

## When you seek God's face

Spiritual disciplines give us something that help us seek the face of God. To "seek His face" is to have our inward attention lovingly drawn out towards the idea of God, yes, but more than just the idea of Him. As gift, when we seek Him, God can make us aware of His presence. Our mind is directed simultaneously both in a frontal direction, upward and outward, as well as an inner direction, being drawn inwardly and stirred, an experiencing of Him. We can avoid God's gaze (for now) by diverting our attention to our activities and anxieties—or, we can with trustful confidence, gently give our full attention directly, honestly, right at God, seeking His face. One day we will see Him face to face. On that day we will no longer need acts of faith, Bible reading, fasting, solitude, or prayer. We will be looking at Him eye to eye. There will be no need for a daily "quiet time"—we will live immersed in His visible presence. On that day, efforts over the memorization of key passages of Scripture will just pass away. When we see His smile, that will be enough.

Which is why we now pray. To the mature believer, for the question, "Why pray?" we might as well be asked, "Why breathe?" Prayer is our way of turning our eyes on Jesus. Prayer uploads our soul into the divine presence. Prayer is the way our spirits are bathed in God.

There is nothing at all wrong with asking for things in prayer. God intends for us to do so. Jesus specifically taught us to pray for our daily bread. Similarly, in His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." (Mt 6:7) In other words, bundling more and more projectile prayers, in the hopes that some will stick, is not the way to get the Father's attention. Why not? Because He is already aware AND POISED to take care of our needs.

The way to get what we need from God is to not to light a multitude of candles, but to ask—simply, and in faith. Jesus taught us also to keep asking, standing in faith until we have what we ask. (See the parable of the widow and the unjust judge, Luke 18:1) But standing in faith, continuing to "ask, seek, and knock," is different from "getting enough prayer support," or saying enough "Our Father's" or (with Asian religions) having enough prayer flags or prayer wheels



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spinning to persuade God. We are not trying to force God's hand. We come to Him as our loving Father, depending upon Him, asking for His help, and trusting His sufficiency. We ask, we keep asking, and we wait, fearing not.

Public prayer is a problem. We have all been present at occasions in which prayer was offered as an invocation. The pastor comes to the microphone, and with a deep, intoned voice says "Let us pray." Somehow I suspect that many of those prayers reached only our ears. Especially in these politically correct times, generic public prayers, unlikely to offend anyone, probably reach no one of any real importance, such as God. Jesus was particularly sharp toward those who pray for public attention. "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and the streets, that they may be SEEN OF MEN. Verily I say unto you, they have received their reward." (Mt 6:5) I remember a time when I embarrassed myself with this. It was at a pastors' gathering, made up of various denominations, most of whom were evangelical or pentecostal. As one of the few mainline denominational pastors present, I was asked to lead in prayer. And boy, did I pray! I went on and on, with great fervency, sure I was making a good impression. Afterwards, one of the pastors even complimented me on "the anointing" of my prayer. At the moment, I felt pleased with myself. Some time afterwards, I repented, having realized whose ears I had really reached. Not God's. Well, we live and learn, don't we?

But back to seeking the face of God.

Whatever spiritual disciplines we practice should have as the result our seeking His face. "Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always." (Ps 105:4) Let me pass on a caution borne out of my own

experience. When you complete your discipline, whether worship, or Scripture meditation, or prayer, or fasting, or solitude, or service, have you looked God in the face? Or has it been just a perfunctory performing of religious duty? Is the inward gaze of your mind extended out toward God in that time? Or buried in a swirl of other thoughts? Let me encourage you to ask God for the privilege of seeking His face. Why? Because when you seek His face, you will find Him.

God really is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb 11:6) We approach "the throne of grace" not to hurl our requests at God and then back out, eager to pursue our usual thoughtless activity, but to linger in His presence. How we must hurt God's feelings! We use Him, we treat Him with casualness, we take His blessings for granted, we hardly remember to thank Him, we holler for His help, then getting it, run off on our merry way—my goodness, what a humble, broad-shouldered, patient Being He is! No doubt, this is one reason David said, "I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs." (Ps 69:30)

God is not after worker bees. Yes, we do exert ourselves towards Him. But my experience has shown me that when I take whatever little pressure of will is required for me to seek His face, He reciprocates in vastly greater measure. At a church pot-luck dinner, we do have to get out of our chair, take the plate in hand, walk over to the steaming dishes, and spoon out our portions. No one will do that for us. But good grief, how hard is that? It is not hard to gently turn our thoughts right at God. It is hard to keep them there, but we find, after a little persistence, that we are helped to do so. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He has promised to be found when we seek Him with all our heart. Jesus assured us that our marching orders are to "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Seeking is not meant to be arduous, a "work." It is meant to signal the turning of our soul to God. We seek the face of God so as to orient ourselves towards Him, longing to stay in His sight, flexible to His direction.

So let us go into our "inner chamber" and pray.

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