

GREAT AWAKENING #3 – “SEEKING GOD’S FACE”

If you’ve been with us the past couple weeks, you know that my text for this series on praying for Great Awakening is found in **2nd Chronicles 7:14**: Let’s see if you can say it with me with a few prompts on the screen. **14 if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.** This week, we’re taking it up another notch. We’ve seen where God tells His people to humble themselves and pray. But now, He calls them to seek His face. How do we do that? Especially when **Exodus 33:20** tells us that no one can see the face of God and live to tell about it

Seeking God’s face is a Hebrew expression that means to pursue His presence. To be before His face is to have an audience with God almighty_ and I don’t just mean via a podcast. It is to be present in His presence. But aren’t God’s children always in His presence? Yes and no. Because God is omnipresent_ everywhere, all the time_ He is always near to us. He is also always with His children in the sense of His covenant promise to always stand by us and help us and work everything out for our good. In **the Hebrew letter** God promises His children, **“I will never forsake you or leave you.” (13:5)**

But yet, the scriptures repeatedly call us to seek the Lord’s face. In **Psalm 27:4** David said: **“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.”** And in **Isaiah 55:6**, the prophet urges the people of God to: **“Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.”** The reality of God’s presence is not our constant experience. This is especially true if become neglectful of God and give Him little to no thought. We do not put trust in Him as we should and He seems distant and aloof. We do not perceive Him as beautiful and valuable with the eyes of our hearts. He is there, but we are not always aware.

Teaching Pastor / author John Piper suggests God’s face is often hidden *“behind the curtain of our carnal desires.”* In other words, we get so caught up in the things of this world that we don’t see Him. In fact, my personal experience is we don’t even miss Him, let alone seek Him. This sad state of consciousness is always ready to overtake us. So in order to enjoy continual awareness of His divine beauty and worth, we must *“seek His face.”*

But what does that mean in practical terms? It is a resolve to set our mind and heart on God. It is the conscious focusing of our attention and our affection on God. **1st Chronicles 22:19** urges: **“Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God.”** And **Colossians 3:1-2** says, **“If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” (NKJV)** This is the opposite of mental coasting. It is a conscious choice to direct the heart toward God. Yet, in **2 Thessalonians 3:5**, Paul indicates that we need some divine help even with this. **“May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.”** Jesus once said no one can come to the Father unless He enables them to. I believe He is saying that the door is open into His presence because the Father has opened it. We don’t unlock it by our cunning or skill_ saying the right words like some incantation that forces God to let us in. Nor do we kick it down with some battering ram of demand or barrage of prayers. Jesus says it is not our many words, but His gracious heart that makes this relationship possible. And it isn’t even by our earning our way by our good works. It is only by His grace and mercy.

I shared last week how much it means that my daughters call me_ and I always respond to their calls.

Yet, what I cherish most is when we can get together...to have them physically present. And when these **30** something girls snuggle up between me and their mother just for a cuddle, my heart melts. Now, they don't need to ask me to open my arms. I do that when I see them moving in my direction. But when they say, *"Daddy, I miss your hugs. Would you just hold me awhile?"* it is music to me ears. And I am convinced God is just as pleased when His children draw near to Him. Seeking God's Face is the conscious effort to move closer to Him. And God welcomes such advances.

Most of us however, indulge in activities which can get in the way. We know what makes us more aware of God's presence, and what desensitizes us to Him_ perhaps even tempts us to not even want to seek Him. Hear me. Anything that keeps us from seeking God should be curtailed. Like what? You tell me. Does watching tons of TV or playing Video Games or even living on Facebook help or hinder you in seeking God? You may say, *"neither"* – but I suggest that if it doesn't help, it hinders.

We don't seek God because He's lost, but because we are. But, by His grace He has set up signs to help us find our way back to Him. The heavens proclaim the glory of God, pointing to Him. His word reveals Him and urges us to seek Him. The transforming grace in His people draws us to Him. Think again on the context. God's presence was to be made manifest in the temple. His people were even to pray toward the temple. So if we were going to seek His face, where would we look for it, if not in the temple? Stay with me now. Today, the church is the temple of God. I often hear that we don't need to come to church to pray, or worship, or read the Bible and I agree_ but more often than not, if we aren't coming to church, we aren't doing any of those things consistently for long. In the community of God's people who collectively seek His presence, there is accountability as well as healing and forgiveness. So, I can't help but believe there's a direct correlation between the decline in church attendance and the lack of knowledge of God, as well as rise in moral decay in our land.

Even among church goers, a growing number just don't see it as a priority. There's what I call the *"floating 40"* that we have here. On any given Sunday there may be **30-40** members absent. Oh, it's not always the same people each week. Some are dealing with illness or conflicting work schedules, but some just choose to come every other Sunday, or once a month, or even less. Some just come when it's convenient. Others as long as there is nothing else calling for their attention. In a scene from the War Room, Miss Clara asks a woman if she goes to church. When she answers, *"Occasionally."* Miss Clara says, *"Why? Does the pastor only preach occasionally?"* Listen closely. It's not just about hearing the Word of God presented by some local pastor. It's not just about singing along with your favorite hymns or worship songs, either. And neither is it about saying, *"Amen"* whenever someone leads a prayer at church. If the only time we're exposed to the Word of God, or we're singing praises, or praying to our Father is when we're at church, we may be seeking something other than Him.

Yet, when we humble ourselves, and pray, and then seek His face, we will find Him at church_ but we'll also find Him whenever we open our hearts to His word, or sing praises_ whether accompanied by a CD, worship video, praise band, organ, piano, or acapella_ in the assembly of believers or all alone in the shower_ and we'll be talking to our Father more often. *"Good morning, Lord."* Only opens a conversation that continues throughout the day.

In **Jeremiah 29:13** God promises: **"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."** And when we find God, **Hebrews 11:6** says that **"He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."** Of course the greatest reward in our quest is God Himself, for in Him, we have everything. And there is nowhere else we find the assurance of His healing and forgiveness.