

James Finley
Intimacy: The Divine Ambush
Excerpt from disc 6

Unedited Transcript

We're saying transformative experience occurs when the way you are experiencing whatever it is that you are experiencing yields and give way to a qualitatively deeper experience of previously unrecognized qualitatively deeper dimensions of what you are experiencing. And so, in love, this is the transformative occurrence. So, two people start out in a conversation in love. And in the conversation in love, as they speak of their love for one another, in the loving exchanges each to each, the level of consciousness of their love for and with each other yields and gives way in the intimacy of the encounter, to a qualitatively deeper experience, of qualitatively deeper dimensions of the love that is their life in this descent. Now if we look on it this way as this descent, then we could say this, the next step would be this: As the sacrament of an eternal descent into an eternal love, they are having this dialogue and she says to him, "You know, prior to our meeting and prior to all of this, I didn't even know love like this existed."

He says, "Me either."

She says, "I assume if we keep going like this it's going to get deeper."

He says, "Me too."

She says, "I wonder if we will ever get to a place of love so deep there is no depth of love deeper than the depth of love we got to."

In other words, you see what she is asking? "I wonder if we will get to the end of love, I wonder if . . . look how deep it's getting. It's getting so deep. This is deep. This is really deep! It's all encompassing. What can I say, what can I say?"

"And in this descent into an ever-deeper awareness of ever-deeper dimensions of the love that is transforming us into itself, I wonder if we will ever get to a depth of love beyond which there is no deeper depth of love. Will we get to the end of love?"

And in asking the question, she already knows the answer: that they will never get to it, they will never get to it. Because there is no end to the endless. This is love has no beginning, love has no end. And it's a descent that never ends. This is why love never dies; this is why love never dies.

Now if we take this image then of a descent, this leads us into an understanding of the dark night. The poetic image is that of a stone falling in water. Imagine it's falling, falling, falling, falling. And the water in which the stone is falling is bottomless. So it's falling forever, falling forever, falling forever.

And the water in which the stone is falling is falling along an underwater cliff. And there's little protrusions along this cliff and every so often, the stone lands on one of these protrusions; and pauses in its descent. And in the movements of the water, it rolls off and it continues on and on and on and on.

Now imagine you are that stone; and imagine we're all falling forever into God. And imagine you momentarily land on a little protrusion where you get to a place where you say, "You know what? I think I'll stop here and set up shop and get my bearings and settle in. The dark night of the soul is the process of being dislodged by love from the perception that the point you've come to is deep enough for you. You see that? We come to a place of realization in love; we come to a place of self-knowledge, we come to a place of a sense of what life is about. And we pause there in kind of a reflective, subjective experience of that depth of presence to life. And the self that lives there imagines it has the final say in who we are. It's got all this marked out. It's got it figured out. It's got its bearings. You go study theology; become a God-ologist, write books.

And then you fall in love or your mother dies or you have terminal cancer or you're utterly taken by the look in the eyes of the one who suffers. And you are dislodged from the ability to live on your own terms. And you continue on in the descent. It's like this.

So the dark night of the soul then is like the divine strategy of artfully dislodging us from anything less than an infinite union with infinite love as being enough for us as our destiny, as destiny.

And here's another mysterious thing, I think. When she says, "I wonder if we'll ever get to a depth of love so deep there's no depth of love deeper than the depth we got to" and she knows as soon as she says it, they'll never get to it. At that point, there is the paradoxical realization that the bottomless abyss of love in which they are descending is welling up and giving the totality of itself as the level to which they've reached at that point.

I want to give another example of this intuition here. Let's say you're at the ocean. And you're at the ocean and you're just ankle deep. It's true you're only ankle deep, but it's also true you're in the ocean. It's also true if you just keep going, it will get plenty deep soon enough. Now here's something deeper. What if. . . what if the middle of the ocean is infinitely deep. And what if the infinite depth of the ocean infinitely gives the infinity of the totality of its depths to your ankle-deep degree of realization of it? Does that make sense in a way?

See we tend to think. . . someone once said at the monastery to Thomas Merton: You get the feeling the Church says that God is everywhere, but God's *really* in your soul. And God's *really, really* in the church. You have to go in the church to save your soul. And God's *really, really, really* in the Eucharist. And then God's *really, really, really, really, really* in Heaven. So out here in Santa Fe with God, it's like one part per billion. Like on a good day you can pick up a (smacks lips). But God's *really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really* everywhere. Because the generosity of the Infinite is infinite. And we are the generosity of God.

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