

Seek My Face

A vision to go deep in God

I. The jealous heart of God

1. The most timeless and timely message is always: what is in the heart of God? The single most burning question for all of humanity is what is God after? What is in His heart toward us and how are we to respond? Every other question pales in comparison.
“All the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: That He is; what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him.” - **A.W. Tozer**
2. The urgency of the hour is a secondary urgency created by the urgency already in God's heart. To understand the hour we need to return to God's heart and search out that original urgency. “God is not the author of confusion.” (**1 Corinthians 14:33**) There is a very clear Biblical response in a time of judgment and the call always is 'return to the Lord', 'seek Me with all your heart.' It's a call to come back to the First and Second commandments and to get serious about reaching for an expression of Christianity that fully embraces them.
3. When God spoke through the Old Testament prophets He gave not only a message for the hour, but a revelation of Himself that provided the backdrop for the hour. He wanted to impart the original urgency, not just the circumstantial urgency.
4. God takes Hosea as he is just beginning his career in prophecy and begins to educate him on the heart of God. He's giving Hosea a message about the urgency of the hour – Hosea is to prophesy judgment coming against Israel – but first God wants him to understand the underlying urgency in the heart of God.
Hosea 1:2 When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD.”
5. If we rightly understand Who it is that is acting then we understand His actions. God was teaching Hosea about His heart as a Husband, jealously yearning for the love of His bride, so that Hosea could understand the heart of God in hedging up her way with thorns until she was driven back into His arms.
Hosea 2:2 “Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband!... 5 ...For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, Who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my linen, My oil and my drink.’ 6 “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, And wall her in, So that she cannot find her paths. 7 She will chase her lovers, But not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, For then it was better for me than now.’
James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?
6. And we will understand what it is that He is looking for. The desired result of the judgment was that Israel would correctly understand the jealous heart of God and submit to loving Him wholeheartedly.
Hosea 2:16 “And it shall be, in that day,” Says the LORD, “That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ And no longer call Me ‘My Master,’...19 “I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you

to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment.

II. The call to seek

1. God in His jealous love will pursue us. He goes after us when we play the harlot and turn to other things.

Hosea 3:1 Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.” 2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. 3 And I said to her, “You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you.”

2. God desires in His jealous love that we would in turn pursue Him. Over and over again His call is seek Me.

Hosea 3:5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.

Hosea 6:1 Come, and let us return to the LORD... 3 Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.

2 Chronicles 7:14 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 I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

3. The human heart is always seeking – we are pilgrims on this earth and never truly at rest until we enter the presence of God. The question is what are we seeking? If we do not set our hearts to seek God, we will wind up seeking after other lovers.

2 Chronicles 12:14 He [King Rehoboam] did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.

4. The call is not just to turn away from the world, but to turn *to* God. To reclaim the glory of who we are as the one creature created for relationship with God.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Galatians 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

III. Pursuing God

1. We're called to a race, a pursuit, a pilgrimage. If we're not running in the race God has laid out for us, we can be sure we're running in some other direction.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

2. Are we pressing on as Paul was to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of us? Do we know

what that is – what we're reaching for?

'We know Jesus is the answer, but we've forgotten what the question is' – **Matt Candler**

3. What is it that Jesus did for us? What is it that He is currently doing in us? Christianity is a process – begun at salvation, but it continues until the day of Christ. There is a pursuit to it, a reaching. For what? What is it that we're after on this side of eternity? What is it that these years as a pilgrim on the earth are meant to accomplish?

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

4. Jesus brought us more than salvation – He brought us eternal life: knowing and loving God.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

5. We all know that's the answer. Everybody is looking for relationship, intimacy, walking with God – whatever your preferred term may be. We all have that longing for Eden inside us – for the time when God walked with man in the cool of the day. We all know that 'Christianity is a relationship not a religion.' We are all aware of the first commandment, the question is are we pursuing it? What does pursuing God even look like?

6. The first commandment sets an awfully high standard for us. By its very definition (all) it requires a complete reorientation of our lives to make it a priority.

Mark 12:30 And you shall love the LORD your God with **all** your heart, with **all** your soul, with **all** your mind, and with **all** your strength.' This is the first commandment.

7. The first commandment is a huge challenge, but also a huge relief. If we were to pursue all the law and the prophets we would hardly know where to begin. Jesus gives us the starting point – we are to prioritize rightly relating with God, and all the rest will come together through that relationship.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

8. Though we struggle with knowing how to pursue relationship with God, the good news is it's actually much easier than pursuing holiness apart from God. It is much easier to let God change us from the inside out than to try to change from the outside in. It's what we were created for. It takes intentionality and sacrifice, but it does not take skill or gifting – we were all created with the ability to fulfill the first commandment.

9. Considering what it means to pursue God is a must if we are really to walk it out. The first commandment needs to become more to us than just conceptual – it needs to be the vision and pursuit of our lives. My working definition of pursuing God consists of three parts:

1. The Invitation – God's love for us and His incredible offer of relationship
2. The Response – Seeking to know and understand Him and to walk ever closer to Him.
3. The Result – The outward overflow of a heart in love: worship, prayer, obedience, service – all that I do because I love Him.

10. These are not three steps or three phases, but three continually realities. If we neglect any of them, our relationship with God will suffer.

IV. Life From the Inside Out

1. Much of the time we are stuck on #3 – trying to produce the outward response of love without the underlying foundation of a love relationship.
2. The first commandment does not call us to *show* love to God, it calls us to actually love Him. God is wanting to work sincere love in the depths of our heart.
3. Expressing our love to God in obedience and service, in worship and prayer is a must – love that is not expressed languishes and dies. But outward obedience it cannot be the fullness of love or 'Husband' becomes another name for 'Master' and the first and second commandments boil down to 'obey the other commandments.'
4. Obedience is meant to flow out of love. It generally doesn't work the other way. We absolutely are meant to fulfill all those other commands, but they don't form a love relationship with Him but rather overflow from one – on these commands hang all the law and the prophets. That's why Jesus says He came to fulfill the law (Mt 5:17) – without Him (the first commandment) it is utterly impossible to fulfill the other commandments.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.

5. Jesus' rebuke of the teachers of the law is not that they place the burden of the law on people – it's that they don't lead them to Him – to the only one who can enable them to fulfill them. When we walk with Him the burden is easy. When done with Him out of love for Him, not to Him in an attempt to prove love to Him the expression of our love actually becomes a way of growing in relationship with Him.

Luke 11:46 And He said, “Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

6. The point is not that the outward expression does not matter or needs to be deemphasized, but that the inward reality is essential and needs to be emphasized.

V. Pursuing God – The Invitation

1. If we don't hear the right invitation, we will never have the right response or see the right result. If we do not understand the hope of His calling, we will forsake our glory.
2. One reason why so many are stuck on #3 is because they missed #1 – the invitation – the idea that God actually desires to have a personal, love-filled relationship with us. Thank God we live in a time when the Spirit is highlighting that message again.
3. If we're not familiar with the hope of our calling, we will inevitably forsake our glory. What made Israel's turning so shocking in the eyes of God was not the depths of their sin, but the heights of glory which they had forsaken.

Jeremiah 2:5 Thus says the LORD: “What injustice have your fathers found in Me, That they have gone far from Me, Have followed idols, And have become idolaters? 6 Neither did they say, ‘Where is the LORD, Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt... 11 Has a nation changed its gods, Which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory For what does not profit. 12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this, And be horribly afraid; Be very desolate,” says the LORD. 13 “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Exodus 29:46 And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.

4. We must get the invitation right if we're going to respond rightly. The covenant given to Israel has been extended to us through Christ – we are more than saved, we are chosen and redeemed – a people set apart as a dwelling place for God, a kingdom of priests.
1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.
5. But beyond just getting the right invitation, we have to stick it out with the invitation. Our tendency is to treat #1 and #2 as steps to get to #3 – often really short steps. These are not 3 steps or 3 phases, but 3 parts of relationship. We don't graduate from one and move on to the next, they are all continual processes and they all feed off of each other. The moment we neglect one of them, we are in trouble. We can't neglect the pursuit of the invitation.
Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.
6. In the book of Ephesians, Paul is writing to a church at Ephesus that is in the midst of great revival. He writes to set their vision – to tell them all the Church and her glorious destiny. In the middle of it Paul makes these two well-known apostolic prayers: not that the Ephesians would do it, that they would finally buckle down and make it happen, but that they would understand the invitation.
Ephesians 1:15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe
Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
7. These prayers are the heart cry of an apostle of Jesus Christ with a great burden for His church. Paul is seeing the Bride of Ephesians 5 – pure and spotless, presented to Christ on that day and he's crying out for what he knows by the Spirit is needed for her to reach her glory – we must understand the invitation. The only way to reach fullness is to understand the fullness of what He has given us in His love.
1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from

God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

8. We are prone to think we've outgrown the invitation – nothing could be farther from the truth. To a degree, we can get it, and we aim for that: 'to be rooted and grounded in love.' But there's another part to knowing God's love – the 'height, width, length and depth' part, the 'surpasses knowledge' part.
9. How often do we wake up with a conscious awareness of the glory of who we are and what we're called to? Until that is our ever-present reality we don't need to wonder whether we've really understood the invitation yet.

VI. Pursuing God – The Response

1. We can also very easily get stuck on #1. Knowing that God loves us, having the language or the idea of God's love is a far cry from actually having that love – from actually developing intimacy with Him. There is a response required. I don't want to just talk about God's love and thank Him for it. Gratitude is a good response, but an incomplete one. God is looking for a response. He desires something. He did all this for a reason.
Acts 17:24-27 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;
2. Our response should be a deliberate, focused effort to pursue Him out of a heart that is lovesick and ruined for anything less. We don't want to take relationship with God for granted. One way love is the worst, most awkward thing in the world. That's why over and over again God says 'seek Me'.
Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.
Proverbs 8:17 I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me.
Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.
3. This is what God wants us to believe about Him – that when we seek Him He rewards us with the greatest reward of all – Himself. It is the only way to please Him.
Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.
4. It's not that we can achieve anything by our seeking. We don't find God through our own understanding or through winning His favor. But He *wants* to be sought after, and He *chooses* to be found.
1 Chronicles 28:9 As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you **seek** Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.
Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to

Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the LORD

5. If God does not desire to be found, then we seek in vain. But because of His great desire, He came and not only called us to love Him, but made it possible.

John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

6. Jesus declares the desire of God – to have a people who love Him as He loves. And He sums up His ministry on the earth as having done what was necessary for that to happen: declaring the name of the Father.

7. Love and knowledge are inseparably connected. Love without knowledge is sentimentality. Love with knowledge enables us to approve the things that are excellent – to love and to agree with the good, pleasing and perfect ways of God *so that* we may be without offense on the day of Christ. It is the path to transforming our hearts and our lives – beholding and becoming.

Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

8. Jesus invites us into communion and beholding – and He opens the door to both. David is called a man after God's own heart because he heard even in his day this invitation and he responded.

Psalms 27:4 One *thing* I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.

9. Beholding the beauty of God is part of who we were made to be. God has a wishlist, not of things He wants, but of things that He wants to give (we call them apostolic prayers). The knowledge of God is right at the top of it. If we are to love God, we must know Him – this was the fundamental mission of Jesus: to declare the name of the Father, making known who He is and what He is like so that we could rightly relate to Him.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... 18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

10. More than just the knowledge of God, we want to know God. We were created for living and dynamic interaction with the Uncreated God. A life of prayer is where we actually come and interact with God. Jesus opened that door by removing the veil that separated God and man and giving us access with confidence to the presence of God. And He sent His Spirit to dwell in us that He would be with us always – an ever-present source of fellowship with God.

Matthew 27:51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom

Ephesians 3:10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

John 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with

you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. 19 “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. 20 At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

11. This is our struggle with keeping Christianity a relationship rather than a religion. We have a wealth of teaching and preaching and writing on the practice of Christianity and far less on the person of Christ. And a relationship is not centered on practices, it's centered on a person. Because of our natural tendencies, it is a constant struggle to maintain a Christ-centered Christianity. Absent the revelation of God in Christ, all we have are empty philosophies and traditions of men.

Colossians 2:1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge... 6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

VII. Pursuing God – The Result

1. The first commandment is the only reasonable context under which to reach for fullness. What God has in store for us as His church is so incredibly beyond us that there is no way to reach for it outside the safety of His love.
2. Some of the most difficult realities of the Christian walk are a joy under the first commandment. Outside of it we don't dare even mention them.
3. When we truly go after loving God with all our heart a lot of things shift. We change from the inside out. New wine requires new wineskins.
4. When our heart gets stirred for God the question in our mind gets totally rearranged. We stop asking “what is required of me” and start asking “what is available to me.” We move from searching for the minimum standard to searching for the highest expression of love.
5. When we are actively pursuing God, He is given the opportunity to breathe on the things that He has already planted in us that He has for us.

6. When our hearts are stirred to seek God, we set our sights on a much higher goal than just acceptable service. We start reaching to invite the presence of God in all that we do.

Psalms 101:2 I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. 3 I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me. 4 A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness.

1 Chronicles 22:19 Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God. Therefore arise and build the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the holy articles of God into the house that is to be built for the name of the LORD.”