

Seeking God

"...for millions of Christians, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle."

Those words, spoken by A.W. Tozer, still ring true years after they were spoken. How many truly saved Christians still have the sad experience of a Christian life where God is simply a set of truths, a concept, or at best – a distant acquaintance?

Is God real to you? Is God a reality to you – so real that the truth of who He is affects you all the time? Or is God a concept in your mind, a truth, a set of facts you believe?

Some, who inwardly know they have no true experience of God, resort to faking their experience of God. They experience the same dull, lifeless religion that others do; they simply take the approach that since the emotions are sagging, they need to artificially pep them up. So they try to use music, songs, lively worship and a crowd atmosphere, to create the emotions they want.

Other people begin to read their lifeless experience of God back into the Scriptures. They begin to regard any talk of experiencing God as a move toward emotionalism, and they back away. They are content to chew on the dry-bone facts about a God they truly do not experience in any meaningful way. They become like people reading travel books about foreign destinations. They can become quite knowledgeable about certain places – but they never go there for themselves.

Truly experiencing God – it certainly is not a foreign idea to the writers of Scripture. They speak of hearing God, seeing God; they even speak of Messiah's garments smelling of myrrh, aloes and cassia.

The Psalmist tells us to taste and see that the Lord is good. They do not mean physically see or hear or taste or touch, but clearly enough, they use the illustration of physical senses that can apprehend the physical world to teach that God has equipped us in our souls to be able to apprehend the spiritual. God, being a Spirit, must be worshipped in Spirit and in truth.

The difference between a Christian life that is far from God, and one that experiences Him, is very much summed up in the phrase, 'seek God.' Many Christians are serving God, but not *seeking* God. Many Christians are talking about God, but not *seeking* God. Some are even reading about God, and sometimes thinking about God – but not *seeking* God.

The one who seeks God in the way God appoints, finds God. And the one who finds God, experiences God. A.W. Tozer wrote a whole book about seeking God. He called it *The Pursuit of God*. In it, he wrote:

"I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain."

Tozer was saying the key to getting out of a lukewarm state is to deliberately, purposefully, seek God. Not programmes, not religious activity, not theology, not Christian fellowship – but God Himself. So much of the Christian life can be simplified into the phrase – 'seek God.'

The Bible is filled with references to seeking God – so many that we cannot look them all up. But the Bible is clear that seeking God is to be the lifelong activity, the continual posture, of a believer. So what does it mean to seek God? How do we seek God? Does God want us to seek Him? If we seek Him, will we always find Him? What will it mean to find God?

God commands us to seek Him

In **Acts 17:27** we read, “so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us...” Here, Paul preaching to an unsaved audience says that God willed that all men should seek Him, in the hope of finding Him. Furthermore, He is not far from every one of us.

And in **Matthew 7:7-8** Scripture says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” Here, in the context of prayer, Jesus commands us to seek. He says that finding is conditional upon seeking. Until you seek God, you will not find Him. And God commands us to seek Him.

We might ask, ‘Why doesn’t God just reveal Himself to us? Why must we seek Him out?’ The answer is not given to us clearly, but part of the reason is that God is a treasure. Everything else of value in life we seek after, we work for, we search for, we enquire after. Why should the most valuable One of all be the One we do not need to seek after?

‘that He can be Found’

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever.

1 Chronicles 28:9

Here David, with a lifetime of experience, assures his son that if he seeks God, he will find Him. It is not like looking for gold in a river: ‘maybe I’ll find, maybe I won’t.’ This is given as a certainty – seek Him, and you will. Similarly, God promised answer to prayer and deliverance if His people sought His face:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14

What it is to seek God

Look with the intention of finding. Seeking is whatever you do to find the thing you desire or need. When it comes to the Lord, seeking is any act or attitude of the heart that says, ‘I want God! I need God!’

- It can be reading, studying, meditating or listening to the Word of God. There we are looking for a Person. We are wanting to find God and His character, His will, and His purposes in the Word.
- It can be praying. When you and I pray, we are seeking the face of God to ask for grace, thank Him for grace received, and praise Him.

- It can be depending on Him to enable you to do something, or to provide something, or to deliver you. When you depend on God – you seek His power and His ability to work on your behalf.
- It can be trusting Him to guide you, to work things out, to give you wisdom, to cause your obedience to bring about a better situation. When you trust God, you seek His will for your life, by placing yourself in His hand.
- It can be submitting to His commands by obeying the Word. When you obey God, you seek to please Him, and you seek His will over your own.
- It can be confessing your sin to Him. When you and I confess, we seek His pardon and His fellowship with us.
- It can be waiting on Him. Waiting on God to answer a prayer, to change a situation, or to bring about deliverance – this is seeking God.
- It can be hoping in Him. Placing your assurance for the future on God, trusting His promises – this is seeking God.

As we do these things, we are expressing a desire for God. We are saying, 'God, I want to see you. Reveal yourself – show me yourself, help me, deliver me, teach me, guide me, enable me.' But what reading, praying, depending, trusting, submitting, confessing, waiting, and hoping all have in common is that they are acts of seeking, looking, searching. It is love in a 'not-yet' stage.

But then, if the promises of the Word are true, we find. And what does it look like when we find God?

- In the Word of God – illumination.
- In prayer – answers and fellowship.
- In depending – empowerment.
- In trusting – God works the situation out.
- In submitting, God reveals Himself to you in your very character, and often shows you the sweet fruit of righteousness.
- In waiting on Him, He answers at the perfect time.

And when we find – what do we experience? Joy over seeing God! Adoration and praise for who He is, love for who He is. Delight in His character. Awe and amazement at who He is. Gratitude for grace given. Contentment in His will for us. A resting in Him.

Now the Christian who is viewing his or her Christian life as an act of continual seeking of God will be different from the Christian not doing that in this sense: they will be looking to find. And as such, God is pleased to reward them.

Consequently, their Christian lives are marked by joy, gladness, awe, contentment and praise. Why? Because they have made it their goal to seek God – everything relates to that. The Christian who doesn't do that is not seeking God, and therefore not finding God, and therefore usually in a cold spiritual state.

How to seek God

1. Respond to His seeking

There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Romans 3:11

"No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 6:44

The Bible tells us that no one naturally seeks after God. God must first seek man. So our starting point is this: when God calls us to seek Him, we must *respond* – that is, as God prompts you to read, to pray, to depend, to trust, to submit, to wait, to hope – do not delay. Grab that opportunity as one by which you shall find more of God. Be sure to listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He urges you and I to seek God.

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

Psalms 27:8

2. Avoid procrastination

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.

Hosea 10:12

O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

Psalms 63:1

I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me.

Proverbs 8:17

Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near.

Isaiah 55:6

I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.

Song of Solomon 5:2-7

I believe the Bible is teaching that procrastination when it comes to seeking God causes the Spirit to withdraw and for us to miss opportunities of finding God. This is very important. Seeking God is at His invitation. It is not that we can repeatedly put God off, and then only pop in when we like.

When God knocks, that is the time. It is not on our time. And if we procrastinate, we may well find that though we are seeking later on, we are battling what seems like silence from heaven. God is sought when He seeks us. That doesn't mean we cannot fellowship with Him at all times. Certainly we can, but we must seek Him when He knocks.

3. Prepare the heart

In **2 Chronicles 12:14**, King Rehoboam's approach as he reigned over Israel serves as a warning to us:
"And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD."

4. Seek deliberately

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

2 Chronicles 20:3

And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers.

2 Chronicles 11:16

Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God.

2 Chronicles 19:3

These verses carry the idea of a very purposeful attitude towards seeking God. See, a chance meeting with someone does not make them feel prized, because you did not deliberately seek them out. So God is not going to be found of those who carry on certain religious rituals hoping to 'bump into God' along the way.

Instead, we have to be very deliberate about this: 'I am praying because I want to seek God. I am reading because I want to see God. I am trusting, depending, waiting, hoping, because I want to find and enjoy and love and praise and experience God Himself.'

5. Seek wholeheartedly

But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

Deuteronomy 4:29

If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 2:4-5

With my whole heart have I sought Thee: O let me not wander from Thy commandments.

Psalms 119:10

Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart.

Psalms 119:2

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple.

Psalms 27:4

And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

Whatever the action of seeking God, it is to involve all of us. When you consider the effort that men put into their searches for other things – glory, fame, prestige, social standing, money – why should God be found by the half-hearted, the last, the indifferent? The prize of God is given to those who seek wholeheartedly. And even here God offers grace when we pray, ‘Incline my heart. Open my heart, unite my heart, enlarge my heart.’

6. Seek continually

As **1 Chronicles 16:11** put it, ‘Seek the LORD and His strength, seek His face continually.’ And once we find God, we must go on seeking. The hymn *Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts*, says:

*We taste Thee, O Thou Living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still:
We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.*

Rewards for seeking God

The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.

Psalms 34:10

Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things.

Proverbs 28:5

The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

Lamentations 3:25

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Matthew 7:7-8

The greatest reward is of course finding God Himself. It is what we call ‘revival.’ We enter into a closer walk, a delightful fellowship.

I love gazing up at the stars at night. But unfortunately living in the city means you see very few stars at night. They are but a handful to the city star-gazer. When we go out from the city to the more secluded places – one of the first things we remark on at night is how many stars there are.

Here’s the thing – the number of stars remains constant, doesn’t it? Indeed, the amount of light emitted by those stars remains pretty constant. But one man in one location sees thousands, another man sees less than fifty. The problem is not with the stars. The problem is here on earth with the individuals’ different locations.

Well, here is the parallel: God’s glory, and knowing God, is much like the stars. It does not change. God’s glory has not diminished one bit over the years. Yet we find one man in one place for whom the glory of God is like that huge array of stars, and we find another man who can barely pick out two or three.

Some people are, spiritually speaking, like city-dwellers and the stars. The relationship is hazy. God is so far away as to seem like a distant, long-lost relative. Yes, another man seems to glow with His experience of God. Like the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, God is so real to him that he can hardly stop telling you about it.

Now here's the thing. Just like the stars, the problem is not up above, but here on earth. The same light is available to be seen. But one man does not seek God at all, and dulls his own view of God. Another seeks God, and His view of God seems to grow brighter all the time. The difference is in the seeking. So seek God – while He may be found.