

Your Personal Dance with God

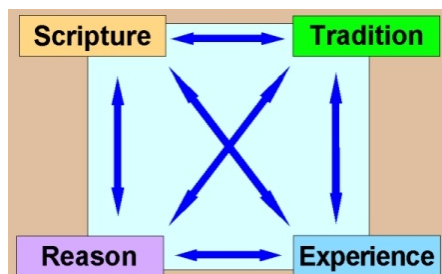
by Rev. David L. Hatton, RN

Free thought is having a revival. Young intellectuals are diving into the skeptic stream of the latter 1800s and fervently inviting others to join them. But, in their philosophical zeal, they've ignored history. At the heels of late 19th Century skepticism, thinkers had to face atheism's logical fallout: *purposelessness*. Even its champion Bertrand Russell succinctly admitted, "Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless."

One reaction to this meaninglessness was *existentialism* (e.g., Sartre, Camus, Heidegger), which sought self-authentication by an act of the will, a "leap of faith." Earlier, Søren Kierkegaard had pioneered this as a Christian concept, insisting that legitimate faith is a personal act. Christian existentialists dance with their Maker; atheists dance alone.

**Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,— act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!**
(from Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life")

Reason cannot dance without action. Our Creator calls humans to creative activity. Our will is the worker; our reason its tool. Both were to function in conjunction with divine guidance. Joint participation with the Ultimate Worker is our true purpose as co-creating creatures (Genesis 1-2). This cooperative effort between us and our Maker is the fountainhead of personal meaning. Experiencing such dependence is the only safe way to enjoy authentic independence.



Experience is part of the quadrilateral that helps us verify sound teaching. It's the personal lens through which we study *Scripture*, adopt *tradition* and employ *reason*. These four interact to shape a Christian's perception of spiritual truth. But as M. Scott Peck said in *The Road Less Traveled*, a misuse of "the hand-me-down variety" of religion can abort a "more appropriate and original" belief system. Faith must be personal. In *The Living God*, Thomas Oden discusses this quadrilateral, highlighting the priority of its experiential dimension:

"The most convincing source of truth is that which corresponds with the rest of one's experience, and which validates the meaningfulness of one's personal history. Any truth that is arrived at by circumventing personal experience is likely to remain somewhat implausible to the individual, no matter how important it may be to others. This is as true of psychological or moral truths as it is of truth of revelation made known in history. A truth that has not become a *truth for me* . . . is not likely to bear weight in sustaining other conclusions in the study of God."

The nature of life itself puts a personal spin on faith. As we rotate through daily routines that demand behavioral conformity, we also face unpredictable twists and turns, turmoil and turbulence, challenging our internal stability. The centrifugal force of such external factors may quickly hurl away or slowly dislodge any peripheral or superficial beliefs. Authentic faith alone—chosen and held at the heart of our being—can withstand the gravitational pull of such circumstances. This center is a sacred location, the sanctuary of our will. Out of this holy place, we were meant to thrive as individuals and commune with our Creator.

Divine revelation, prophetically preserved in writing, broadcasts across the centuries God's wish for a relationship with us. But when He became human, He invited us in Person, with lips of flesh, "Come unto Me . . . Follow Me." His desire for our fellowship is emphatic: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John 14:23, NKJV).

Spurgeon wrote, "We can read of God, and hear of God, and be little moved; but when we feel His presence, it is another matter." This level of intimacy can be frightening. Who can read Francis Thompson's poem "The Hound of Heaven" without trembling at the vision of God as an impetuously persistent Lover pursuing His beloved? We easily identify with the girls in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when the Beavers told them about Aslan:

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

As intimidating as encountering God can be, it's our ultimate fulfillment. *Scripture* invites it, *tradition* promotes it, *reason* describes it, *experience* verifies it. But, if the metaphor of divinely intense passion seems too imposing, this article suggests another.

While Scripture reveals God's love and care for all creation, He especially enjoys spending time with us as unique persons. Indeed, Christ the Bridegroom came seeking a corporate Bride, the Church. But He approaches us individually, asking the polite question, "*May I have the pleasure of this dance?*" Yet He's not requesting our hand just for a single melody. It's for the whole "Psalm of Life."

His ball is always in our court. If we ignore it, He usually sends another. But although He seems to "hound" us, He never forces us. It's truly a dance, an interaction where we seek Him as sincerely as He seeks us. The quest must be our own personal journey, as poet Edwin Leibfreed eloquently described in "The Quest for God":

Each soul must find its own uncertain way,
Regardless of the traveler yesterday;
That we, alone, may find the God we seek
In solitude, where He to us may speak.
The revelation is by slow degree,
And all His laws make time their one decree.
Time's evolution is the needful space
To seek the marvels of eternal grace.

Stretch your soul's legs. The divine dance floor awaits you.

(This essay was [published 5-12-2014 on Seedbed.com](#), a Wesleyan "think-tank" blog from Asbury Theological Seminary. For further information or to ask questions, email me at pastordavidm@gmail.com.)