

## Chapter 2 (Noticed and consumed)

Hillsong sings: “*consume me from the inside out.*” If we choose to let Jesus invade our soul then what should we expect? Change, change, and lots of change. It’s interesting that God first appears to Moses as a burning bush. It says the fire did not consume the bush. The fire, love, and plans of God should consume us like the burning bush: from the inside out. Then we notice, as Moses did, how God brings us closer to him.

What is the plan of God? I was reading Isaiah 43 and it hit me. This chapter could be a bedrock of Christianity. All the essentials are there. The theme of it is two things. One is that God says “He will.” We read words like *past, former, and “I will.”* God loves to say he did it all. Then we have the second part found in verses 18 and 19

*“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”*

I almost wish God began Matthew or John the same way. Matthew begins with a statement that this is the genealogy of Jesus. Then he could have added “*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!*” John says “*in the beginning was the word.*” He could have added “*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!*” The plan of God is always doing a new thing.

I know, some will say we need the past words and deeds of God. Yes, we do! Yet, as much as Jesus embodies and loves the Old Testament, he is doing a new thing. Yes, Jesus said “*I have not come to abolish the law.*” However, He is also doing a new thing. It’s not a new plan but the continuation of the old plan. That involves God always doing new things.

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So, God began a new thing with Moses in the desert. Did you notice in Exodus 3, that God saw Moses looking at the bush? Duh! He drew Moses closer to himself directly because Moses was looking. This is where we should begin. Moses is outside of God. In so many ways Moses knows very little of God. We always assume that because he was Hebrew by birth, Moses was Hebrew. How did Moses know the Hebrew ways? As an infant he was Egyptian. His adopted mother was Egyptian. From the inside out, Moses would have been consumed by Egyptian culture and beliefs. He was probably more Egyptian than Hebrew. I'm sure Moses had heard of the Hebrew God. Yet, how could he really know? This is where God steps in.

Certainly, Moses knew of the Hebrew religion. Yet, God wanted him to know the Lord in a deeper way. God in his brilliance brought in Jochebed, Moses real mother to nurse him. I'm sure she told him stories. Schooled him in the customs of being Hebrew. How did Pharaoh's daughter know who the mother was? Someone did, that's for sure. How was pharaoh's daughter able to have a child that looked so clearly Hebrew? I find this whole scene to be wild and odd. God must have orchestrated the whole thing.

Hello, crocodiles and snakes. What about water and drowning? Yet, Moses is found floating in a basket amid the reeds of the Nile. So, many questions. Did you notice that Moses was hidden within the reeds, pharaoh's kingdom, and in the desert for 40 years? Clearly, God was in it and had a plan. Yet, he needed time to work it out. He hid Moses until a time for something new.

There are probably about 300-500 years between Joseph to Moses. Take of give a few years. God loves to put distance between the old and new. He did it with Adam to Abraham, Joseph to Moses, and Malachi to Jesus. The new thing takes time. In some ways, that gulf of time is for us. We need time to see. The Israelites took 400 years to cry out to God. After the

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Maccabee war the remnant of the Jewish culture was becoming more Greek every day. It was time for Jesus to come and turn tables. To do a new thing.

There are several themes in this book. Two of them are based on the words “noticed” and “consumed.” Let’s begin with a look at the word “noticed.” Half the time that is the problem with the Christian world. We don’t seem to notice much. You think horses own the market on blinders? Oh no, religious people do. Sometimes I am delivering mail (mailman) and the Jehovah Witnesses walk by. They could be Mormons, I don’t know. They do have bibles under their arm and tracks in hand. These people are armed to the teeth to witness for Jesus. Usually, they come in twos and threes. It’s biblical. However, I have noticed that, not once, have I ever been noticed by them. They always walk on by to the next door.

I am watching a show called *In-between*. It’s about a girl that notices spirits. Usually, the spirits don’t notice that she sees them. Often, I am walking by these Bible heroes on the street. Don’t misunderstand me, I like their spunk. Christians don’t tend to witness much these days. Were too busy blending in. However, with these people I must be invisible because our friendly neighborhood Bible heroes usually walk straight on by. Sometimes I do get a smile or nod, but never a single word. I have often wondered if they are so consumed by going door to door that they miss someone standing right in-front of them. Don’t mailmen need saving too? Why don’t they notice me?

I certainly noticed them. One usually has on a long coat. Why I don’t know. I suppose if they were Mormons, it’s all about being black and white (men in black). Black pants and white shirt. We all notice them. They all hold a Bible except the Mormons. Holding three Bibles would be complicated. Imagine carrying a stack of the Old and New Testaments, plus the Mormon

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Bible. Got to have those Biblical tracks too. You need a hand free for them. They are probably more important than the Bible I suspect. Noticing religious people is pretty easy.

The new thing that God needs to do usually begins with “noticing.” He noticed the plight of the Israelites. He noticed Abram hidden within the Ur culture. I could go further and say he noticed Adam hiding and David among the sheep. It saddens me that most Christians don’t notice those who need God. They are like shadows we can’t quite see. Who really noticed me as a kid in church circles? Who was asleep as the church gave away all the social services to the government? I am putting the church on notice. God is never unaware. He always notices what we tend to ignore.

I would; however, like you to notice a few things in this Moses story. God noticed the plight of the male Hebrew babies. Pharaoh wanted them killed at birth. God provides a way through it. First, the Hebrew midwives made an excuse for not killing the boys. Then God saves Moses on the Nile. He then provides Moses with Hebrew training and safety within the Egyptian kingdom. This theme of noticing is all over this story. Moses notices a Hebrew slave being mistreated. So, he kills the Egyptian guard. It’s interesting that Moses hides the body in the sand so nobody will notice. Then Moses intercedes in a dispute between two Hebrew men. They noticed that Moses had killed an Egyptian. So, Moses flees. He hides in the sand (desert) too.

As the story continues Moses is noticed by the beautiful Zipporah. I’ll bet he noticed her as well. Of course, forty years later we find God noticing Moses looking at a burning bush. I can see God watching Moses. He then calls Moses over to talk. It’s the template of the Christian religion. We pray and God notices. We cry out and God hears. Yet, we don’t seem to realize that God is looking and waiting for us to call on him. To look for the burning bush.

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One night at bowling I was witnessing to a friend of my son. I was interested in his view on God. What I missed, at the time, was the other friend. As I made good points, the one I was talking to refuted me. Yet, the friend off to the side was agreeing with me the whole time. Sometimes we just don't take notice.

Later that night, at home, it hit me. I was so intent on making that boy a Christian that I missed the one to the side that was really interested. Did those Jehovah witness miss the one who might be interested? God noticed that Moses was interested. I believe that God is always watching and waiting for us to notice him at work? I just wonder how many Christians create programs and ministry to reach the lost. Yet, in being so consumed with the program they miss the point. They, in essence, miss the lost.

Churches give to missionaries. They in turn give those funds to the poor in another place. Yet, missionaries must come home and raise money. Ministry leaders must prove their mission is legitimate to receive funding. In the middle is a burning bush. This bush is the so-called poor, needy, and lost right in our own community. What do we notice more, the people or the mission? We did an outreach within the city that grew and grew. It became expensive. Nine pastors met and decided to cancel the event because they didn't see enough benefit. These men were not willing to take the time to see God work. I thought one lost soul was benefit enough? That's it in a nut shell. What are we really looking at? I wonder if the burning bush was their all along. It just took Moses 40 years to notice.

Jesus says he notices the one who got away. He would leave the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep. It's such a great preaching tool. The verses are all set up. It's pulling the heart strings of the saved. We were all their once. Oh, how touching. Preach on minister! Yet, as we leave the service all the heartfelt questions are asked. What's for lunch? Where should we eat?

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What time is supper? What are we doing next week? Let's get together as the saved and encourage each other. The lost ones? Oh, we lost that thought the minute the preacher closed his Bible.

I am just as guilty. My current church is at a mall. If we go this Sunday, we could shop for groceries after. Possibly, we could we eat lunch at the mall too. The wife and I always went for coffee after church on a Saturday night. To be fair, who plans on reaching the lost before or after church? It's not how we roll is it? If we're going to do that in this modern era, several things must happen. One is that we need ministry to do it. Who does ministry outside of a group anymore? Is it feasible? Is there pastoral interest? Heaven knows that without interest the church will not pursue it. That includes prayer. "Well, we tried that but nobody showed up."

What are the real pillars of church? Is it prayer, reading the Bible, and teaching and preaching? The Holy answer is yes. The real answer is sort of. If childcare is not met then who comes to church? If the worship sucks, then who is coming back next week? Is the floor clean and the parking good? I have heard people complain that the preacher did not shake their hand. There was no usher. I had to sit at the front. Trust me, I have heard many reasons why we don't go to church. People don't really go to church to find God. They go to notice what church will do for their comfort and entertainment.

What if the preaching is boring? Not bad, but boring? As a preacher I know. I love to preach. Yet, I know with all my heart I'm not that good at it. Trust me, my current preacher is a master communicator. Yet, it's the same word of God. I'm not expecting people to endure a bad speaker. Yet, what is the reason we stay? The Bible or entertainment? What are we looking for in church? It comes back to the same theme. What did we notice? Conversely, who noticed us? I know some people (in several churches) that put their hand in the offering symbolically every

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Sunday. They gave nothing, but that's ok because it's not about the giving half as much as being noticed giving.

So, if God noticed Moses. Should we notice people? I suppose we do. I judge people by their actions or what they wear. I notice good food and bad teeth. My wife notices drivers. We are all always looking at something. Yet, are we so busy looking that we fail to notice the right things? Believe it or not but preaching is a three-point process. It's meant to make you notice. Is it forced just to make three points? How often has the message wandered just enough to make application? I said to a pastor that the single people were grumbling that the message was not resonating with them. He questioned if the Sermon was biblical. I said yes. He replied "then you need to take the message home and study it until you notice God in it, not the plight of single people." We were so busy trying to find ourselves in the sermon that we missed God in it.

I chose to mention a few things we do in church for a reason. We notice others in church. We see their actions. God does notice that we pass by the poor and the lost. I know a man who believes in looking for a certain type of lost. He believes that only some people are predestined by God for saving. This man calls them the saved lost. It's our job to spread the gospel to wake them up. To bring them into the light. It's the "Where's Waldo" God style. No matter the reason or mission we were made to notice.

Just one more "notice" story. In John 4 Jesus is sitting at Jacobs well. Jesus notices a woman drawing water. He calls her. She notices he is a Jew. Jesus in turn notices that she has had five husbands. This woman says to Jesus "*I can see that you are a prophet.*" She is noticing Jesus now. In the meantime, the disciples come back with food for dinner. They notice Jesus talking to an unpopular Samaritan woman.

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Honestly, they see Jesus far more than the woman. They are stunned he is talking to her. Jesus and the disciples then get into a discussion about food. They are so consumed with food, Jesus, and what they are supposed to do that they missed an opportunity to see. I think Jesus was at a crossroads of sorts there. He could tell that the Jewish men around him could not see past themselves. The world was on one side and religion and ministry was on the other. Honestly, how was he going to bring the two together? The burning bush (a Samaritan woman) was staring them square in the face, yet they were blind and starving.

With that said, sometimes we notice and other times were blind. Why is that? It's why I want to introduce a second word found in the Bible: *consumed*. Oh, we are consumed all right. Ministry is always looking for the next big thing God is doing. I went to a conference once featuring a man with a very popular book. My Pastor said he was the hottest thing right now. He was amazed that this man would even come here from Australia to speak. This pastor was so consumed with the book that he bought several dozen. He preached on the book instead of the other book for weeks. Here is what's interesting.

The Pastor gave away these books. He wanted everyone to read it. The trouble was that this book was thrilling to a theologian. To the common person it was drier than toast. Not much tastier than holy ground. He was frustrated that the people would not read the book. He even took a bunch of us (for free) to hear this man speak. Yet, a few months later I noticed all these books in the discard pile. I asked why. The pastor said that the man is frowned upon now for his faulty teaching. Translated into English. Oh, they had moved on. He was not the hot thing anymore. Furthermore, it didn't entertain his congregation.

So focused. So sure. Yet, was he blind to bad teaching? I'm not even sold on that. It's more likely that the book was good and bland all at the same time. It was a pastor's book but not



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an entertaining book. By the way, what was the theme of the book. The church was not preaching the Bible like they should. Ah, putting other writings ahead of the real word of God. Who knew? Yet, through this whole process we were so distracted and consumed. Are we thinking about the poor or the lost? I feel sometimes that ministry and Christianity is a huge drain swirling down. Trying as hard as it can to drown us in the middle. Where is the real work of God going on? On the fringes of the drain.

In the meantime, where are the lost? Those outside of God's church. When was the last time a church really went after the lost? I was outside the Christian world. To be fair, I was a kid. What do I remember? At least three times I can say that I went to church as a kid. I don't believe that I was offered the gospel one single time. I'm not sure that is true. Yet, I can remember the games and singing so well. The Bible messages?

I knew a boy that was interested in God. He was willing. Hmm... Maybe he was predestined? We invited him to a youth night with my son. Later, I got a call from my kid crying. What? A pastor and youth teacher had pinned my boy and his friend in a corner. They were told "believe in Jesus or you're going to hell." I can tell you that I like the direct approach in life. Yet, I'm not so sure that was the best way for the boys to make friends with Jesus. My kid's friend lives whole heartedly in the gay world now. He wants nothing to do with the church. Why? The gay community noticed him and is consumed with knowing him.

The church however, wanted him to know Jesus more than they wanted to know him. That is a bigtime church problem. Well get into that later. Surely, those two leaders should have noticed it wasn't working. Yet, they were so consumed with the message that they forgot who they were talking to: kids. Impressionable kids.

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You know that pastor who was promoting a book has a problem. He is still consumed with the next big thing. They changed the name of the church. He is calling it an exciting new direction. He used church funds to pay for a few of us to attend conferences. He paid with church funds to buy dozens of those expensive books. Yet, the Bibles he gives away are dirt cheap. It says a lot. Christian ministry is consumed with all the wrong things. Do you need to change your name or your attitude? How much of the church funds were used to send the church in a new and exciting direction?

What is consumed Christianity? I was in a meeting for three hours talking about a name for a ministry. Consumed? Spending all your time looking for the predestined and ignoring the lost. Consumed? Consumed with budgets and not with where God is working. Do you know they are not tied together: money and God's work? People believe that where the money is, God's blessing is. Oh, really. So, Jesus sending out the twelve without money is what? Looking for the lost or looking for the flow of money?

We get so wrapped up in the process, so consumed. Jesus asked his disciples to notice people. He then asked them to give freely whatever they had. It's never implied that those who gave money would be the ones who would receive. You miss the mark if you believe that. Jesus wanted them to notice people. To see the sick and to notice the poor. Jesus gave them power to heal and do miracles. To wow them with miraculous signs? No, it was to further the kingdom plan. He sent them to the Jews only: why? Jesus was strengthening the backbone of the new church movement. The Jews knew of God. The gentiles not so much. Jesus wanted the Jews to notice the world around them possibly for the first time. To be a burning bush!

God knows what he is doing. Jesus had a plan. Jesus notices Zachariah. He noticed Thomas. He noticed Peter sinking. In each case he held out a hand of friendship. We are so

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consumed by tithing, price, and worth. Jesus cares nothing of these things. Friendship, kingdom, and love are all that Jesus cares about. It costs nothing to give a kind word; to bless a soul, or invite people into the kingdom of God. Yet, we are consumed with the program, ministry letterhead, and the five verses that fit the church image. So, consumed!

God heard the Israelites. He noticed their cries. The real story in that section of the Bible is that Israel did not notice God until they needed him. They were so consumed with life. How do I know. Well, if you flip ahead to Exodus 16, we have the Israelites on the other side of the sea. God had beaten Pharaoh. Yet, the questions were: where is the water, food, and lush lands? They were in the desert. I traveled in Egypt on a train to Abu Simbel. During the trip I could see the robust Nile on one side. The other side was barren desert. It was a pretty surreal sight. I saw what the Israelites saw. Lush Egypt and barren desert.

God hears the Israelites grumble against him right after he saved their donkey. They mention the food they lost. The comfort they lost. You see people want God to play ball their way. We are so consumed with getting what we miss rather than what God gave. He heard their cries. He rescued them from slavery. Conquered Pharaoh in plain sight. That's not including seeing a massive pillar of fire and smoke. Hello! They grumbled? Consumed?

It's how we roll. We do notice the lost. God can save them. Yet, what can I do for them really? I'm just the saved and forgiven. It's the elephant in the room. What about those outside the church? Should we be consumed with preaching and making music to attract them? Should ministry be fun so that more will join? We are so consumed with making church better than it needs to be. If we were honest, we have made church to look more like a resort than a Bible school. The Lost are not flocking to church to check out our fancy props. Maybe we need a new (or old) way?

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When I was part of the lost, someone took a chance on me. They thought of me by deciding to be my friend. We were friends regardless that I was not in their Christian world. I am positive several of those people prayed for me before I was a Christian. I know they did. I'm sure some prayed I'd go to hell too. I noticed a sign seven years before I became a Christian at a baseball game. It was a John 3:16 sign. A Gideon gave me a Bible as a kid. All these incidences (seeds) drew me closer. I'm going to say that God was slowly drawing me in. Was I predestined to be saved? Yet, someone cared enough to try. Hoping I would notice.

Those people were consumed with bringing me into the kingdom. Some others are more consumed with other things like predestination. There was a guy I knew who believes in predestination. He heard me preach on sin one Sunday. I may have mentioned while preaching that we will fight sin our whole life. I believe it. Yet, he believed that at some point we can overcome sin. He also believed that only the true predestined could beat sin. At a coffee shop one day he bid me farewell, closed his Bible, and left our friendship. I sat there stunned. I guess I am not predestined. Yet, I'm sure God had noticed me. Once we are consumed with the mission even friendship does not matter.

You know that man was so consumed with finding like-minded people that he missed what God was doing in me. He could have stayed. Worked on me. Nope, he did not notice the signs that God was here working on me. The problem is the human mind. We just believe that were better at some things. I know people are depressed directly because were not as good at some things than others. It's the conflict we wrestle with all the time.

I am doing a study of Martin Luther's 95 Theses. Number 4 says "The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven." Let that roll around in your heart for a while. Pride kills us. Wrong

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expectations, depression, and shame kills us. How can we get into heaven if all we notice and are consumed with is ourselves? That is why only looking for the predestined is so wrong. That is why only ministering to the saved is so wrong. The lost and poor will make us uncomfortable. Yet, that's God's real mission field. Yes, even holding a sign at a ball game. Martin Luther knew that it's not about us but about him. Who is "him"? Jesus. Who was Jesus consumed with? People!

Colossians 1:16 just might be the greatest verse *"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."*

Here we are, more consumed with how we look at church. We sit down and plan out how we will talk in public. What is appropriate or not. Yet, the real "you" is missing in the process. We tell people that Jesus wants a personal relationship with them. You should give honest and real prayers from the heart. Yet, we notice the words we would normally say. We are consumed with correcting ourselves to look more like God. It's how we roll trying so hard to look holy in the eyes of others.

Why do the lost mention how Christians talk to others? That's an interesting conversation. The lost are different than Christians. Do you know that? They think different. When they talk it comes out a different way? Their way. Why are we surprised some times? They are who they are. In university, I was told to be careful about how I talk. I'm representing Christ. Also, they asked me to be mindful of what they call christianese. Using Bible language, the lost can't understand. Do you really think God uses "thou art my beloved" when he talks to us? Maybe, we should speak Lostanese to those who are not Christian. How novel to use language they could understand?

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To be blunt (forgive me) but it's the only way. "Fuck" is "lost" speak. Christians say frig. It's shoot vs shit. Gosh darn vs Jesus Christ. I could go on by you get the point. Christians are consumed with being holy in public. Just consumed. I had a pastor tell me that Christians should have two lives. The one in public and the one in private. Did Jesus? Of course, I will use the "what would Jesus do" line. Yet, it's true isn't it. Matthew 11:19 if you forgot where it is.

*'The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.'*

People will notice the church stealing. Buying a jet plane. They will also notice you are not feeding the poor in low-cost government housing. They notice the church open on holidays. They notice the pastor arrests. The abused boys and girls. If you ask for money all the time people will notice. Trust me, if preachers tell you about hell more than love they will notice.

Be smart about life. Drive a good car but not a jaguar. Do you really want to be noticed for the things you owned when Jesus said take nothing? I know it's not that simple but as the body of Christ, what are you noticed for? I had a pastor give a speech on why he was leaving. He said it was Gods calling to go. In private the whole congregation knew he had quit. People notice.

Congruently, what consumes you? I knew a fellow who believed in the commentary within his Bible. He was consumed with quoting it far more than scripture. I asked him if it was the word of God. He was convinced it was. A pastor is consumed with reading his Bible but has no time for people. I thought a pastor is a shepherd of people? People will notice what consumes you. They noticed him leaving the pulpit and locking himself inside his office after the service too.

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What I wish for is to take a step back. We don't need to defend the modern church. We don't need to throw out the traditions of old church. Everything has its place in God's plan. Current worship through the likes of Hillsong is amazingly Godly. The hymns remind us of where we started. The creeds work. Home church works. The mega church has its place. Do any of these things consume you to the point of missing the work of Christ? Do you really notice the lost and needy? Are you so consumed within ministry to really notice anything at all?

I love listening to J Vernon McGee on the radio. His 40-year ministry is a benefit to my Christian life. Yet, in his words, there is some amount of sadness. Sermons he wouldn't dare preach. Congregations he would have rather killed. I can hear the sadness and frustration. Now he says something outside the ministry? It's too late now for the most part. All that he noticed and all that consumed his time (in the church) tore him up inside. He has said often that now, outside of the pastorate, he is living the Christian life. That means something.

I heard the story of a snow storm. In Calgary Alberta we really don't notice snow. It's common. One winter day, a pastor was sitting in his office bored. His window faced the bus stop. On that day, was a terrible storm and the people were waiting and freezing. Who knows how many other storms had passed him by? Yet, on this day he noticed people outside the church. He put together hot chocolate and went outside to serve them.

I wonder about the impact he made that day? Was the greatest impact on the people or himself? I bet it was the best day ever. Meeting people that may be lost or not. It did not matter because they shared a common concern, the cold. It was cold outside. I wonder if someone was standing there wondering why it was cold inside the church. I bet someone was amazed why we'd rather freeze outside than seek shelter in the warm church 10 feet away? All we have to do is quit being consumed and start noticing.

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I have some suggestions on what could make Christianity better. They are not tweaks to Gods word. They are tweaks to Gods people. We should notice things more often than we do. We could be more consumed with the lost than the sheep. Jesus was. I feel though, that before we can go there, we need to know something. I come from the outside in. I know the lost. It's not fair to yank the chain of those who have never lived on that side. Yet, you need to see the lost from their perspective. I'd rather have them notice us because were consumed with knowing them. Let's talk lostanese for a minute in the next chapter.