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GOD-SEEKING

Ministry for God without intimacy with God is a dead work. Mission to the world without a connection with the God who loves the world is a filthy rag. Anything of eternal consequence flows out of our relationship with Father. Far too much of the ministry being attempted today is deprived of the soul-morphing effect of an intimate encounter with God.

David said, "The intimate friendship of the Lord is reserved for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant." (Psalm 25:14) His response? "My eyes are ever towards the Lord." (25:15) This fluency speaks to the need for intimacy with God.

Seeking the Lord:

Matthew 6:6: But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Luke 5:16: But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Mark 1:35: Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Psalm 34:8: Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him.

John 15:1-8: I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.

-- WHAT IS THE SECRET PLACE? --

Read: Matthew 6:5-15

Before Jesus shows us how to pray, He directs us where to pray, though the secret place is not so much a "place" as it is more about intentionally devoting oneself to intimately encountering and interacting with God. If you enjoy the outdoors, perhaps your place to connect will be in nature, or if you have a house full of people, then you may need to get in a literal closet and shut the door. Again, it's not so much about the location, but the private time you are setting apart to seek first His Kingdom. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

It's interesting to observe how we tend to exhaust so many different resources without coming to God first. After all, He is in control of everything and tells us to come boldly before the throne of grace. John 16:24 says, "Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." It is in the secret place where you can be completely vulnerable and transparent before the Lord. We will find Him when we seek Him with our whole hearts.

DISCUSS

- What is the secret place?
- What are the key elements of the secret place?

WHY THE SECRET PLACE?

Read: Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Mark 6:46, Luke 4:42

"Jesus did not say, 'Dream about your Father who is in the secret place,' but He said, '. . . pray to your Father who is in the secret place. . . .' Prayer is an effort of the will. After we have entered our secret place and shut the door, the most difficult thing to do is to pray. We cannot seem to get our minds into good working order, and the first thing we have to fight is wandering thoughts. The great battle in private prayer is overcoming this problem of our idle and wandering thinking. We have to learn to discipline our minds and concentrate on willful, deliberate prayer.

We must have a specially selected place for prayer, but once we get there this plague of wandering thoughts begins, as we begin to think to ourselves, 'This needs to be done, and I have to do that today.' Jesus says to 'shut your door.' Having a secret stillness before God means deliberately shutting the door on our emotions and remembering Him. God is in secret, and He sees us from 'the secret place'— He does not see us as other people do, or as we see ourselves. When we truly live in 'the secret place,' it becomes impossible for us to doubt God. We become surer of Him than of anyone or anything else. Enter into 'the secret place' and you will find that God was right in the middle of your everyday circumstances all the time. Get into the habit of dealing with God about everything. Unless you learn to open the door of your life completely and let God in from your first waking moment of each new day, you will be working on the wrong level throughout the day. But if you will swing the door of your life fully open and 'pray to your Father who is in the secret place,' every public thing in your life will be marked with the lasting imprint of the presence of God." – *Oswald Chambers*

There were times when Jesus addressed the multitudes, the twelve, the three, but there was also consistent, daily time spent alone with God. Mark 1:35 says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed." As you read in scripture Jesus many times isolated Himself to pray and seek the Father. In fact, the Pharisees and others were astonished by His teachings, yet Jesus expresses that He does only what the Father reveals. In order to know God, we need to spend time with Him. The secret place is the ideal time to consecrate ourselves to the Lord and allow His Spirit to truly transform us into His likeness and image.

DISCUSS

- Why did Jesus spend time alone in the secret place?
- Why is it important for us to spend consistent, daily time with Jesus?
- What are the benefits of seeking the Lord early in the morning the way Jesus did?

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD-SEEKING

*Read: Hebrews 11:6, John 15:1-8, Hebrews 4:16,
Philippians 4:5-6, Psalm 34:8*

Question: Why do you think it matters to set apart time in the secret place?

The Bible exhorts us to have the Word written on the tablets of our hearts and meditate on it day and night so that we may be careful to do everything written in it (Joshua 1:8-9), to seek the Lord and His wisdom as if seeking for hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44), to cry aloud for understanding (Proverbs 2:3), to confess our sins and He is faithful and just to forgive us (1st John 1:9), to take the sword of the spirit which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17) so that we are alert and prepared to answer everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have (1st Peter 3:15), to pray continually on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10), making requests,

and giving thanks in all circumstances (Philippians 4:6-7). Remember the Lord rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), and He is faithful to keep His promises (Deut. 7:9) despite whatever our circumstances may look like!

Jesus says in John 15, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing... If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you... as the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love." Apart from God we can do nothing, but with Him all things are possible and we will bear much fruit. It's when we behold the beauty of God that we are transformed (2nd Corinthians 3:18).

A Lack of Time...

It's interesting that so many people would say, "I don't have time," or "I am too busy to seek the Lord." In reality, it is quite the opposite! If you are too busy, how can you not make time for the Lord? Thinking we are too busy is not Biblical and is not Kingdom minded... even the Son of Man, who only had three years to fulfill His ministry purposes here on earth knew how important it was to seek the face of the Father!! And yet Jesus knows the Father much more intimately than we possibly could. If we only knew that seeking the Lord and being in the Word of God are equivalent to being on life support! But we have gotten so good at relying on ourselves and being in control. When we exert so much unnecessary effort by trying to do things on our own, we often forget about the God who supplies us with every breath we take. Would you not rather pursue the obligations of your day through the overflow of the Spirit than in your own futile efforts? And the irony is that though God does not need us but desires us, we desperately need God but don't really want Him most of the time!!

DISCUSS

- Review each of the Scriptures references in the two paragraphs above on the importance of God-seeking and repeat each reference back in your own words.
- How do we ensure that time with Jesus does not just become something we have to do, but something we want to do?
- What does intimacy with God look like? How do we draw closer to the Lord?

INSIDE THE SECRET PLACE

Here are practical steps to begin encountering the Lord in the secret place. Everyone seeks the Lord in different ways and each day may vary, but here are some fundamental aspects of God-seeking:

Set an appointment with God daily

Pull out your planner and schedule an uninterrupted appointment with God every day. It may begin as a task a few minutes a day, but the more time you spend in His presence the more you will be transformed. And soon what seems to be a duty will turn into delight. We have complete access to the King of the universe, yet many of us give God our leftovers when we are tired or rushed by the end of the day. God honors those who honor Him with their first fruits, so you may consider setting your alarm clock an hour earlier and begin the day by seeking the face of the King.

Watch how everything else will fall into place as He gives you the peace and grace to face the challenges the day may bring. Remember, first seek His kingdom and His righteousness and everything else will be given to you. The Lord honors those who honor Him.

Give thanks

When the very first words that come out of your mouth as you wake up every morning are praise and thanksgiving, it shapes the rest of your day. Psalm 3:5 says, "I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me." The Lord really does sustain us in every way, and not only that, but He has revealed Himself to us so that we may live abundantly and have eternal life (John 10:10). Thank the Lord for who He is, for the gift of salvation and for the blessings in your life. He is worthy to be praised. Remember that every good gift comes from God (James 1:17). Whether you eat or drink, or spend time in the secret place, do it all to the glory of God (1st Corinthians 10:31).

Ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit

Every day, ask the Lord to fill you with the Holy Spirit! Ask Him for His Spirit; the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), and to keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

Worship the Lord

Having a time in the secret place to praise, worship, sing, dance, or fall to your knees in reverent worship allows further connection and adoration of God (Psalm 150).

Repent/forgive

Scripture says that if we are offering a gift at the altar and there remember that our brother has something against us, to leave our gift there and first go be reconciled to our brother, and then come offer the gift. (Matthew 5) Ask the Lord to reveal any unforgiveness in your heart so that you can repent and should you need to go reconcile with your brother, then He will give you the grace to do so. If we confess our sins the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us. Receive healing, forgiveness, and a transformed heart daily!

Read the Scriptures

Scripture clearly calls us to know Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:16, Joshua 1:8, Matthew 5:18, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 24:35... Jesus says that heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away. In order to know God, we must read scripture, and in order to be more like Him, we need to apply Scripture. Someone can know God but not live according to His word. This means when you read Scripture, don't read it like any ordinary book because you will miss the Creator Himself. The word is alive; allow it to change your thoughts and your life. Memorize and meditate on His words daily so that He becomes a part of your lifestyle.

Listen

God gave us two ears and only one mouth. Maybe the Lord speaks to you through Scripture, or through worship music, or through prayer... but we must be silent in order to listen. Take time to be still before the Lord. Wait upon the Lord (Psalm 5:3, Psalm 27:14, Psalm 37:7).

Journal

Journaling is a powerful tool for listening and remembering what God has said and done. Write down prayers, how the Lord has answered prayers, or when the Lord speaks.

Ask

The Bible says you have not because you ask not, but then tells us that we need to ask with thanksgiving. (Phil 4:6-7, James 4:3, John 16:24) God wants to lavish us with good gifts, but He also wants us to ask. It's interesting that before Jesus healed someone, He would ask them, "What do you want?" Imagine the blind man Jesus healed. The Lord knew he was blind, but nevertheless He asked Him to speak His request. The Lord wants us to ask with good motives and to be like the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). Keep asking the Lord for the salvation of your lost friends and family members. Keep asking the Lord for strength, protection, our jobs, healing, families, leaders, to deliver us from the evil one, to be more like Him, for understanding, revelation, etc... "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-11)

DISCUSS

- What do you think constitutes a successful quiet time?



REFLECTION & APPLICATION

In your own words, what is the big idea from this chapter?

Specifically ask yourself:

- What did I learn from this chapter?
- Lord, what do you want me to do about it?

Choose 1 or 2 Scriptures that impacted you to memorize this week.

- Write out and journal through what the Lord is teaching you through these Scriptures specifically.
- How do you plan to apply the truth from these Scriptures this week?

*Suggested books: Why Revival Tarries,
Secrets of the Secret Place,
The Hour that Changes the World, The Praying Life*