

Seeking God

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Those of us who are older could probably look back over our lives and think of different conferences, conventions, and meetings, and assemblies we've attended. 4H conventions, cattle feeders conventions, sales conventions - and what is that compared to this? The meetings of God. I heard that they've got an Airstream trailer convention.

And then to make it more special, they narrowed it down to Airstream trailer owners whose first name was Bob. And what is that compared to this? And that's their koinonia, that's their point in common. That's their point of fellowship. We have to do with the living God. Shall we pray?

Lord, we are gathered to You in Your name. We're here. No other reason. No other purpose. We are here because of You. We are here for You. We look forward to a day, Lord, when all the saints from everywhere - tribe, tongue, people, and nation shall be gathered around Your throne. But for now, Lord, we are here in the ends of the ages. We're here at the end of this meeting, this conference. And we've heard so much. We desire You, Lord. We're praying, Lord, that You'd work in us more and more to will and to do of Your good pleasure. You'd call us on, You'd bring us on. Plant our feet on higher ground. You'd break every snare. You'd break every chain. You'd set our spirits free to worship You more purely, perfectly, joyfully. We'd walk this world in white, Lord, that we might find then the fulfillment of that word joyfully in the presence of Your glory. We ask for Your blessing, amen.

Please turn to Colossians 3. Mike Durham and I were talking before in the break here and we both agreed there's so much more could be said. But we both agree there's probably not much more that could be heard. If I set aside all my notes, that would take care of that a little better.

The assignment is seeking God, and that particularly in prayer. The pursuit of God in prayer. When you think about the pursuit of God, what verses come to your mind? What Bible texts come to your mind? Mack, what comes to your mind?

Mack: Seek the Lord, seek His face, seek His strength.

Bob: Psalm 105. What else? Ed Williams, what comes to your mind?

Ed: Delight yourself in the Lord.

Bob: Delight yourself in the Lord. Psalm 37. What else? Mason, what do you think of?

Mason: As the deer pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants after You.

Bob: Psalm 42, "As the deer pants..." Yes. What else? Matthew 6, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." What else? John?

John: Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near.

Bob: Isaiah 55. Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. What else? (unintelligible) Very good. "Set your affection on things above." I wonder if this Colossians 3 gave you a hint. Yes.

It's in the Bible everywhere, isn't it, and understandably. Like Paul said, with all that we've heard, this is the logical, the reasonable conclusion, that we ought to seek this great God that is there; that we ought to pursue Him with all of our heart, no strings attached. Absolute unconditional surrender to the King of kings. All of our affections cast upon Him, invested in Him. This is the Bible from beginning to end.

Psalm 24, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place? This is the generation of those who seek Your face, O God."

Psalm 27, "When You said to me, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to You, 'Your face, O Lord, I will seek.'"

Psalm 40, "Let all those who seek Thee, rejoice and be glad in Thee."

Psalm 119, "How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart."

And then the New Testament. Some have been quoted already.

Matthew 5, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Matthew 6, "Seek first the kingdom."

Matthew 7, "Seek and you will find."

Luke 16, "The kingdom of heaven is being proclaimed and every man is pressing his way into it." Forcing his way into it. Forcing his way in.

Hebrews 11:6 - don't you love that verse? I've loved it from the early days. Those who come to God must believe what? Two things. That He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And we ought to be thinking as we're listening to this: Am I one of those? A rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

James 4:8, "Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you." Wonderful, wonderful verse! Don't you cherish that? You put your finger on it, your heart on it, and say I'll take that! I want that! I believe that. Lord, You said if I draw near to You, You'll draw near to me. Thank You, Heavenly

Father, for these exceedingly great and precious promises that by them we might be partakers of His divine nature.

The Bible is filled with it. It ends in the end, Revelation 22, "Come." If you're thirsty, come. Press in, come on, pursue the living God - the God who is there, with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. The pursuit of God. What are we talking about? The living God.

Sinful man making his way into the Kingdom of God, into the presence of God? What are we talking about? That we children of hell would in His image shine? That we end up in Heaven instead of hell? That we've been destined for glory and not for wrath? Incredible! Marvelous! Matchless, infinite grace! What a privilege that we should be invited, called, commanded to seek God!

And this is the heartbeat of so many of our hymns, right? Arise, my soul, arise. Shake off these guilty fears. Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee, Lord. My spirit pants for Thee, O living God. Nearer, still nearer, close to Your side. Draw me, my Savior. And my goal is God Himself, not joy or peace, not blessing. I've had somebody send that to me handwritten on a piece of paper. And I've had it hanging on my wall till it's almost faded and I can't hardly read it. But I want it hanging on my heart.

God is so worthy as we've heard, and it is the crime of all men's crimes to not seek God diligently with all his heart. Sometimes we go out for some evangelism and we carry a sign with us: "God puts people in hell for neglect of Him." The most opposition we've got for it is from the religious folks. But that is the crime of all men's crimes - to neglect God. Somebody finally stole it. I guess they got tired of that.

God is worthy. He wants to be wanted. He wants to be wanted. He deserves to be wanted. And yet, think of it, man has fallen so low that it says no one seeks for God - no, not one.

Our dog back home, he's been running off. It is very disgusting. But he comes back! But here, man is worse than that dog. He won't come back to God. If anybody does find God as Romans 10:20, "I was found of those who sought Me not." Marvelous grace that called us, drew us, won us.

For 22 years of my life, I didn't seek the Lord. I did not pray to God. I spent those years in vanity and pride, caring not, knowing not, wasting the years. The masses of humanity have been born and they live and they die never knowing where they come, why they're here, or where they're going. Never knowing, never caring, never seeking God their Maker. I was so neglectful of God. I knew nothing. I never thought of God or Heaven or hell or anything. My chief delight in going to church was the foolishness up the choir loft. When we went to the family reunions, some religious relatives that I had, they would pray before the meal, but we didn't do that in our family. And I always hoped: don't call on me to pray. I had absolutely no idea of how to pray.

I went off to college and majored in more foolishness. And then, about one month - well, the winter before I graduated, I began to get sick of sin and sick of sinful friends which are no friends at all. I began to wonder about what is the real purpose of life. And it was at that time, a month before college graduation in 1971, my brother was coming down to visit me from another college. He was a year behind me in school. And I had dates lined up for him. And he got down

there and he said, no thanks, Bob, I'm not into that anymore. He said I've found the Lord. And I couldn't believe what he was saying. We'd never used the Lord's name but in vain. There was a different spirit about him entirely. I could see that he was dead serious. And he left some literature with me. And that night, I read those Gospel tracts. And for the first time in my life, I got down on my knees and tried to pray. I realized that I was a sinner in trouble with God and I needed a Savior, and asked the Lord to forgive me and come into my heart. And that night, the walls in that old fraternity house heard different words. I found the Lord.

Inherent in man is a need for achievement and progress and purpose, right? You know, it doesn't matter whether it's a better golf game, or drinking more cans of beer at one time, or making money, or even suicide is an attempt at progress, purpose, achievement, statement.

Oh, Augustine was right. Lord, You've made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till we rest in You. One man said even a man who's knocking on the harlot's door is looking for God. Conrad Murrell put it this way. He said even a little kid going through the pots and pans under the kitchen sink, he's looking for light. He's looking for God.

I read this about Bertrand Russell, the famous atheist. It's pitiful. "In the center of me is always and eternally a terrible pain, a curious, wild pain, a searching for something beyond what the world contains; something transfigured and infinite, the beatific vision - God. I do not find it. I do not think it is to be found. But the love of it is my love. It's like a passion - a passionate love for a ghost." That atheist knew down deep in an honest moment that he needed God. There's something got to be out there. As far as we know, the man perished in his sins. Creation is groaning until all the world is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. And wonder of wonders that sinful man can seek and find the Lord.

Let's read this text. Colossians 3:1-4. "Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking..." Keep seeking. If you've been raised up, "keep seeking the things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above and not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Here we have stated the foundation of how a man can make contact with God; how a man can get in with God. It says if you've been raised up with Christ - that is, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ - you'll open the book of Acts, and the apostolic preaching, and you find all through the book of Acts mentioned even more than the death of Christ is what? The resurrection of Christ. From Peter at Pentecost to Paul with Felix, it was Jesus and the resurrection. With great power, the apostles were giving witness to Jesus and the resurrection. Why? They were saying that the Son of God became the Son of Man. He came down here and died substitutionarily. He took our sins upon Himself, paid that sin debt, satisfied divine justice and rose again and entered into the presence of God. He opened up a way into the presence of God and set up a throne of grace whereby we may then seek Him and get in. Drawing near through the blood of Christ. That is what they were saying.

There's another assumption here: "If you've been raised up with Christ..." If you have been. A condition or an assumption. He'd been talking about being dead in sin and then now being made alive in Him, raised up with Christ. And so, we then, if we are Christians, we have been made partaker of that same resurrection power. Our lives, then, are a product of a miracle. And we are seated with Him in heavenly places. We are really strangers here upon the earth - a

little colony of heaven here upon the earth. This is not really where we belong. Our life is really a reality up there in Heaven. So it's only consistent for us to be not earthly-minded, but heavenly-minded and to seek the things above where Christ is.

Then we come to these words: "Keep seeking." If you have been, I mean, the Christian life started out seeking God, right? That's where it started, so if you have begun to seek God, then He says you keep on seeking God. Keep right on. It's a mystery, isn't it? Here we have sought God, we have found God, and yet, we're still seeking God. It's a mystery. It's a paradox that we are totally at rest. The job is done. Our sins are forgiven. We're in. Free. And yet, we're dissatisfied too. We're not resting. We're pursuing, we're working, we're pressing, we're laboring on. It's a paradox, and yet like Tozer said, it's no mystery to the children of the burning heart.

Moses had seen great visions of God, right? And yet, we find him saying, "Lord, show me your glory." Paul had seen great revelations of God, and yet we find him saying, "I press on." Again, I press on. Again, I press on "that I may win Him." That I may apprehend that for which I've been apprehended. He was seeking God. He was still seeking God all the way to the end. He was on the stretch. He wasn't going to quit. He was going to go all the way until he was there.

This pursuit of God, it just makes everything else look so small, doesn't it? I mean, so what if I climbed to the peak of Mount Everest. It just does not compare. It's almost like it's hardly worth talking about. That's the way I feel in my heart. If I told another man of God I climbed Mount Everest, he might say a little bit, but behind his face, you know, so what? What is finding the Titanic compared to going deeper with God? What is pursuing the Super Bowl title or the Tour de France compared to pursuing God? Nothing compared.

Pity the non-Christian. What a tragedy it is, "left to breeding spotted mice," as Tozer says. Waxing his lawn mower like John says. Puttering around the house. Watching a television in a nursing home. I used to work in a nursing home and it just tore me up to go in and find the elderly sitting there yet with some clarity in their mind watching the tube instead of picking up the Word of God and seeking the living God. There they are on the brink of eternity? And you're doing that?

Next verse, next phrase. "Keep seeking the things above." Paul, what do you mean? Can you give us a little definition? Yes. "...Where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." Where Christ is seated. So we're to keep seeking God. We're to keep seeking this living God - more of who He is to us and to everyone as Creator, as Protector, as Provider.

A couple years ago, we were having supper, and I just happened to make the comment to Terri and the children, you know. We haven't had any turnips for a long time. It'd be nice just to have some turnips. And do you know the next night, one of the sisters in the church knocked on the door and she had a bag of turnips in her hand. This is God. Our privileges in Him.

A while ago they had a C.H. Spurgeon convention. And a woman stood up and she said, "My name is Susanna Spurgeon. And I'm Charles Spurgeon's great-great-granddaughter. I'm honored to be his great-great-grandchild, but that does not compare with being a child of God." Isn't that wonderful? To have your great-great-grandchildren be able to say that?

To study God, to study His judgments. You children know that there is a place in the Bible where there were some boys that mocked the preacher. And God's sent a bear out to kill

them all. This is the pursuit of God. Just as Michael Durham brought out, God is known by His judgments.

Last Sunday, I was in the food line there at the love feast in the church meeting. And you've got two sides to the table going down the line. And there's a brother a little bit ahead of me on the other side, and I notice, man, you took quite a bit of grapes there. And Terri just after that came up to me and says, "Here, why don't you watch a grandchild? I'll hold your plate." I sat down. She brought my plate over. And I had more grapes on my plate than he did. You know? This was God telling me something.

Before we left to come out here, I told Terri and the children I'll be back at 11. We'll take off at 11 o'clock. I got back a little bit late. Two things weren't done yet and I got a little bit edgy with Terri and the children, you know. You know you cost us some minutes here. And then, through a wrong decision of mine to take a crippled vehicle, we got an hour from home and had to turn around and go back. Through my decision, we lost two and a half hours! So again, the Lord - this is God. This is the pursuit of God, right? Observing, watching His hand, fearing the Lord in everything. Everywhere we can see Him and pursue Him. And listen.

And then it says, "Seeking the things where Christ is at the right hand of God." So we're to pursue Christ at the right hand of God. What does that mean? The right hand of God - is seated there at the right hand of God, right? Where He is seated. You tell a boy to go out and pull weeds, and you come back a little later and you find him in the house sitting down. "What are you doing sitting in here?" "I'm done." We're talking about the finished work of Christ. We're to study, to understand more of that, to apply more the finished work of Christ. He accomplished redemption and took His seat at the right hand of God.

We're to then pursue the Lord Jesus that we have heard of. His eternal Sonship, the divine Person, His humble incarnation, His miraculous birth, His perfect life, His beautiful words, the works of power, His substitutionary death, His powerful resurrection, His effectual intercession, His glorious reign, His fiery coming again, the awful day of judgment and the end of all things, a new Heavens and a new earth which He'll inaugurate. Seeking the things at the right hand of God where Christ is seated.

Seeking the advancement of His kingdom in the souls of men. We know of a sister over there in Kansas City that feels that it is God's will for her to send tracts or to try to send literature to every house in Johnson County. That includes all of Kansas City. She's hand addressing 1500 envelopes every day - I'm sorry, every month.

The things of the Holy Spirit - His regenerating power, various gifts. Not grieving the Spirit of God. The pursuit of God.

Then, there is a determination underlying here. (incomplete thought) "Set your mind on things above. Not on things on the earth." He says set your mind. Set your mind. Has that ever stuck out to you? Set your mind. The mind, the mind, the mind is such a battlefield, isn't it? And it says set your mind. It speaks of a determination. You may have an alarm clock, but it isn't going to do you any good unless you set it. You may have speed and cruise control on your car, but it isn't going to do any good unless you set it. You may have a pulley and a shaft and a powerful motor, but it isn't going to do any good unless you set the set screw. And so it's talking about a settledness. Eliminating options, eliminating alternatives, burning all bridges, set your mind on things above.

You know, there were kings who did not do that. Like Rehoboam, it says he did much evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord. On the other hand, there were kings like Jehoshaphat who were commended again and again because he set his heart to seek the Lord. In other words, not options. We're not dabbling around. We're not toying with it. Maybe, maybe not, we'll just taste, we'll just sample. We'll just be lukewarm. We'll just kind of coast along. No, there's a decision here that is talking about we're setting our heart, setting our mind on seeking the Lord. No strings attached. I'm leaving everything behind. I'm going this way. All eggs in one basket. This one thing I do. Set your mind. These thoughts come in - no, my mind is set. I'm not going to toy with that temptation. My mind is set on things above. James says draw near to God. Cleanse your hands. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. I am resolved to enter the Kingdom.

Then we have an admonition. He says, "not on things that are on the earth." Set your minds on things above (v. 2), not on the things that are on the earth. Things on the earth. Things. It's just got such a hollow ring, doesn't it? Things that are upon the earth. What things? Evil things have got to be turned away from and that's what he's saying down here in v. 5. Immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, idolatry, these lusts and these appetites, you're going to have to put them aside. You're going to have to deny. Then you're going to have to get control of your appetites if you're going to seek God. If you're going to pursue God, those things have got to be subdued. They've got to be mortified.

V. 8, But now put them aside - the anger and the wrath and the malice, and that bad talk - talking behind people's back and things like that. Abusive speech from your mouth - going to have to get control of your mouth if you're going to seek God. You cannot go on and seek God with sin in one hand and the Lord in the other. Evil things must be put away. Not only that, neutral things sometimes need to be put away. Even neutral things. The toys. If you're going to really seek God, you're going to have to put the toys away.

The other day, Ray and I were evangelizing at the state fair. And I looked across the road where he was. I guess it was Ray, unless it was the other brother. And he offered him a tract and they declined, passed on by. And some came by me and I offered them a tract. And this one woman, she declined, and she said, "No thanks, my hands are full." I thought, woman, you said it all too well. There wasn't anything wrong with what she had in her hands. It was neutral stuff. It wasn't a bottle of liquor. But her hands were full.

Evil things, neutral things - sometimes even good things must be laid aside if we're going to seek God, right? Abraham, he had to yield up Isaac to belong to God. Jacob lost his strength to belong to God. Samson lost his life to end up with God. Even sometimes good things must be put away if we're going to go on with God. We must invite the cross to do a deadly work in us if we're going to pursue God.

My goal is God Himself. Not even the good things - not the ministry, not success in the ministry. God has a way, doesn't He, of purifying our motives? He tests the hearts. He puts the fire on. Some of us who are pastors, we know one thing that really takes you right down to the bone of examining your motives - why you're in the ministry - is to have a church split or having some dear ones depart over some displeasure. I mean, you end up asking yourself, what am I even doing here? Why am I here? Why am I giving my life? Why am I standing up here to preach the Word of God? Am I doing it just for results? Am I doing it for attendance? Am I doing

it to build a big church? Why am I investing in other's lives? Is it that I seek the favor of men? Seek to please men? Or am I doing everything I do as unto the Lord period? Then it doesn't hurt - the disappointments.

He gives an explanation next. "For you have died..." In other words, the old sinful self - who you were in Adam - that is gone. And now it's only fitting for you to seek the things above. He says your life is hidden with Christ - it's not obvious to the world. But it's hidden with Christ, and when He's revealed, you'll be revealed with Him in glory.

Let me tell another story. This person was passing by Ray. I thought, there they are headed over to the bandstand to listen to some rock star. They don't care about Ray, whether he's a child of God or whether he's a witness from God. They don't care whether the Kingdom of God's been brought near through this preacher. They don't care about him. But there's going to be a day where they will care. Christ who is your life, when He's revealed, you'll be revealed with Him in glory. So let the world go on. Don't let it bother you. Keep on seeking God with that forward.

I've been asked to speak something about the pursuit of God in prayer. There are so many other aspects of seeking God, right? I mean, reading the Bible, memorizing the Bible, and so on. Really, all of our life is a pursuit of God. But especially prayer is an aspect, a means of seeking the Lord. And you can understand why it says down here a chapter later, v. 2 of chapter 4, "Devote yourselves to prayer." Romans 12:12, "Devote yourselves to prayer." It says in Acts 1, "they were devoting themselves to prayer." Acts 2, "They were devoting themselves to prayer." Acts 6, "We'll give ourselves to prayer." 1 Timothy 2, "First of all, I urge that prayer and thanksgiving be made." The importance of prayer. Seeking God in prayer. Daniel - it says he sought the Lord with prayer and supplication, with fasting, ever sought the Lord. And it says he was entreated by us. David says "I cried to the Lord." "I sought the Lord and He answered me." And so prayer is a great means of pursuing God.

Communion with God. It's contact with God. There's no secondary aspect to it. It's contact with God. Prayer is a distinguishing mark of the Christian church, right? The Lord says "My house shall be called a house of prayer." He didn't say preaching; not a house of eating; not a house of singing; not a house of evangelism. My house shall be called a house of prayer. A distinguishing mark of the true Christian is that he prays. A true church that it is a church of prayer.

For the Christian, it's his natural breath, his native air. But yet there are some things that can be said about pursuing God in prayer, right? I mean, it's a discipline to be learned. When the disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray," the Lord Jesus did not say it will just come natural. I mean, He gave them some things. He gave them some principles.

And so, it is an adventure to pray in the will of God, to discern the will of God. We don't know how to pray as we ought. Abraham prayed, "Let Ishmael live." He missed it. Moses prayed, "Let me go into Canaan." God said don't talk to Me anymore about it. Joshua was praying and God said quit praying. Stand up. Israel has sinned. Samuel kept praying about and grieving about Saul. And God said how long are you going to do that? Paul prayed three times for something that the Lord Jesus wasn't going to do. It's a challenge, isn't it? It's a discipline, this matter of prayer.

I have about five things here. Number 1: as you seek God in prayer, remember, it is a blessing. It is a blessing to be able to communicate with God. I mean, who are the priests? Who are those who can talk with God? It's not the truck drivers. It's not the farmers. It's not the politicians. It's not the technicians. It's not the doctors. It's us right here, redeemed by sovereign saving grace, made unto God kings and priests. We are the ones that can communicate with God. It's a terrible thing. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing to not be able to cast all your cares on the Lord? Wouldn't it be a terrible thing to be cut off with God? Think about how it used to be.

I remember at a family reunion, an uncle of mine had a heart attack right after the meal, and his son took off running down the street to the doctor's house. And he came running back and he said he isn't going to answer. He isn't going to come. How would it be to be again like that with God? No answer. Saul - no answer.

But now we commune with Him as friend with friend. He's made us joyful in the house of prayer. Isn't it wonderful to just be able to spend a little time in communion with God, morning by morning? It's a purchased blessing by the Lord Jesus. If you broke your neighbor's window, you wouldn't be on talking terms until you paid that debt. Now we enter with boldness into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. Not only a blessing to us, brethren, but it's a blessing to God. He wants to hear our voice. He's delighted with our prayer. It says it's like incense - it smells good to God. He invites us to come and commune with Him.

When Paul was saved, the Lord Jesus - you know what He said? Do you remember that? "Behold, he's praying..." Look at that. Just like a parent saying, "Look, my boy's starting to talk." It's your day's greatest work.

And that brings me to the second point. Prayer as you seek God, admittedly, it's going to be some work. Yeah, it's a delight, but it's also a labor. It says in Colossians 4 that Epaphras, he labors diligently, fervently for you in prayer. There's some work there. The effectual fervent hot prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much. The Lord Jesus - see Him sweating in the garden. See Him praying through the night. There's work there. Payton praying grooves in the floor. Brainerd melting the snow drifts.

One time, Terri and I and the children were visiting relatives. And that night was prayer meeting. They were always regular going to prayer meeting and every church meeting. So they invited us to go with them. And do you know what happened? Twenty minutes were spent taking prayer requests and the prayer meeting lasted five minutes. And the words that were prayed were hardly audible. It was just a joke. There was no labor expended. That was no prayer meeting. It accomplished nothing.

This one woman says wherever your ripen fields behold waving to God their sheaves of gold, be sure some corn of wheat has died, some saintly soul been crucified. Someone has suffered and wept and prayed and fought hell's legions undismayed.

Work. And it takes some time, doesn't it, to wait on God? To wait on God, it takes some time. The dew doesn't fall in a moment. You don't recharge your battery in a moment. It takes some time. How would you wives like it if your husband just talked to you hurriedly passing by? One old saint said, "hurried prayer is a curse."

A story is told about J. Wilber Chapman. He wasn't seeing any results in his meeting and he went over to Praying Hyde and he asked him to pray for him. John Hyde turned around and he locked the door. And they got on their knees and for five minutes nothing was said. And then

Praying Hyde uttered two words: "O God." Five more minutes went by. And that man opened up with such a volume of prayer, beautiful words, wonderful words, hot words. Chapman said, "I went away knowing I'd been prayed for." It wasn't a hurried prayer. It takes time.

Persevering work. Praying with all perseverance it says. "Lest by her continual coming, she weary me..." You go to break a piece of concrete with a hammer, sometimes it takes more than one hit. The prophet reproved the king. What? Why didn't you hit the ground five or six times? And you would have had more victory. Don't let up before you've got peace. Don't let up before you're through to God. Persevering work.

The story is told of Morrison in China, Carey in India, Moffit in Africa, Judson in Burma - they all labored seven years before they saw their first convert. Perseverance.

About three years after I was converted, I was 8 months with Keith McLeod in Canada. And he was an itinerant evangelist and he had accepted an invitation to preach, to hold meetings from Sunday through Sunday at some big evangelical Mennonite church. And so we were up there for 8 months. And then we had about three months of that time to pray for those meetings. We prayed every day. We prayed hard every day. We prayed through every day. I mean, those were glorious, glad times of prayer. But it was about three months as I recall that we prayed for those meetings. When those meetings started from Sunday through Sunday, the very first meeting, at the very first meeting the power of God was there. And every meeting there was something like 20 to 40 people that had a meeting with God. Sometimes they came - he never gave an invitation or anything, but they came to the front without any invitation. They sometimes came to the front before the sermon was over. Sometimes they came to the front - it was a terrifying thing. They were screaming under conviction of sin. God was there. I have no doubt in my mind it was in answer to those prayers.

Sometimes it's a desperate work, right? All through the Bible we see this word: they cried to God. The Lord Jesus prayed with strong cries and tears. We wouldn't be surprised that there's some of that involved. We're desperate. We've got to get through to God. Strong cryings and tears. It's not that God is hard of hearing, right? But it's just that sometimes it's only natural to pray that way. There is a cry that a child will make that will bring a parent to his feet. So it is with God.

I think that's why there's a lot of false professions. It says whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. But it's not talking about a casual prayer. It's talking about a desperate prayer. The prayer of a drowning sinner. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Jacob wrestled with the angel. It says in one place, there is no one who calls on the Lord, who stirs himself up to take hold of God. Have you ever seen that in Isaiah 64:7? No one who stirs himself up to take hold of God.

One time when I was in college, I went back to an old high school wrestling meet to watch these two heavyweights wrestle. They were reputed men, big men. So there was challenges and bets being made. And these two beefs were out there pushing one another around. Nothing was happening. And then the other fellow, he clipped our man in the nose and gave him a bloody nose. Our man wiped his face like a gorilla and took hold of that guy and threw him down and pinned him and it was all over. He took hold of that man. I think there's something to be learned in wrestling with God in prayer. There's no one who stirs himself up to

take hold of God. You're just kind of dabbling around, fiddling around, not really praying through, not really getting through, not really crying out.

One time I remember I had these skin irritations. And I had tried this and that and the other ointment and nothing seemed to help. They kept coming back, coming back. Why is this blotch on my hand? Why is it there? What's going on? I got out on the gravel road and was kicking gravel again. I cried out to God from the depths of my heart and I never had those since.

I know of another fellow. He could not get rid of this sin. It was a besetting sin, a shaming sin. He could not get victory over that sin. And he cried to God "either put me in hell or set me free from that sin." He never had trouble with that sin again.

With all that work that I've been talking about - I said, laboring in prayer. I said number one, prayer is a blessing. Number two, prayer can mean work. But number three, with all that work we need some oil, and that's my third point is: seek to pray in the Holy Spirit. It says in Jude 20, "praying in the Holy Spirit." Right? Praying in the Holy Spirit. There is something unusual when God comes on the scene and enables a man to pray effectually.

Reality. Contact with God. Engaged with God. The words come easy. Energized prayer. A sense that God is really hearing your prayer. It says pray in the Holy Spirit. Sure, every Christian's got the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Holy Spirit - how that happens I don't know except these two things, and that is, number one, just try to pour your heart out to God. Not like a squeeze bottle, you know, and a ketchup cap. Not through a little hole. Take the cap off and pour your heart out to God. Pour your heart out in absolute unconditional surrender - everything there on the line. If the fire is going to fall, it will fall on the sacrifice.

And another thing is ask. The Lord Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find..." And then He made an application right after that that we could ask for the Holy Spirit and He would give it to us. Every day, why not ask for the Holy Spirit? Every day, why not ask for a fresh filling?

Number four: As you seek God, seek to pray using the Word of God. It will be ammunition for you. "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you'll ask what you will and it will be done for you." Pray with the Word of God. Seek to be mighty in the Scriptures. Memorize the Scriptures. It's the sword of the Spirit. It will help you to pray. It will help you to pray. It will help you to pray if you are mighty in the Scriptures.

Number five: As you seek God, remember, your prayer must be clean. It says in Psalm 66, if I regard iniquity in my heart, what? The Lord will not hear me. You cannot expect to have an audience with God, to get anywhere with God, to pursue God if you're hiding some sin. If there's some sin fluttering around in your conscience, if you're toying with temptation, if that sin there has still got a hold on you, maybe, maybe not - well, I will repent of it. I'm going to keep it on the back burner anyhow, you cannot, you will not have an audience with God. If I regard iniquity in my heart, no contact.

I was talking with a semi-driver the other day and he said he was going through the Rocky Mountains and the motor went out and the lights went out. All the electricity went out. All that he had going down that hill was one tank of air for the brakes. And he got it stopped and they towed it in and they found what? They found one little wire that had shorted out. One.

Saul - God wouldn't hear him because of sin. God told Jeremiah it doesn't matter, Ezekiel, it doesn't matter if Noah, Daniel, or Job were here to pray, Israel has sinned. I won't hear. You're going to have to come with a clean heart.

Selfish motives: You ask but don't receive because you ask with wrong motives. I remember one time when I was still at Kirksville. There was a fellow who started coming to the meetings. He started coming to the prayer meetings. His wife had just left him for another man. He started coming to the meetings. And eventually it became clear what was going on. Charles said to him, "Ralph, you're just using God like a milk cow for what you can get out of Him." Wrong motives. Can't get anywhere with God that way.

A.W Tozer says "God being Who He is must always be sought for Himself; never as a means towards something else. Whoever seeks God as a means towards a desired end will not find God. The mighty God, the Maker of Heaven and earth will not be won with many treasures, not even the chief treasure. He must be all in all or be nothing. God will not be used."

Relationship problems - you short circuit with your wife, short circuit with God. Unbelief, don't let that man expect to receive anything from the Lord.

And finally, as you seek God in prayer, seek Him in faith. Faith. Believing that God is great. Great enough to deliver me from this sin. Great enough to fix my life. Great enough to bring me on, to move me on, to plant my feet on higher ground. Lord, I am trusting You that there's nothing too difficult for You. You're able to heal my life, fix my life, bring me on, do whatever is needed in my life. I'm throwing, I'm investing, again, everything in You. I'm trusting You to do this for me. Praying in big faith.

We're coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring. His grace and power are such that one can never ask too much. Moses held up the arms of intercession, Israel prevailed. Joshua prayed and the sun stood still. Pastor Hsi of China - he was converted. His wife wasn't converted. She was a hindrance to the work. He fasted and prayed for three days, went into the bedroom and cast the demon out of his wife, and she was a great helper thereafter.

Pray with faith. God is willing. God is able. Trusting the Lord for all these things. Anything! "Call unto Me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." M'Cheyne says, "whatever a man is on his knees before God, that he is and nothing more." E.M. Bounds says, "what the church needs is not new machinery or better methods. What the church needs is men that the Holy Spirit can use..." Men of prayer - men mighty in prayer. The churches have tried just about everything else. Why not pray? Why not cry out to God? Why not be stranded on God? Stranded on omnipotence?

In conclusion, if you're here today, you're in one of two categories. You're either a seeker of God or you're not. If you're not a seeker of God, here's what I know God is telling you to do today, and that is seek the Lord while He may be found. It says in Ezra that he had told the king that the hand of our God is on them for good that seek Him. But His power and wrath are against everyone who forsakes Him, who neglects Him. Power and wrath for not seeking God? You better get in today while the Lord is near, while the Lord is here, while you've got life and breath.

A year ago, I went up to my hometown and I looked up an old farmer friend of my father's. And I told Floyd how I had found the Lord. And he cackled and shoved me off. He said, well, you had a mother that'd do just about anything for you. I'm just telling him about the new

birth and he attributed it to my physical birth. And you know, last February, I attended his funeral. I have every reason to think that that man, he died and went to hell. He didn't seek the Lord. You better seek God right now. You better get in with Him.

Are you afraid of going to hell? Here's the thing to do. It says this poor man cried to the Lord and the Lord delivered him from all his fears. Are you afraid of going to hell? Cry out to God like a poor man. Empty handed, come. Lord, nothing in my hand I bring. I'm coming to You. I'm seeking You. It says if you'll seek Me, you'll find Me if you search for Me with all your heart. The reason you're not finding God though you've been seeking Him a little bit is because you're still holding something back. You'll seek Him and find Him when you search for Him with all your heart. You will find Him that way. The Bible says so.

If you're a believer, if you're one of those who has sought God, then seek Him all the more. Keep seeking. It says in Ephesians 3 that Paul prayed for the Ephesians even though they'd been sealed with the Spirit. He says, "I pray for you that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Yet more, you see? Moses asked for more. Paul asked for more. David asked for more. "I will earnestly seek You." Only a fool would come across a gold mine and wouldn't go back and get the rest of it.

You know, a static position is very dangerous. If the airplane stops making progress, it's coming down. The bike stays up best if it's moving. A static position is very dangerous. You know what it says? As long as Uzzuh sought the Lord, God prospered him. It says an Amaziah - an amazing verse, 2 Chronicles 25, Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of God, yet not with all his heart. Wow! Lord, don't let me have that on my tombstone! Don't let that be my biography! I did right in the sight of God but not with all my heart? Help us! Pitiful!

It's like God can tolerate a hundred errors, but He won't tolerate lukewarmness, halfheartedness, fence straddling. Like one missionary said, somebody's going to get roughed up straddling the fence. I'll spit you out of My mouth. What kind of language! Do you believe the Bible?

It seems like anymore this word "cool" has become popular. Hey, isn't that cool? I'm getting so sick of it. You know, luke-cool is the same category as lukewarm. It's not cold or hot.

But here's Hebrews 11:6. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Do you believe that? That if you take one step toward God, He'll take two toward you? That it's worth it? That you'll be satisfied for doing that? You'll be satisfied for making yourself a living sacrifice? You won't be disappointed? You won't feel like you came up with the short end of the stick? Do you believe that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? Do you believe that if you seek Him you'll find Him?

You know, I was reading the other day about the Gold Rush in 1849 out to California. Thousand and thousands of people went thousands and thousands of miles to get over there to get a little gold. Very few of them found gold. They were seeking for something which they might not find. We are seeking for Him Who we surely will find if we do. What a wonderful thing that we can go with that kind of confidence, with that kind of sure certainty, surety. I am glad it's that way.

It says in Psalm 27, "When You said, 'seek My face,' my heart said, 'Your face will I seek, O Lord.'" Is that your attitude today? A responsive heart? Okay, we'll go with it. We'll go on. I'll seek Your face. A responsive attitude. That's what David had. Day by day, His sweet voice

soundeth. Over all this noise of the world, Jesus saying, "Follow Me." Come Christian, follow Me. Let that be our heart cry, all of us. Dear saints of God, majestic ones, the inheritance of God's glory. Let's go on! I feel like someone just pointing across the ocean. Let's plow in. Tozer says let's go on then in this adventure out of the wilds of sin into the presence of God.