

Seeking God

Favorite Psalms Part 19

Psalm 32:6, Selected Passages

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From the time you woke up this morning until right now, what have you done that could be classified as seeking God? And what have you done that could be construed as earnestly seeking God - with all your heart and all your soul? What does it even mean to seek God? This message is a summary of what Scripture teaches about seeking God.

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Psalm 32:6 Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the flood of mighty waters rise, they shall not reach him. 7 You are my hiding place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah.

Introduction

From the time you woke up this morning until right now, what have you done that could be classified as seeking God? And what have you done that could be construed as earnestly seeking God - with all your heart and all your soul? What does it even mean to seek God? We need to know, because seeking God is so fundamental to what it means to be a believer that it is sometimes used as shorthand to describe all of God's people.

Proverbs 28:5 Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it fully.

The opposite of an evil man is one who seeks the Lord. So it is pretty important that we understand what seeking the Lord means. The reason this came up is because we have been studying Psalm 32, and the crux of that whole psalm is verse 6.

Psalm 32:6 Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found

Whenever we fall into sin our task is to find God again. The sin puts relational distance between us and God, and we must then seek Him until we find Him again. So I would like to wrap up this series on Psalm 32 with a topical message on the concept of seeking God.

The Meaning Of Seeking

Effort To Know

So let's start with the definition - what does it mean to seek God?

Hosea 5:15 ... they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.

And when they did, here is what it looked like:

6:1 Come, let us return to the LORD ... 3 Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD

So seeking God means pressing on to know God. And in this context it is not talking about just gaining information. It is talking about experiential knowledge - knowing something by experience. Knowing *someone*, personally, by experience. That is why it specifies, **they will seek my face**. So seeking God means seeking His face - seeking to have Him look at you in a favorable way, seeking to have Him smile at you. That is what knowing Him means. You have a personal experience of His power, and then you have a personal experience of His kindness, then an experience of His wisdom - various different experiences of what He is like, and through that you get to know Him better. That is why seeking God and knowing God are used interchangeably.

Psalm 9:10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.¹

So seeking God's face means seeking to know Him better through experience. And the goal of the seeking is to satisfy the cravings of the soul.

Effort To Satisfy Thirst For God

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you

The reason he is seeking is to satisfy the thirst of his soul. Do you know what the thirst of the soul is? Any time you find that you are lacking joy, lacking hope, lacking spiritual strength - or you feel a sense of emptiness, or your emotions are numb or your godly desires drop to dangerously low levels (you don't have very strong desires for good things), or you are depressed or discouraged or restless - those are all examples of what Scripture calls the thirst of the soul. Just as your body gets hungry and thirsty physically, so your soul gets hungry thirsty spiritually. There are physical appetites and there are non-physical appetites. And when those non-physical appetites - your appetite for joy or awe or hope or peace - if those appetites go unsatisfied, your soul gets hungry and thirsty. And the only food and drink that will satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul is an experience of God's presence. That is why God so often describes Himself as being like food and drink. So when your soul gets hungry and thirsty, and you make an effort to satisfy that hunger and thirst with an experience of God's presence, that effort is what the Bible means by seeking God.

If you are a child of God, God promises to never leave you or forsake you, which means God's presence is always available to you. Sometimes more available, other times less, but to some degree God is always available to His children, which means there is never a time when joy is impossible. Whenever we lack joy, it is always because we are not taking advantage of something that we could be experiencing. It is always available, but it is not automatic. You have to make an effort to experience God's presence, and that effort is called seeking.

So what does seeking God mean? It means to make an effort to experience the attributes of God in ways that deepen your knowledge of Him and that satisfy your soul's cravings for things like peace and joy and rest and awe and comfort and insight. That is the meaning - what is the method? How is it done? What are the actions you take to actually do it?

The Method Of Seeking

I looked up every reference I could find in Scripture to seeking God, and I found that it is a complex of numerous different attitudes and actions. And the attitudes are just as important as the

¹ See also Ps.14:2.

actions. Seeking is an action of the heart that compels certain actions. If you do the actions without the attitudes, it is not seeking. So it should not come as a surprise to anyone that it all starts with desire.

Desire

Isaiah 26:9 My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.

Yearning and seeking are used interchangeably there, because only powerful yearning can cause true seeking. When a person just goes through the motions, but he doesn't really want to - he cannot wait to be done with his prayer time, cannot wait to be finished reading his chapter in the Bible, he is just sitting there the whole time in church thinking, "When is this going to be over?" – is that seeking God? Is that how relationships work? What do you think your wife would think if you are 10 minutes into having dinner with her and you look at your watch and say, "Oh, when is this date ever going to be over?"? Do you think she is going to say, "Well, the important thing is he did his duty and took me on a date"? I don't think so. I think if you say, "When is this date ever going to be over," her answer is going to be, "Now!" Seeking must be driven by desire and craving and longing.²

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Prayer

So it begins with desire. And what does that desire drive you to do? The most obvious thing is prayer.

Psalm 32:6 Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found

How is God found? Through prayer.

Daniel 9:3 So I turned to the Lord God seeking him in prayer

Jeremiah 29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me

We seek God through prayer. Prayer for what? Prayer for help when we are in trouble.

Psalm 77:1 I cried out to God for help ... 2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord

Psalm 34:4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. ...6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. ... 10 those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

If seeking God is making an effort to experience His attributes, one of His attributes is that He is our protector and rescuer and caretaker. So looking to Him to supply all our needs every day is part of what it means to seek God - especially when it comes to seeking His will.

About 30 or 40 times in Scripture the word "seek" is translated "inquire" of the Lord, referring to seeking guidance - trying to discover what God desires for us to do in a particular situation. We seek God when we are eager to know His way.

Isaiah 58:2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways

Trust

So we seek God through prayer. It glorifies God when we look to Him to supply all our needs, because doing that shows that we rely on Him. And relying on God, depending on God, trusting God is another major aspect of seeking Him. It is the attitude that goes with the action of prayer. Only a

² That is one reason why suffering is a very valuable thing. If you interpret it the right way, all the pain can be interpreted by the soul as thirst for God's presence, and so the greater the pain the greater your desire to find God's presence. And that is also why pleasure is good. If you interpret pleasure the right way it can become a sample or appetizer for what the presence of God is like and that can also increase your appetite for God.

trusting heart can seek God. Whatever it is you look to and depend on for your wellbeing, that is what your heart is seeking.

Hosea 10:12 ... it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you. 13 But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength

They thought of their wellbeing as resting mainly in their own hands, so they were trusting themselves rather than God. In Amos 5 the people needed military help, and so they were tempted to put their trust in the help they might get from Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba.

Amos 5:4 This is what the Lord says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; 5 do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal ... 6 Seek the Lord and live"

Rely on God, not anyone or anything else.

How to Pray

So seeking God starts with desire for God, and that desire drives you to prayer - talking to God about the things you desire. You do not have to use any special words - just say what is on your heart to God. God loves that. And He listens and responds.

And there are different kinds of prayer. There is the ongoing conversation with God all day long - brief interactions throughout the day. And there is also extended prayer - times when you set everything else aside and put your full attention on God for an extended period of time. Both kinds are crucial, so don't neglect extended times of prayer. Put it into your daily schedule. You do not have anything going on in your life more important than prayer.

Go somewhere where you can be alone, take your Bible, several good devotional books, a pad of paper, maybe some worship music, and just go from learning something new about God, to expressing your thoughts to God, to taking delight in God and expressing that in song, then reading something else - the more variety the better. If you would like more detail on how to have a daily time alone with God you may want to listen through that series Basics of the Christian Life. And if you would like a more in-depth study of prayer, you might want to check out the series Jesus' Pattern for Prayer. Both are on the Food For Your Soul website.

Scripture

OK, so far we have desire, prayer, and trust. What else? What else is involved in this activity of seeking God? Well, if the thing we are seeking is to know God - where do we find truth about God? In His Word.

"But I thought you said it was an experiential knowledge?"

It is, but your ability to experience God is limited by your knowledge of what God is like. And the only way to discover what God is like is through Scripture.³

Learn What God is Like

If you want to seek God, there are two things you need to learn from the Bible. First, what God is like. If you don't know the truth about what God is like, so you believe things about God that are not true, you could end up seeking a false concept of God. Most (if not all) of the spiritual problems we have are caused by believing things about God that are not true, or by not believing things about Him that are true. People get angry or they grumble about their circumstances because deep down they believe God makes mistakes. Or they do not believe God is in full control of all things and that He only does good things. The reason we worry or get depressed or live in fear is because we either do not know or do not believe what God has promised. The reason we sin is because deep down we don't believe God's presence is more satisfying than sin. And we don't really believe what Scripture says about God's rod of discipline. And we don't really believe His way is the best way. This is why we tell our Sunday school teachers constantly - "Don't just teach the kids how to behave. Spend most of your time teaching them what God is like."

³ God has revealed certain things about Himself in the creation, but those do not provide enough knowledge of God to be able to draw near to Him. They can cause people to begin to grope about for God, but that groping is groping after an unknown God until the truth of Scripture is proclaimed to them (Acts 17:23,27).

Learn What God Desires

So seeking God will require getting your Bible out, opening it up, and diligently searching to discover more truth about what God is like. That is *one* thing you search for in Scripture to seek God. The other thing you are looking for is God's will. Seeking God requires discovering what God desires. All through the Old Testament when you read about God's people inquiring of the Lord when they wanted to discover His will - that word translated "inquire" is this same word - "to seek." Seeking God involves an effort to discover what God wants you to do. Why? Why are we seeking this information? So that we can ace a test? So we can impress people with our Bible knowledge? No. The reason we seek to discover God's will is so that we might *do it!* We want to learn and understand God's commands and decrees and statutes, *so that we can keep them*. That is part of seeking God.

Psalm 119:2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.

Part of seeking is keeping His commands - doing His will - carrying out God's desires.

10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

How to Study Your Bible

"I've tried reading the Bible, but it just doesn't really do anything for me. I can't understand it. And the things I do understand are so obvious and basic, it doesn't really draw me closer to God. Reading the Bible is just ... boring for me, and so I find that no matter how often I resolve to start reading every day, after a few weeks it just falls by the wayside."

The reason it is so hard to make yourself do it is probably because when you do try to do it, it is not a delightful, satisfying experience. You get the words, but not the message. The part of God's Word that will satisfy the cravings of your soul and open your eyes to delightful things about God is not the words; it is the meaning conveyed by the words. If you miss the meaning, you are not getting God's Word. Too often people will read something they do not understand, then the next day move on to something else they do not understand. What a frustrating exercise! No wonder they don't want to do it. That is like getting all the ingredients out of your pantry every day, but never actually eating anything. That would be an unpleasant chore.

So if that describes your situation, here is my advice: First, do not just be random in what you read. Go to someone who has a good knowledge of Scripture and let them know what you want to learn so they can help you pick out a particular book to study. Or look at the summary of each book of the Bible in your bulletin and pick something that sounds interesting.⁴ Then once you settle on a particular book in the Bible to study, ask around and find out what resources would be helpful for understanding that book. Then start going through it very slowly. Most people read the Bible way too fast. Each paragraph is like a nut. The meat is enclosed inside a hard shell, and until you manage to penetrate that shell and get to the meat inside, it is not going to feed your soul. Keep studying that same passage, thinking about it, reading about it, meditating, praying about it, turning it over in your mind, talking to others about it, asking wise people questions about it - keep doing that until you get through to the nugget that really feeds your soul. Then move on to the next passage. And if you don't know what a passage means, ask someone! I don't know if there is any part of my ministry I enjoy more than helping people figure out what some passage in the Bible means. Of all the emails I get, those are my favorite.

Believing

OK, so if the attitude that has to go alongalone with the action of prayer is trust, what is the attitude that has to go along with studying Scripture? Belief. Trusting and believing are the two sides of faith. You trust a person; you believe information, and both are essential aspects of faith. You cannot seek God without believing what He has revealed about Himself.

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

⁴ See the Appendix

If you want to seek God - if you want to come to Him, you must believe the truth about Him - especially the truth that He is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him.

Righteous Living

So we seek God by studying His Word for the purpose of learning two things: what God is like and what His will is. And why do we want to know what His will is? So we can do it. And that brings us to the next point. Seeking God involves doing His will. If you are seeking to find nearness to God's presence, the pathway that leads there is the path of righteous living - a life of doing what pleases God.

Zephaniah 2:3 Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility

That is very clear - seeking the Lord requires seeking righteousness - seeking to do what God commands. Sin is always movement away from God's presence, and righteousness is always movement toward His presence.

Psalm 24:3 Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart ... 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Psalm 119:2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. 3 They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

You cannot separate seeking God and walking in His ways.

Repentance

That is why seeking cannot begin until after you repent of sin. Sin is movement away from God, so you cannot even take the first step back toward God until you forsake the sin. Repentance is a U-turn. As long as you are still moving in the direction of sin, you have not made your U-turn yet. If you know God is to the north and you are still traveling south, you can hardly say you are seriously seeking God. In Ezra 6 it says the people...

Ezra 6:21 ...separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel.

You are not seeking God until you are preferring His presence to the pleasures of sin.

Acts 17:27 God did this so that men would seek him... 30 he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Isaiah 55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD

You have not returned to the Lord until you have forsaken the sinful way, and the sinful thoughts. Suppose a man leaves his wife for another woman, and then a while later calls his wife and says, "I want us to get back together. I want our marriage to be restored." So the wife asks him, "Have you broken up with the other woman?"

"Well, no. I love her too much. I don't want to jeopardize my relationship with her. I enjoy her so much - I really can't give that up at this time."

That wife is going to hang up the phone because that man is obviously not seeking to restore the marriage, because marital love is exclusive. And our relationship with God is the same way. It is exclusive. You cannot have a third party involved. You have to forsake the sin before you can return to God, because He will not accept you back while you are continuing to commit adultery against Him. As long as your heart is still in love with a particular sin, seeking God is impossible.

Hosea 5:4 Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.

So if you are still committing the sin, you have not yet begun to seek God. And the converse is true. You have not fully repented until you have begun seeking God. If you stop doing some sinful action, but you are still not to the point where you are aggressively seeking after God, then you are

still in the sin. If the guy cuts off his relationship with the other woman, but he is still not doing anything to pursue reconciliation with his wife, he is not returning.

Loyalty

So seeking God begins with desire, and that compels the action of prayer. And the attitude that goes along with prayer is trusting. Next is the action of seeking God through the Scriptures, and the attitude that goes along with that is believing. One of the things we search for in Scripture is the will of God, so that we can do it - seeking God through the action of living a righteous life. What is the attitude that governs that? Loyalty to God.

Jeremiah 50:4 "In those days ... the people ... will go in tears to seek the Lord their God. 5 ... They will come and bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant

Devotion, or commitment, or binding yourself to God in covenant loyalty is part of what it means to seek God. You repent of sin in the past, and you resolve to avoid sin in the future. Part of seeking God has to do with your intentions for the future. If you ask forgiveness for some sin, but you fully intend to do it again in the future, that is not repentance.

Eagerness

So what are the actions we need to take to seek God? Prayer, studying Scripture, and living righteous lives. And what attitudes are required? Desire, trust, believing, and loyalty.

"Wow, that doesn't sound very easy."

It's not. None of that is easy. That is why it requires such passionate desire. That is why God says "You will not find Me until you seek Me with all your heart and all your soul."

Psalms 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you

The Hebrew word translated **earnestly** means "*persistently* or *insistently*. Oh, the curse of casual seeking! When you don't have any big disaster going on in your life it is so easy to fall into the pit of casual, lackadaisical, half-hearted seeking. For most of us, the natural process is for our prayers throughout the day to become hollow – so hollow that they are not really even prayers. What would it sound like if God recorded all your little prayers through the day and played back the tape?

"God, please make this light turn green before I get to the intersection."

"Oh no, I can't find my keys, Jesus, please show me where they are."

"God, please take this headache away soon."

It is fine to ask God for things like that, but is that all there is to fellowship with God? If so, there is nothing difficult about finding fellowship with God. That does not require earnestness at all. If that is all it is, why did David have to seek so earnestly for it? How hard is it to mumble requests for our preferences to God all day long? And does doing that really satisfy the thirsts and longings of my soul?⁵

No. True seeking consumes your life. The true seeker will toss and turn in bed through the night, "When will I find my God?" It will be your first thought in the morning. It will consume your desires and feelings and thoughts. It will control your decisions. You won't be able to put it out of your mind any more than a person dying of thirst can put that out of his mind. Your attitude will be, "Let others pray for money or comfort or health - all I care about right now is nearness to God. Oh, that I could enjoy His presence again!" In times like this David didn't care about food - he didn't care about eating, he didn't care about sleeping - all he could think was, "When can I go to meet with God?"

⁵ So much of our prayer life is really just us using God to get us the earthly things we are seeking, rather than using earthly things to enjoy God, which is nothing more than a religious version of a secular life. For people in the world, the goal of life is to find fulfillment through maximizing enjoyment of things, people and activities. That is how a child decides what toy to play with. That is how a college student selects a major. That is how they chose a spouse and a job. "Which of the various options will maximize my enjoyment of things, people and activities? That is the secular life. If we just do the same thing but ask God to help us get those things, that is not the Christian life. That is a life of seeking earthly things, with God's help. The Christian life uses earthly things to help maximize your enjoyment of God.

God Uses Suffering to Make Us Seek Earnestly

And what is it that usually drives us to that level of desperation? Isn't it suffering? It is so common, during times of relative ease and comfort, for the fires of our passion to seek God to cool off. And so to help us get back to desperate earnestness in our seeking, God will send suffering into our lives. It is like the line in that song: "What if a 1000 sleepless nights is what it takes to know He's near?"

Psalm 78:34 Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again.

We get an idea of how this works in Hosea 5. In Hosea chapter 5, the people are living in disobedience to God, and since their hearts were in love with their sin, they couldn't repent.

Hosea 5:4 Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.

6 When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them.

Their seeking is not working. God is withholding His presence from them to bring them to a point of desperation so they would repent and seek God wholeheartedly. Did that work? Did it make them become more earnest? Look at the end of verse 15.

15 ... in their misery they will earnestly seek me.

It did work. They finally became desperate enough to repent and truly seek. And what did that repentance and earnest seeking look like? Look at the next verse.

Hosea 6:1 "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. 2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. 3 Let us know the Lord; let us press on to know him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

All the pieces are there. You can see the desire, they cry out in prayer, they strive for knowledge of God, you can see their faith - they have full expectation that God will come to them, they are full of hope in anticipating it – it is all there.

So that is a quick rundown on what the Bible says about how to seek God.

The Result Of Seeking

So how do you know when you have succeeded? You do all that to seek God - how do you know when you have found Him? You will know because your heart will be full of joy. Right back to Psalm 32.

Psalm 32:7 ... you surround me with songs of deliverance. ... 10 the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. 11 Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

You will still have trouble and hardship and sorrows - but your joy will be greater than your sorrow.

2 Corinthians 6:10 ... sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

You know your seeking has succeeded when you are able to enjoy God with respect to the past, present and future. All three are crucial. Think of your life like a river. The water in the river is joy, and it is supplied by three tributaries - one from the past, one from the present, and one from the future.



Those three streams feed our river of joy, and in order to have enough joy to flow over the rocks of trouble and difficulty and sorrow in life, all three of those tributaries have to be flowing. If one of them gets blocked, you will not have enough joy and you will end up depressed.

Past (Gratitude)

Let's start with the past. The stream that supplies joy to your life from the past is gratitude. Calling to mind the wonderful things God has done, and taking delight in them. In that psalm the psalmist is severely depressed, so he is earnestly seeking God.

Psalm 77:1 I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. 2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord...

Ok, so right off the bat in verse 1 we see that this is a psalm describing what it looks like to seek God. He then goes on to describe his horrible depression. Why was he so depressed? In his case it was because the stream of joy flowing from the past had been clogged up and choked off by lack of gratitude. He was not remembering what God had done in the past. And he finally figures that out in verse 10.

10 Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." 11 I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. 12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. 13 Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? 14 You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples...

And he goes on to recount God's great acts of salvation in the past.

Psalm 105:4 Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. 5 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced

When we remember God's past goodness, and we carefully consider it and meditate on it, gratitude will rise in our hearts and that will unclog the flow of joy from that first stream. That is a key component to seeking God.

Present (Fellowship With God)

How about in the present? You seek God in the present by doing everything you can to enjoy fellowship with Him. That would include any kind of enjoyable, satisfying interactions with God - not just thinking about God, but paying attention to God. Realizing He is right there in the room, in your car, right there with you in the aisle at WalMart or the grocery store, right there in your office. If you want a detailed study of how to have fellowship with God all through the day I would refer you to parts 8-13 of the *Loving God with all Your Heart* series. It took six sermons to cover because Scripture says so much about it. There are so many ways to have communion with God all through your day. You can experience nearness to God today ...

- by being enlightened by Him, as you submissively learn at His feet,
- by being listened to by Him, as you lift your hands to Him in prayer as a child in His lap,
- by being thrilled by His glory, as you kneel before His great throne in praise,
- by being sheltered and protected by Him, as you run into His refuge,
- by being used by Him, as a tool in His hand or as a fountainhead through which His grace flows to others,
- by being searched and thoroughly known by Him, as you stand before His omniscient, purifying gaze,
- by knowing Him, as you receive insights into greater depths of His glory and exchange gestures of love with Him,
- by being strengthened by Him as you feel His power through your trials when He takes you by the hand,
- by being chastised by Him as you walk with Him to the woodshed,
- by being healed and restored by Him as you lie on His operating table
- by being conformed to Christ's image by Him as you are shaped on His potter's wheel,

by suffering with the Lord Jesus, as you join Him at the cross.

So many ways to draw near to Him!

But when we don't do those things, and we just get consumed with thinking about the trivia of life and go hours at a time without any satisfying fellowship with God, or we distance ourselves from Him by latching on to sin, that stream of joy from the present gets choked off.

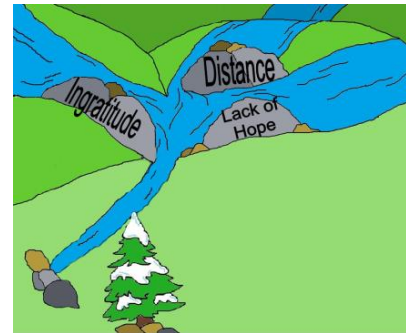
Future (Hope)

How about the future? How do you get joy from God when it comes to thinking about the future? That comes through what the Bible calls *hope*. Hope is when you are so sure that something good is going to happen in the future that you're already in a good mood right now just anticipating it. And that is also an aspect of seeking God.

Lamentations 3:25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him

Part of seeking is hoping.⁶

That is another key source of joy in the Christian life. But if we are not aware of what God has promised in the future, or we don't really believe it will happen, or we believe it will happen but we don't believe it will be delightful or satisfying, that chokes off hope. When any of those three streams of joy get blocked off, whether it is by ingratitude about the past, distance from God in the present, or lack of hope regarding the future, our river of joy will be so weak that when it runs into the rocks of hardship and sorrow, it will be blocked altogether, and we get depressed.



Conclusion: Seek Him!

I know for some of you this sermon might sound like bad news. It might come as a shock to discover that in order to have this joy you have to devote every hour all day long to seeking God. This pursuit has to consume every last bit of your life, or it will not work. And if you are into casual Christianity, this might come as a shock. But for those who truly love the Lord, this is *great* news! It is great news because joy is always available to you, and the only requirement is the most delightful, satisfying activity known to man - seeking God. So come, let us return to the Lord. Let us know the Lord; let us press on to know him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth. Let us desire this one thing: to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek Him in His temple.

Benediction: Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1:25 Questions

1. How intense is the thirst of your soul right now?
2. What earthly things are you most prone to run to to satisfy the thirsts of the soul instead of God?
3. Which of the various components of seeking God needs the most work in your life? (Desire, prayer, trust, Scripture, believing, righteous living, loyalty, fellowship with God throughout the day, gratitude, hope, or eagerness)
4. How earnest is your seeking after God at this time in your life?

⁶ Malachi 3:1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. What does that mean, the **Lord you are seeking**? If the Messiah had not come yet, in what sense were they seeking Him? Through hope. They were eagerly looking forward to His arrival. That is another part of seeking.

Appendix: Summary of Each Bible Book

Old Testament

The first five books: “The Law,” “The Pentateuch” or “The Books of Moses” (Written by Moses)

Genesis – First three chapters among the most important in the Bible – explain the origin of good (God) and evil, suffering and death (rebellious man). The rest of the book outlines the origin of God’s dealings with man through covenants. Most of it describes the lives of the Patriarchs (first fathers) of the Jewish nation (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph). After mankind quickly fell to the utter bottom of wickedness when left to themselves, God promised to never let that happen again. He would always preserve a people of His own (through the Jews).

Exodus – Four hundred years after the end of Genesis, now Israel is a nation, enslaved in Egypt. Exodus is the story of how God made a special covenant with Israel and delivered them from bondage in Egypt. This is the time in which Israel received the Ten Commandments, and wandered in the desert for 40 years after failing to enter the Promised Land (because they didn’t trust God).

Leviticus – Contains the details of the sacrificial system that God instituted to give the people a picture of how their sins could be forgiven and how they could worship God properly and understand holiness.

Numbers – The account of Israel’s trip from Mount Sinai where they receive the Ten Commandments to the border of the Promised Land (then called Canaan, later Israel) to Abraham.

Deuteronomy – Moses’ fuller explanation of the meaning of the Ten Commandments just before the people entered the Promised Land. Jesus quoted this book often.

The Historical Books

Joshua – The account of Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land.

Judges – The account of the first 20 years or so in the Promised Land when Israel had no king and was ruled only by occasional Judges. This is the moral low point of Israel’s history.

Ruth – The account of how the messianic line was preserved through a Gentile woman (Ruth, a Moabitess, is King David’s great grandmother).

1 Samuel – The account of Samuel and of Israel’s first king (Saul) whom God rejected and the second king (David) who was a man after God’s own heart.

2 Samuel – Further information on David’s reign.

1&2 Kings – The account of Solomon’s reign (the third and last king of the whole nation of Israel), and the account of how Israel split into two, brief descriptions of the various kings of both kingdoms, and an extensive account of the lives of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. The descriptions of the kings list the kings of the Northern Kingdom (referred to as “Israel”) until they were conquered by Assyria and deported, and the kings of the Southern Kingdom (referred to as “Judah”) until they were conquered by Babylon and deported. The kings are evaluated based on how they compare to David.

1 Chronicles – Another account of all the kings of the Southern Kingdom focusing more on worship and the good kings.

2 Chronicles – The account of the rebuilding of the Temple after Judah came back from the exile in Babylon.

Ezra – The account of the return of the Jews from exile and the restoration of Temple worship.

Nehemiah – The account of the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem.

Esther – An account of the near elimination of the Jews and God’s preservation of them through providence.

The Wisdom Literature

Job – An explanation of the fact that the Retribution Principle (the wisdom theme that the righteous are blessed and the wicked cursed) is a principle and not an absolute law. There are exceptions – like Job.

Psalms – The Hebrew hymnbook. Teaches how to worship and pray. The book of the Bible that is most densely packed with information about what God is like.

Proverbs – A collection of observations of life useful for decision making and general skill at living.

Ecclesiastes – Rather than trying to figure out what is not revealed, trust in God’s wisdom and goodness. God’s unrevealed purposes behind everything are impossible to figure out. Therefore simply enjoy life, fear God, and do good because there will be a day of judgment.

Song of Solomon or Song of Songs – A collection of love poems describing the beauty of marital love and warning that it is very powerful and not to be awakened prematurely.

The Prophets

The most prominent theme in the Prophets is the sovereign rule of God over history and all the nations. The first five are called “major prophets” because they are longer, and the remaining 12 are called “minor prophets.”

Isaiah – Part 1 (ch.1-39 – known as “The Book of Judgment”) written after the defeat of the Northern Kingdom warning the Southern Kingdom to repent or face the same fate as the Northern Kingdom. Part 2 (ch.40-66 – known as “The Book of Comfort”) promises of restoration that would come after the judgment. This book is rich in descriptions of the Messiah (called “The Branch” or “The Servant.”

Jeremiah – Shortly after Isaiah, Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. While Isaiah said, “Repent or be judged” Jeremiah said, “Now you didn’t repent, so you will be judged.”

Lamentations – A sequel to Jeremiah, a series of dirges lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon.

Ezekiel – Announcement of the coming judgment of Jerusalem and on surrounding godless nations, and promises of restoration for Jerusalem.

Daniel – The account of Daniel & friends’ rise to power once exiled to Babylon, and prophecies of world history from Daniel’s time up to Jesus’ time, as well as of the end times.

Hosea – An announcement to the Northern Kingdom that they would be judged because of their unfaithfulness.

Joel – A warning to both kingdoms that God’s judgment (“The Day of the Lord”) is on the way unless they repent.

Amos – A warning to both kingdoms (mostly the Northern) of the coming judgment because of their social injustices.

Obadiah – A warning to the Jews' enemy, Edom, not to gloat over Israel's defeat, because Edom would be destroyed and the Jews would be restored.

Jonah – A description of God's mercy on the evil city of Nineveh when they repent after hearing Jonah's warning of judgment.

Micah – Oracles of judgment on the Southern Kingdom and hope of their restoration.

Nahum – The prophecy of the judgment of Nineveh for their wickedness.

Habakkuk – A dialogue between the struggling prophet and God about God's justice, followed by a beautiful confession of faith.

Zephaniah – A warning to the Southern Kingdom of coming judgment as well as the surrounding nations.

Haggai – A call to the restored Southern Kingdom to rebuild the Temple.

Zechariah – Another call to rebuild the Temple, & announcements of the Messiah and end times.

Malachi – A prophecy to the restored community rebuking their unfaithfulness, a call to repentance and an announcement of the Lord's coming.

New Testament

Historical Books

The Gospels (Accounts of Jesus' life)

Matthew – Highlights the Kingship of Jesus.

Mark – Highlights Jesus as the Son of God

Luke – Highlights Jesus as the "Son of Man" (the great, heavenly figure of Daniel 9)

John – Written to help generate belief

Acts – A sequel to Luke's Gospel - the history of the beginning of the Church

The Epistles (letters to churches)

Paul's Letters

Romans – The longest, most detailed theological explanation of salvation by grace through faith in Christ

1 Corinthians – Paul's answer to the Corinthians' questions on various issues.

2 Corinthians – Our suffering teaches us and you comfort, trust and bring thanksgiving. Ministry and future hope keep us from losing heart. We have God's approval and divine validation. The super-apostles are from the devil. Your response to us and repentance were wonderful. Now forgive and comfort the one who caused grief so Satan doesn't outwit us. Be generous in your gift. Don't make me punish you when I come.

Galatians – The Galatians' re-enslavement to circumcision and ritualism is apostasy. Justification AND sanctification are by faith expressed in love and not works of the Law. We avoid sin because the life of faith is a life lived for God (and to rebuild the system of righteousness through law-keeping would be law-breaking anyway).

Don't use your freedom to indulge the flesh (reaping corruption), but live by the Spirit fulfilling the law (love and serving)..

Ephesians – The unification of Jew and Gentiles in the Church

Philippians – A "thank you" letter of encouragement for the gift they sent to Paul

Colossians – A refutation of a heresy that diminished Jesus

1 Thessalonians – Control your body honorably.

Increase in your loving the brothers. Be quiet and work hard. Don't act hopeless about death, because of the resurrection/rapture. His coming will overtake them like a thief, but not you sons of day, so let's be awake. Honor church leaders. Always rejoice, pray and give thanks. Don't oppose the Spirit/prophecy, but do test for evil.

2 Thessalonians – Relief from your persecution will come at the Second Coming (but not until after the Antichrist and apostasy). Don't feed or associate with the idle busybodies.

1&2 Timothy – Instructions to Timothy, who was overseeing & reforming the church in Ephesus

Titus – Instructions to Titus, who was establishing church leaders in Crete

Philemon – A letter to Philemon urging him to accept back his runaway slave who is now a believer.

General Epistles

Hebrews – A warning to Jewish Christians not to turn away from Christianity because (1) it is superior to the alternative and (2) turning away would result in terrible judgment.

James – Prize suffering/humility, study the law and have true faith (expressed in loving deeds) to honor God. Repent of pride and selfish greed, living in light of Judgment Day.

1 Peter – encouragement for suffering believers

2 Peter – instruction for believers who are subject to false teachers

1 John – description what it means to truly love God

2 John – A letter urging believers not to support false teachers' ministries

3 John – A letter to commend Gaius for siding with John and against the false teacher Diotrephes

Jude – Very similar to 2 Peter 2.

Revelation – Christ calls the churches to overcome, then comes tribulation (saints protected but persecuted), then all evil is defeated and thrown into hell and overcomers reign with God in the dwelling place of God.