

Session 2a Wednesday AM Suth. Aud.  
By: John Eldredge

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Host: With three very lively, animated boys. So, I've heard. And he works with Focus on the Family Institute. And I also found out something else, talking with him, that he was an actor and writer in Hollywood, in Los Angeles doing live theater and outdoor drama. And him and his wife, actually his wife, who's an actress as well, actually owned a live theater production company for five years. So, a very talented and special speaker. So, help me introduce John Eldredge.

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Eldredge: Let's see. Okay. Having a little fun with the sound guy there. Sorry. Let's see, can we do this now? Is this, okay? Thanks. And that way I can see you and wander around. Wow. Thanks for coming back. You never know. I am curious before I kind of go on and talk a little bit more, I'm curious to hear those of you who heard what I just said. What that struck in you? A little bit of feedback? What did that stir in you? An allergic reaction? Hey, look, I'll take what I can get. Thanks. Any thoughts? Don't be shy.

[00:01:35.930]

Yeah, right. Yeah. Very good. God reveals himself in many ways through general revelation, through creation, as well as through the Scriptures. Yes, that's right. Yes. I'd be happy, too, that the Bible is a story, and that is so crucial because the modern era this is very important, and maybe I'll wing off on this for just a second. It has to do with our way of knowing. How do you

really know something and the truth of it? I could tell you many things about my wife. I could tell you that she's blonde, she has green eyes, that she's 39, which she probably wouldn't be glad I just told you that.

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I can tell you that she has a delightful personality. She's a great mom. She's, my soulmate. I can tell you lots of things about her. She's from Kansas. We met in LA. Do you feel any closer to her? No. You see, this is very crucial. Mere fact and proposition will tell you very little about a person. Okay? And now you know why the Bible is such a weird book. I mean, come on. It is a very weird book, right? You get these bloody histories and these racy love poems and the ranting and raving in the Psalms and the jealousy and the prophets, and then you get these sketchy details of Jesus life. I mean, nothing close to a biography. And then you get some personal mail. I mean the Bible is a weird book. Honestly. If it was your job to communicate the most important truths to the human race, would you have written the Bible? Right? You'd write a theology textbook, right? Salvation. Look under S, Trinity, look under T. You kind of lay it out like the Yellow Pages. But the problem is, mere facts and proposition do not help you get to know a person.

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The most effective way to get to know a person is to meet them. Right. And that's why CS Lewis said, you can't really study people, all you can do is just get to know them. That's why eventually he came, incarnation is the most powerful means of communicating. If you want to know what God's like, meet Jesus. The next best thing to incarnation is story. Because story fleshes out

personality. You see the character of a person, their hopes, their dreams, their quirks, their sense of humor. All that is revealed through stories. So, if I told you some stories about Stacey, my wife, you would have a better sense of knowing her. The Bible is not mere fact and proposition, it is revelation about a person. Right, the Bible is trying to introduce you to the deepest and richest personality in the universe and that's why it's such a strange book.

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Other comments, thoughts before you? A thought was it's a good way to reach the American culture, kind of the film and the storytelling and that sort of thing, absolutely, it really is. Which is why I go to movies, so that I can talk about them with people. Watch what people are seeing because it's touching something in them, and you can use that to speak to them.

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Yes. The reminder that we live in a cosmic struggle that most of us have not experienced what it's like to live in an actual war-torn country, but to be reminded that we are in a massive battle. The evil one has very personal intentions against you. He wants to take your heart away. Even though you're in relationship with God, he still hates your guts and wants to do what he can to mess your life up. So, we are in this massive battle. Just a couple more thoughts. I'm just curious how this is very helpful to me to kind of know how it strikes people.

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Yeah, that is so good. Gosh, that was a great comment. Next, I'm sorry, I'll try and repeat it. Just a reminder of the richness of what's coming, the adventure, the intimacy of what we'll enjoy and

just how much God loves us, how much he's pursued us, how much he wants intimacy with us. This is really crucial, particularly for those of you who have been raised in Christianity. I kind of came in late, so to speak. I was raising a pagan home and used to drop acid. I was total counterculture and came to Christ when I was 19.

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And so, I didn't have kind of the religious upbringing, which is a mixed blessing, because so much of what's offered out there in Christianity today is that what God wants from you is duty, obedience, sacrifice, service, commitment. Right. Doctrinal belief. And we forget that he did not move heaven and earth to make you busy. He did not move heaven and earth to make sure that you had your propositional facts in a row. He moved heaven and earth to rescue you, to capture your heart, to free it, to live in his love, in each other's love. That's what he's after. And that is very good news that will get you out of bed in the morning.

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And again, when we read the Bible, like the Yellow Pages or like the encyclopedia, the way of knowing things in the modern era was to dissect them, right? Science majors know this. The way you really know something is to take it apart. You dissect the cat to get to know what a cat is. There's only one problem with that. At the end of the experiment, the cat is dead. You don't have anything like a cat left, right? If you want to know a cat, you live with a live one. And so, when you approach the Bible to dissect it, kind of read it like an encyclopedia. How many of you want to get up early in the morning and spend a half hour at the encyclopedia? Right? I mean, it

doesn't take your breath away. But to be invited into intimacy, wow. That's a whole different deal.

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Let me say a little bit, thank you, by the way, it's very helpful for me to hear what resonates with you. Well, Jesus, speak to us in the time that we have, let this be time spent with you. Open the eyes of our hearts and lead us into a deeper place with you. Let that be true. Everyone here, and the time is Yours, Lord, in the context of your mission conference. I want to think in the context of how Jesus talks to people, what he appeals to in people. And let me use just several illustrations to set this up. He comes to the man at the sheep gate in John, chapter five. The fellow is crippled. He has been there for 30 years. He's dropped off every day, apparently by his family, because I guess, as the rumor has it, once in a while a miracle takes place in the pool there at the sheep gate.

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And kind of first one in gets healed. And so, if you don't get in, you're out of luck. And this poor guy can't get in. People beat him down into the waters because he can't walk. He doesn't have the use of his legs. It's very apparent that he's crippled. It's very apparent. The story says Jesus knows this as he approaches the man, and remember what he asked him, do you want to get well? I mean it's an embarrassingly rude question. Right? Jesus, I mean it's politically insensitive right? You're talking to a disabled person, and what do you mean do you want to get well, it's what he's here for, it's what he's been here for 30 years. Why do you suppose he asked him that question?

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Does Jesus not know what he wants? Of course, he knows what he wants. He's God, right? John earlier in John 2 says he knows what's in man he knows. So why does he ask him that question? Because the man has forgotten what he wants. Can you imagine 30 years waiting just to try and get the use of your legs back? Can you imagine the resignation that would set in the deadness of heart, the deadness of spirit. Jesus needs to take the man back into his desire. And that's the crucial word, desire.

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Think about the two blind men on the road to Jericho. Jesus is walking by large crowds of people, and they're yelling out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us, right from this story. And the people are trying to get them to be quiet. And finally, Jesus turns around, he walks up to these two blind guys. They are obviously blind, right? They are sitting there on the side of the road, begging. And what does he ask them? Yeah, what would you like me to do for you again? I mean, a seemingly strange question. Why does Jesus do this? Right?

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The disciples of John the Baptist, John says, there he is, the Lamb of God. And the two disciples of John the Baptist follow Jesus. And Jesus turns around and he asks them a question. What do you want? What do you want? God appeals to us at the level of our desire. We are desire. Desire is the most essential element of the human personality. When God sets his image on Earth, male and female, we bear the image of God in our souls. We don't bear his image physically, right?

God doesn't have a body. We bear his image soulfully. In characteristics like creativity, God is immensely creative, and he made human beings to be creative with cognitive, rational capacities. We think. He thinks. We bear his image in those ways. But the deepest, the deepest part of the human personality is longing. It is thirst, it is desire. And that is the place that Jesus appeals to people.

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You remember his conversation with the woman at the well? That is an unbelievable story, right? It's the middle of the day and Jesus is at the well, and the woman comes out to the well, right? You all remember the story. Why is she at the well at the middle of the day? Yeah, exactly, right. She's the town whore because people go to the well in the evening after the day of work when it's cool. You don't go to the well, not in heat of the day. Right? But she goes in the heat of the day, so she won't be seen, so she won't have to deal with the sneers and the derision and the little nudge nudge wink wink of the community, [inaudible 00:14:40]. And Jesus does in something absolutely outrageous. He violates all protocol. What does he do? Yes, he talks to her, right? I mean, Jesus is not a safe person.

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Have you noticed that Jesus is not nice in the sense of grow up and be nice. Jesus is a very dangerous person, for good. He's immensely good, but he is not safe. And he begins talking to this woman. He knows why she's there. She knows why she's there. He's a single man. And he starts up a conversation with her. Now, would you say that's fairly provocative? Would you say that that's outside conventional religious norms? It is. And what does he talk to her about? Her

thirst. He talks to her about her thirst, the thirst of her soul. Does he use moral language? Not at all. Does he quote the commandment, thou shalt not commit adultery? Never. He does not use moral language with her. He speaks to her at the level of her desperation, her search for life, which in her case, especially as a woman, is a search for intimacy and the failure of her life's pursuit to find it. Right?

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Go get your husband. I'm not living with my husband. Yeah, I know. I know that. And now that we both know it, we can talk about the failure of your ability to find what you thirst for. This is immensely important. That the most powerful way to speak to people. And the deepest invitations of God are always at the level of thirst. They are not moral categories. Yes. Sin, absolutely. We go whoring after other gods. But Jesus boils down the whole argument he has with the human race when he says, you refuse to come to me to have life. To have life. In other words, Christianity is not an invitation, invitation to become a moral person. That's not its primary invitation. Oh, it will change your character, it will change you dramatically. But this primary invitation is not come and learn how to be good. Its invitation is an invitation to life.

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I want to use an illustration of this, and I'll choose a missionary. You'll see the film Chariots of Fire? Most of you have probably seen it at some point. The story of Eric Little, the famous Scottish runner and missionary, went to China in the 1920s and 30s. Eric Little in the movie, the whole movie, culminates in his arrival at the Paris Olympics. He's fast. And there's two



characters in the film. Do you remember Eric Little, who's very, very fast and from Scotland, and Harold Abrams, who's also very, very fast from England, and they're arch rivals.

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Abrams runs for a very different reason than Little runs. Little runs passionately. He runs out of desire. Abrams, interestingly enough, in the film, is a Jew. He runs because he ought to. He runs to prove something. He runs to vindicate his family's name and the reputation of his people. He runs out of obligation, out of duty. He runs out of the law. Well, you recall the story, they were scheduled to face each other, although they're both representing the United Kingdom in Paris, they're going to race against each other in 100 meters. And you remember the story, it's on Sunday. So Little says no, I'm living in a larger story. And I think, wow, in the Paris Olympics, that's a pretty big story. But he's living in a larger story than that. And so, his heart's free. He says, no, I don't need to run. I'm okay. So, he gives up his slot. He won't run on Sunday. And then the twist in the plot comes at the end of the movie when one of his teammates gives up his slot in the 400 meters on Thursday because they just love to watch Little run. They love to watch him run.

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Passion in motion is a very captivating thing, isn't it? Okay, so here's the story. Little was on the relay team for the UK, and so he has run two relay races already on this day. And then he steps into the 400 meters, which is not even his event. He's a 100 meters man, right? He's a sprinter. So, this is a tremendous test of his abilities. And we're going to step into the scene now at the

400 meters in the afternoon on Thursday at the Paris Olympics. And what I want you to listen for, Little is going to tell you the secret of his life. And then we'll unpack it after we play it.

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[Shows film: No problem. He's a flyer. He's had two races today already. He'll die. Just swing along, you guys, and wait. After 300 meters, Rigor Mortise sets in. You'll pull him in on a rope. Watch out for a Little. Coach has no problem. He's got something to prove, something personal, something guys like Coach will never understand in a million years. Excuse me. Jenny! It says in the old book, he that honors me, I will honor. Good luck, Jackson Schultz. So where does the power come from to see the race, to attend from within? I believe God made me for a purpose. He also made me fast. And when I run, it's pleasure.]

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That is such a beautiful scene. There's so much in that of the beginning of act four, right? Just a crowd cheering the salute there from the captain of the team and all that. The friends, the family, everyone rejoicing. Where does the power come from, Little asked, to see the race to its end. What is the secret of his life? It comes from within. In other words, it comes from desire. Little did not run because he should to or because he ought to. He ran because he couldn't help it. He ran because he said, when I run, I feel God's pleasure.

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Abrams, the legalist, the Jew, the law in the film runs out of duty and obligation. And you saw the one little picture of him. He's the grave fellow, the cheerless fellow, right? Life is all burden

and obligation. This is the central argument between Jesus and the Pharisees. The pharisees argue. No, no, the external life, looking good, keeping the rules, maintaining your religious reputation. That is what God is after. And Jesus says to them, you're dead wrong. In fact, you guys are just plain dead. You're whitewashed sepulcher's, right? You see, they are dead within. Jesus says, the inner life, the life of passion, of desire, the life of the heart is where the action always is. That is what is what God is after.

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What's fascinating is that the apostle Paul says something very similar. He says the life of should to and ought to is a soul killing life. The letter kills, but the spirit gives life. And Paul goes on to say, woe unto me if I don't preach the Gospel. I can't help but speak. I can't help but do this, you know. The prophet Jeremiah says something very similar. His ministry is going, not well, right? He's getting thrown naked into cisterns, and he's a pariah of the community. And in chapter 29, he finally has this argument with God, and he says, that's it. I've had it. I'm done. You tricked me into being a prophet. He actually says, you seduced me into it, and now look what's happened. And then he goes on to say, but if I try and hold this within me, it burns within my heart like a fire. I cannot help but speak the words of God. In other words, Jeremiah, he just couldn't help it.

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This is what happens when God gets ahold of someone and when Christianity tries to come along and say, what God primarily is concerned about, is morality and what he primarily wants from you is duty and obligation and external observance. It will kill you. Let me ask you a question. Do you want to spend the weekend with any of the Christian leaders? You know, I'm talking

about skiing, going down to the beach, your free time. People rip the roofs off houses to get to Jesus. They literally trampled one another to get after this man, to get near him. He was captivating. They saw in him life, and they wanted it desperately.

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And there's something that's gone wrong in the Christian community. When I don't mind learning from my leaders, I don't mind. Well, let me use this example. Compare the emotional life of the elders in your church to what you find in the Psalms, right? I mean, you read the Psalms and they are full of desire. Oh, God, my heart pants after you. I thirst for you, I long for you and lament, God, why have you deserted me? And rage, kill them, Lord, kill them, kill their children too, right?

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You read the Psalms and you think the person needs professional help, and it is our tutorial in prayer. The Psalms are given to us to give us a means and a language whereby we communicate with God about the deepest desires of our heart. And you look at what is held up in Christianity today as maturity, and it is the absence of all but one or two mild emotions, right? In other words, maturity is deadness. That is not biblical. Maturity is passion. It is aliveness. It is desire. So, let's come back to the human predicament. We were made to live in paradise. Every human being comes into the world designed for a different world. Every person comes into this life with longings and desires set in their heart for intimacy, beauty, adventure for Eden.

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And we find ourself in a very different experience. Very quickly we begin to see that this world is not what we hoped it would be. The best life is incredibly disappointing. And now we have the human predicament. The human predicament is simply that every human being longs for life and no one's quite sure where to find it.

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Postmodernism comes along and says, all of the deepest questions of your heart now are unanswerable. Right? Who am I? We don't really know what will become of me. We're not really sure. Where will I find life? Your guess is as good as ours, right? The postmodern summary word is whatever, right? Whatever. And so, people find themselves in a desperate situation and then God comes into the picture. And how does he speak to people? He speaks to them out of desire. What do you want? What do you thirst for? What do you hunger and long for?

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The invitation in Isaiah 55 is the same invitation that Jesus reiterates in John chapter seven, when he stands up at the feast and he says, if anyone is thirsty, let Him come to me and drink. And out of this innermost being will flow real life, the life of God, springs of it, a spring of living water. When you think about approaching people in any culture, you know something about them that they may not even know about themselves. The first thing you know is that they are made in the image of God and that their deepest reality is longing.

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God is a person of tremendous longing, right? Jesus stands over Jerusalem and he says, oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I have longed to take you under my wings, but you would not let me. He sits down at the Last Supper and only he knows that it's the Last Supper, like a condemned criminal. And his best friends are there, and he says, I have longed to share this meal with you. In fact, what do we call his final week? Yes, his Passion Week. Jesus is a person of immense passion.

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That is the image of God in every human being. Every human being is at their innermost core, desire. And what the Church has done is unspeakably sad. We kill desire and call it sanctification. We try and get rid of desire because desire creates a problem, doesn't it? You think about all the deepest dilemmas of your life. They're dilemmas of desire. The refrigerator or the Internet or someplace where desire has gotten you into trouble and we learned the wrong lesson. The story is so familiar. You can finish it for me. The pastor a good man, 30 years in the ministry shocks the community, deepens public cynicism about Christianity, devastates his family by running off with the secretary.

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And we learn the wrong lesson. The Church says, AHA, you see, desire, desire is a problem. You've got to kill desire so that you can be holy. No, no, no, wrong lesson. I'll tell you what's a problem disowned desire. When you disown your desire, when you push it away and attempt to kill it, it goes underground and then it surfaces. Later, maybe much later, maybe 30 years later, desire surfaces again and it becomes a devouring animal. The poet David White calls it the

devouring animal of our disowned desire. The problem is not desire. The problem is what we do with desire.

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Every human being has the image of God in them as desire, and desire creates a dilemma for us. How shall I live with this desire? Come to me, all you who are thirsty, all you who are hungry and have no money. Isaiah says, Come, buy, eat, drink. The whole Bible is the story of desire. Not the getting rid of desire, but the redemption of it, the rescuing of desire. So, in the beginning, Adam and Eve are deceived about what they truly desire, and desire goes skyrocketing off in all kinds of terrible directions.

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But by the end of the Bible, what do you have? The end of Revelation, you have the church panting for God. Let the spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him who hears say come. Whoever is thirsty, let him come. And whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. He who testifies to these things says, yes, I am coming. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus, do you hear the panting of the church? God does not want us to kill desire. He does not want us to replace his appeal to desire with primarily moral language and moral categories. He wants to capture our desires for him, so that we can say with the psalmist, as the deer pants after streams of water, so my soul pants after you, O God, one thing have I desired of the Lord, this I'll seek after, I just want to be with Him.

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GK. Chesterton said that every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God. He's absolutely right. It is the desire for God taken in wrong directions. Every person has this desire set within them. Every human being desires God. Most of them don't know it's God that they desire, because life and the evil one and the corruption of our own sinful nature takes that desire in all kinds of tragic directions. We do ourselves and we do Christianity a great disservice when we try and ignore desire or kill it, and we try and replace it with duty and obligation.

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Little says, how do you find the strength? From where will you find the resources to finish this race? Only from within, not from any external thing. It's got to come out of desire. What do you want? And this is the lesson that Hebrews 12 gives to us when it tells us we have this great cloud of witnesses. They're all there in the stands cheering and watching, and it says, fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. How did he do it? In other words, there's something we can learn from the life of Jesus. How did Jesus finish the race? What does Hebrews 12 say? The joy for the joy set before him. In other words, out of something he wanted very badly. Right. He wasn't kind of a halfhearted fellow. Well, okay, God, I'll go down and die for the human race if you want me to.

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He didn't come because the Father told him to. He didn't come because he should to, or he ought to. He came because he wanted to. He came out of desire. And Hebrew says, that's the secret of Jesus life. That is how you will be able to run the race well. Also, you have got to recover and restore the panting heart, the thirst of your soul, and begin to let that desire carry you towards



eternity. The law was merely meant to sort of be the track, the lines on the track. It was just to kind of help keep us on course, because sometimes we are very confused about what we desire.

[00:39:10.230]

I'm having an affair right now with an internal frame backpack. It's hanging in the sporting goods store in Colorado Springs. It's \$365. And I'm convinced that if I just had this pack, life would be good. I would be happy. I'm having this affair with a backpack, for heaven's sake. It is unbelievable. Our desires will take us all kinds of other directions. Oh, if only I had this, then life would be good, right? I need, I need the word of God. I do need his ethics to guide me, to remind me, John, it is God that you desire. He is the only answer. Oswald Chambers says, to the aching abyss of the human heart, everything else we throw in there is like car keys in the dryer. It just rattles around in your soul. It does not fill.

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And so, then you can come to people, and you can sit down next to them and say, I'm intrigued why you like Titanic. Tell me a little bit about that. The romance, the love. Yes. Wouldn't you love to be loved like that? How has love been going for you? Oh, my gosh. You are at the deepest level of a person's soul in a very short conversation. Right? Because the answer is that life is very short on love. Very short on it. How is it going for your thirsty soul? Really ought to be our basic approach to people. Do you know what? I found a spring. I found water. Are you interested? Let me tell you about the one whose life was the light of men, who said, Come to me if you're thirsty. Who said, come to me if you are weary in your soul's pursuit of life.

[00:41:21.090]

Christianity is not an invitation to become a moral person. It is an invitation to life. Life and the human predicament is we all long for life and we don't know where to find it. Thoughts, reactions, comments, charges of pharisees, protest, condemnation, public flogging.