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Perfume Sermon Series – 2

“Allure”

Allure – the perfume by Chanel. Difficult to Define. Impossible to Resist.

There's a beautiful verse of Scripture in Hosea. It's Hosea 2:14. *Let me give you a little context. The people of God had abandoned God to worship other gods. God missed them and wanted them back. To achieve that end, God sent Hosea, the prophet, to accomplish their return through his preaching and witness. God never stops trying to bring us back into union with heaven!* So, here's the verse: “I will allure her into the wilderness and there I will speak tenderly to her.” I probably have always loved this verse because I first heard it in a translation that substituted *desert* for *wilderness*. So it read, “I will allure her into the desert and there I will speak tenderly to her.” This appealed to me because I'm a desert *soul by nature*. Since childhood, I have felt as if God was alluring me to the desert, and I have always had confidence that God would speak tenderly to me there.

Still, I don't think it's an actual physical place that Hosea, speaking for God, had in mind. He was referring to a state of being. He was referring to that empty space where there's only God and us. Consider that evocative, provocative word 'allure' - such a great name for a perfume!! We generally think of 'allure' as a word that describes being seduced into something - probably something that is a little on the seamy side! The word does have a seductive connotation to it. But, mariners also use the word. They employ 'lures' to attract fish – 'lures' is from the word allure. And, advertisers attract customers by using lures as well. When Chanel released the new perfume “Allure” in 1996, it was to lure and captivate fragrance customers who were looking for a new scent. The word allure, however, comes from a French derivation meaning 'gait, or way of walking.' Rather than thinking of slinking into a clandestine encounter in the middle of the night, think of allure, for a moment, in terms of gait, or way of walking.

Think about a normal day in your life. What is your way of walking? What do you walk toward? From what do you walk away? Do you know? Do you pay attention?

What about your soul? What is its way of walking? What does it walk toward? From what does it walk away? Do you know? Do you pay attention?

*What is your way of walking now?
How do you find your way?
How does your soul tread through this life?
Or move from day to day?
God lures you to the wilderness,
To speak in kindness there.
God is alluring your soul right now,
Start walking, if you dare.*

Let me share three places where you can look to better understand your soul's way of walking through the world.

The first place to look is your conscience. *We generally think of our conscience as that part of ourselves that won't let us rest when we've done something wrong – our personal sin calculator and guilt reporter! Actually, our conscience is much more than a nasty undercover agent, or an irritating tattletale!*

Our conscience is our inner knowledge, voice, wisdom, higher self. It knows what is good and right for us. In fact, the writer of the Book of Proverbs says that when we listen to that inner wisdom, we will know the way to walk. Sometimes when we listen to our conscience it lets us know that we're not walking in a way that's healthy for us. Sometimes it tells us that we need to change a current pattern that is familiar and comfortable in order to walk in a way that has more depth and fulfillment. Sometimes, we're told to look in unexpected places for meaning and purpose. Our conscience is one of the primary ways God allures us 'to the desert,' – to the wilderness – to the empty space -- to God's self.

It can occur quite simply. We might suddenly think of someone who needs prayer, and we stop immediately and offer a prayer for them. At other times, it may be a major issue we're considering. We might, for example, have it in mind to make a drastic change in our life. Our conscience may tell us that the change we're contemplating is really nothing but over-reaction to some situation, or that we need to give the decision more time, or that we don't yet need to change our pattern of walking, or that the time is right to completely alter our situation!

The second place to look is in your longing. *What we long for and what God longs for us are not really so different! We have a longing for wellness and peace. God also longs for that for us. We long for deep and meaningful relationships. God also longs for that for us. We long to enjoy life and be bathed in beauty. God also longs that for us.*

Of course, there are things that we want that may not be what God longs for us! Like a bottle of Allure perfume, or a new outfit, or even a wild weekend with the lover of our dreams! Yet, if we peel away the outer layers to find what is behind the perfume, the outfit, the wild weekend; we find that what we really long for is to live fully, to experience beauty, to know peace and love. These are all things that God longs for us as well.

So, if we pay attention to our longing, we can go to the core to find out and assess where we're being allured, and if our way of walking is toward the allurements of God's desire for us or away from it.

For example, if life feels overly stressed and complex, and you're longing for peace, it might be helpful to peer into the longing more. On further examination, it may become clear that you're trying to get peace in unhealthy ways. You may need to think about what true peace really is for you and commit to seeking it, even if it means you must make serious changes in your life.

The third place to look is in your anger. *Anger is an interesting emotion. We usually get angry because we didn't get something we wanted. Perhaps, someone didn't treat us as we thought we should be treated. Or, we may have felt that a salesperson took advantage of our vulnerability. Or, we may feel helpless because a politician doesn't agree with our point of view. Or, we become furious because a friend or lover doesn't take our needs into account.*

Anger can be so strong that it actually keeps us from listening to our conscience or our longing! It can halt our ability to feel the allure of God, simply because we are consumed by the pain of not getting what we want or think we deserve.

Surprisingly, though, anger can also be our teacher. When we listen to our anger, we find a treasure tucked inside. That treasure is the desire for things to be right, for things to be fair, for things to be at peace. We may get the specifics wrong, especially if we're acting like spoiled brats, but at the clearest part of it all, there's something alluring us that is higher and nobler than pettiness. When we listen to our anger, we go beyond the pettiness and begin to hear God's seductive whisper.

The advertisement for Allure perfume by Chanel has these words: Difficult to Define. Impossible to resist. A very alluring marketing message, to be sure! The words linger in the mind long after reading the perfume ad. Difficult to define. Impossible to resist.

They may be the words of a clever advertising executive trying to sell a perfume, but they are also an apt description of God. Difficult to define. Impossible to resist. It is that God – the God that is difficult to define, impossible to resist – that is always alluring us to the desert – to that empty space – where we can be alone with God.

*We feel that allure in our inner conscience, in the longings that come from our deepest selves, and in our anger that is merely a cover-up for what we are missing. In the moment that we pay attention to that allure, we will not be able to resist. We will begin walking in the way toward **that** God. And when we move toward God into the wilderness, God will speak tenderly to us there.*