

God-Soaked Life: Discovering a Kingdom Spirituality
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God-Soaked Life invites us to live in the reality of God's presence in our everyday lives. It's an invitation into the community of God's people, into fearless honesty about our own weaknesses and failures, into the daily experience of God through silence, Scripture, and prayer, and into a new life of love and service in the broken world around us. God's kingdom is not far away, a remote and future promise. It is here, now.

“Imagine the day after your death.”

You find yourself waking up to a new and glorious reality. This place – what shall we call it? Heaven? Eternity? Whatever its name, it is achingly beautiful. Formed by the artistry, imagination, and creativity of God, how could it be otherwise? You feel you could explore the intricate wonder of this place for a thousand years and still daily come across new marvels.

As you walk through this landscape you become aware of others around you. You realize that however beautiful your surroundings may have seemed at first, they pale in comparison to these creatures of glory. These people are breathtaking. The place through which you are walking may well be a work of God's art, but the people walking with you are somehow bearers of God's very life and breath. To look on one of them is to gaze into the face of God, and it is magnificent. Every one of them has a beauty that could bring you to tears, were you to look on it clearly enough and long enough.

Imagine you slowly become aware that these others are not simply wandering around, they are engaging in all manner of activities. As you watch all this activity, you gradually begin to realize that among all this runs a single golden thread: *love*. This is how these people are able to show love for one another. By creating beautiful art. By building homes and schools. By teaching, by cooking, by growing food, by delighting in one another's company and in the world around them. You begin to see, behind the endless variety of seemingly random activity, the unifying presence of the community of love.

Perhaps a tiny nagging doubt pesters at the back of your mind: Why aren't these people gathered together in some gigantic temple, surrounding God and endlessly singing hymns and chanting psalms? Isn't that what heaven is supposed to be all about? Why isn't eternity more religious, less obviously secular? While you're wondering where you might find God in the midst of all this, you start noticing something else: God seems to be right here already, manifest all around you. Like the gentle breeze blowing through the trees, the Spirit of God is everywhere present and moving through all these lives and these activities.

As you continue to explore, you become conscious also of this: that these people are *constantly* expressing their love toward God. Some of them are gathered together and singing hymns. But others are loving God by loving those around them, those in whom they know God's life so wonderfully dwells. Some are loving God by delighting in his creativity, and some by echoing that creativity in their own. But these people together are singing a great song of love, in words and music and silence and action and stillness, a song that rings through all creation and says: in life, in love, in one another, and in you, God – we rejoice!

But there is another song that runs around this hymn of the people, a song that weaves its

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“With the eye of a poet and the heart of a pastor, Chris Webb cuts through the din and despair of modern society with a call to true discipleship: live in the embrace of a loving God and rejoice, one and all, with your whole being. I can think of no finer encouragement for women and men, and no better word of hope for the communities we share.”

— Samuel Rahberg, author of *Enduring Ministry*

harmonies through the skies and seems to tremble under the earth itself, the hymn of joy and delight that brought this place into being from the beginning and continues to sustain it. You still yourself to listen more closely. This song is *astounding* in its utter beauty. It is ravishing. You feel as though your heart will burst open with every unfolding note. It unlocks a deep longing in the very center of your being, a longing to hear this song more deeply, more fully, to let it soak into your flesh and bones.

From the moment you begin to hear it, you start framing your life around that deeper song, the song of rapture and delight. Wherever it can most clearly be heard, you go. You notice that it seems clearer and purer when you are with certain people, so you spend more time with them. As you love them more deeply you find the song rises in its joyful intensity even more, so you open your heart as much as you can and love them without reserve. Sometimes the song seems to respond to your singing, so you sing yourself hoarse; at other times it is fullest in your silence, so you learn to keep perfect stillness.

You know this song. It is the song of God. In this place, people have discovered how to make their lives an offering of joy and delight to God. But God also sings over them. You are learning to experience *his* joy and delight in all that he has made. In the beauty of all that is, in people, and in you. Yes, in you. You are discovering the delight of God in you, and in his song you have also discovered yourself: your value, your worth, your purpose, your significance, your identity. Finally, enraptured in love with God and entirely given in love to others, you have found *you*. And you have become free and happy and complete.

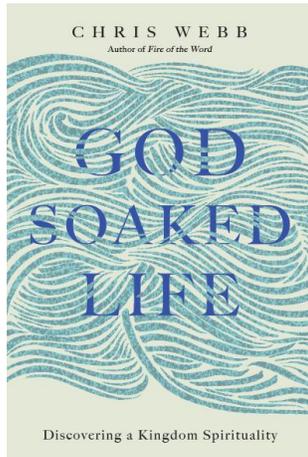
Imagine this place.

Now imagine one more thing. Imagine that this is *not* the day after your death. Instead, it is today. This is not your dream of heaven; it is God’s dream of creation, a dream made real by his limitless power. You already live in this achingly beautiful dream; you dwell in eternity now. At this moment you are surrounded by people made in his glorious image, and they are magnificent. They are capable of the greatest love, and they can express that in a thousand different ways in the ordinary business of daily life: in their art, their work, their neighborhoods, and their family life. They are worthy of your love. And all through the dream of creation God is singing his song of ravishing delight for those with ears to hear. There are ways you can open your soul to that song: places where it is more easily heard, practices that attune the ear of your heart, people who will help you listen. And in that song you can discover who you really are, even *become* who you really are.

Do you know where to find the dream of eternity? Take a good look out of the window. Hear the gospel whisper in your ear: “the kingdom of God has come to you” (Luke 11:20).

Let’s explore.

— Adapted from the prologue



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"Chris reminds us of the life-changing call to know we are beloved as children in Christ, held alongside the transforming call to grow into all that means in all parts of life every day. This is no microwavable, just add boiling water, spirituality-lite; this goes deeper into the things of eternal life."

— **Barry Hill**, rector of Market Harborough, diocese of Leicester, UK

The Kingdom Is Calling

It's easy for us, living in a very different world from that of first-century Palestine, to misunderstand all this talk about the "kingdom." There's something archaic about the language; we might picture territorial lines drawn on some parchment map being pored over by armored knights while their steely-eyed monarch watches from his magnificent throne. Kingdoms seem to have more to do with Arthurian jousting or Tolkien's elves than with our contemporary world of polling booths and global commerce.

Like just under a tenth of the world's population, though, I grew up (and still live) in a modern kingdom—in my case, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I remember the street party we held, when I was a young boy, to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee; we hung bunting from the lampposts and laid out trestle tables groaning with food along the length of the road under a bright summer sun. As a boy scout I renewed my oath every week to "do my best, to do my duty to God and the Queen, and to help other people." My father and stepfather served in Her Majesty's Royal Navy doing their bit "for Queen and country." To this day we Brits send letters in the Royal Mail, licking and sticking stamps adorned with the monarch's head onto the corner of the envelope; we pay taxes to Her Majesty's government; we buy pastries and coffee in the local cafe using coins and notes issued by the Royal Mint imprinted with the Queen's image. Reminders that we live in this kingdom surround us everywhere we look.

But for most of us, most of the time, all this is only tangentially about power and authority, or territory and maps. The kingdom I belong to is, above all, a community of people: my family and loved ones, my friends and neighbors, my colleagues and acquaintances, and the millions of fellow citizens whose lives are more distantly connected with mine. The monarch is perhaps best understood less as a ruler and more as a symbol of this huge society and all it represents. Her Majesty's government regulates the community, her armed forces protect it, the Royal Mail helps to keep it connected. But it's the people who *make* it. Sure, we have what Winston Churchill called "this sceptred isle" on which we spend most of our time, but even the land isn't the kingdom: when I travel abroad, I'm still a subject and citizen, still connected to my people and community. The United Kingdom is who we are together, not where we live.

This is the kind of kingdom Jesus proclaimed; this is what God had in mind from the very first moment of creation: *community*. A God-soaked community of people whose lives are defined not by territories and authorities, by shifting allegiances to political systems and philosophies, but by deep bonds of love to one another and to their Creator. Rulers and nations come and go. The poet Shelley, in his great poem "Ozymandias," describes a vast monument to a forgotten dictator in the Middle East carrying a hubristic inscription:

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“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The mightiest cities will one day crumble, and the most noble societies will pass. But God’s purpose remains steadfast and cannot be frustrated. God, whose presence fills all creation, is calling people to life in a community built on eternal foundations. He is calling you.

— Taken from chapter one, “The Invitation”