is idolatry (Rom. 1:23). But God is forgiving people’s sin through Jesus Christ and re-creating us to relate with creation properly. In the Age to Come, we will live in a new world with glorious rewards such as cities, crowns, palaces, and more. And all these staggering rewards in creation will not lead us to forget God; rather, they will lead us to know and enjoy Him more fully!⁷

With all this in mind, I would like to invite you to join me on a journey of walking through the stunning features of life in the Age to Come.

And get ready to worship, because if we consider these things properly, they will lead us to become a society of praise for our King, resulting in the fame of His name, and awaken us to live more fully for His kingdom now!

“FAIRY-TALE PHILOSOPHER”

Using Chesterton’s language, I would like to invite you to join me in becoming a “fairy-tale philosopher.”⁸ I love this paradoxical phrase! At first glance it sounds like two opposite concepts. People often think of *fairy tales* as naïve. Yet, *philosophers* are

perceived as being intellectually sophisticated because they are people who think deeply about life.

I think this phrase is fitting for Christians. God has given us the answers to the most important questions in life through His Word. Thus, we are people who think deeply about life. And what we find in Scripture and therefore believe to be true is that living under the lordship of a glorious King as His queen with crowns and castles restored by His grace is in fact the destiny of believers. And while this may sound naïve to the world—like the stuff of fairy tales—it is in fact a profound reality to which our deepest longings and pursuits testify to each day.

I am not suggesting that we become women who are led by emotional longings or fanciful stories. Rather, I am echoing Chesterton by noting that there are some parts of fairy tales that mimic the world of wonder God has designed. And while fairy tales fail to tell the complete story, the Bible brings the universal story together in a comprehensive and glorious way.

As fairy-tale philosophers, let's approach the Word of God as a book full of wonder because a God of wonder authored it. Let's read the Bible with utmost care, not twisting it and turning it to say what we want it to say. No, no, no, the wonders of God and His design for the world are far greater than anything we can imagine on our own. Let's seek God through His Word, ready to read epic stories because they are part of God's grand adventure. And let's seek to become well-versed in kings and queens, castles and crowns, the moral lessons of the sacrifices we make in this fallen world for our true Love,

Let's approach the Word of God as a book full of wonder because a God of wonder authored it.

and how to live for Christ's kingdom—which has already begun in our midst, giving us foretastes of the fullness to come.

DRAWING UP DESIRES

We long for the stuff of kings, crowns, kingdoms, and castles because we were made for God and His kingdom. But due to sin, we seek to have these things apart from Him. Let's identify our idols and begin exchanging that time and energy for pursuing God and His kingdom (1 Tim. 4:8). And in doing so, we will discover great reward (Heb. 11:6).

1. We discussed four desires that are common to humanity. Which one(s) are you longing for and seeking to obtain during your current season of life (a king, crown, kingdom, or castle)?
2. Are you lowering your standards and searching for someone or something other than God and His kingdom to satisfy the high desires of your heart? If yes, what things in creation are you turning to for satisfaction? In other words, how are you settling for less?
3. James 4:1–3 says we are inwardly frustrated and fight with others when we do not get what we selfishly desire. Do you find yourself frustrated in your endeavors or relationships? Which ones? The heart of frustration is often due to unmet expectations, which can be rooted in pride and idolatry.

4. Another way to identify our idols is to consider the things we turn to when the pressures of life begin to squeeze us. Take time to recount three recent circumstances when you felt life's pressures. Who or what did you turn to for relief?

5. Let's consider one more avenue for identifying idols of our heart. Which of the desires described above are you so eager to satisfy that you are willing to sin for it?

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that God wants us to draw near to Him with confidence, knowing He exists and is a Rewarder of those who seek Him. I would like to invite you to confess your sin to God, marvel at His rewarding nature, and prepare your heart to seek Him and His kingdom with more devotion in the days to come!