

DOES YOUR FATHER MISS YOU?

I miss my children. Now that they are grown and established in their own households, their mother and I understand their busy lives with their own kids and jobs. I will sometimes send a text message and receive no answer. Other times I will leave a voice mail, "Hello; this is Dad. Just thinking about you. Wondering how you are doing; is everything okay?" Then maybe a few hours later or the next day I receive a call, "Hey, Dad! Sorry I didn't get back to you sooner. I was all tied up." When I hear their voice, I cannot contain my smile. If I am in the office, I stand up from my desk and walk around. If I am in the grocery store, I stop everything and give them full attention. It's my girl or it's my boy! And they immediately take precedence over all my activities. I am more than happy to stop what I am doing just to talk to them.

Does your Heavenly Father miss you? *"Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number"* (Jeremiah 2:32). Jeremiah was telling Judah that a betrothed maiden is never ashamed of the wedding garments she is making for the day she shall be raptured by her bridegroom. When company comes over to her house, she gladly shows them off with little girl wonder. Why? Because one day this princess will become the queen of her home. And it's all because of the boy she loves. And when that boy comes calling, do you think she is preoccupied? Absolutely not! She anticipates his company. She gets her work done early, just to spend some added time with him. She prepares herself in anticipation. If he likes a certain dress or hairstyle, she is apt to go to any length to look beautiful for the one she loves. If he likes a certain food or dessert, she will take pleasure in making it for him. Company with her beloved is never a chore or an inconvenience. Anything that keeps her from him is considered an inconvenience.

Do you ever wonder why God uses familiar metaphors such as, *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"* (Revelation 2:4) or *"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him"* (Psalm 103:13)? It is because He wants us to get what He is saying. Returning to Jeremiah's analogy, *"...my people have forgotten me days without number"* (Jeremiah 2:32b). I ask you again, does your Heavenly Father miss you? I have preached with my preacher friend, Benny Beckum many

times over the years. God has given him a unique ministry around the world since his wife Dianne died twelve years ago. It is a ministry of calling God's people back to prayer. For twelve years he begins every sermon with this question, "Have you talked to the Father today?"

If you have abandoned the secret place (Psalm 91:1) or perhaps more kindly stated, neglected the secret place, this message is for you. If you have come to the realization that God misses you and you are now missing God, may I share these five simple thoughts with you?

I. Stir Up

Isaiah was concerned that God's rebellious people were going through all kinds of trouble but will not seek God. He said, *"And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities"* (Isaiah 64:7). What a challenge! We should not be waiting for God to drop one more chastening episode in our life to get our attention; we should stir up ourselves to take hold of God.

In my childhood, I considered it a special treat when Mother would put chocolate in my milk. If you ever tried to drink it without stirring it up, the taste was bland and really not so good. But, oh, when we stirred it up, it became a dessert! For many of you, your Christianity has become bland. It is time to take the initiative and stir yourself up. What's missing is the presence of God permeating everything you do. Exodus 33:14 and 15 says, *"And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."* God promised Moses His presence as they traveled on. Moses declared in essence, "If you don't go with us, I am not going." I fear too many churches have become complacent and our members have become satisfied serving God without God manifesting Himself in our midst. This attitude begins first with the individual. Amos addressed it with these words: *"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion..."* (Amos 6:1a). Don't get used to being comfortable without God. Stir up yourself!

II. Turn Off

The older I get, the more I notice interfering sounds competing for my attention. In other words if someone is talking to me, I need to turn off radios, televisions or sounds from my laptop if I am to hear clearly what you are saying

to me. God often speaks to us in that "...still small voice." (I Kings 19:12). If we are caught up in the wind, earthquake and fires of life we will not hear the voice of God. Has it ever occurred to you that God wants to just talk with you? Too often we want God to do something dramatic when He just wants to talk with us.

When we live without the day-by-day interactive fellowship with God we have done what God told Jeremiah, *"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"* (Jeremiah 2:13). Without God's fellowship we are drinking from cisterns that constantly run dry. You are carrying around canteens that have holes when you can live under the spout of the refreshing fountain of God's fellowship! So turn off the interference that is robbing you of the greatest blessing of your life.

III. Turn On

How do we activate the fellowship with God? I remember back in the sixties Timothy Leary, a leader of the misguided hippy movement of the day, said that we should "Turn on, tune in, drop out." He was one of the pied pipers leading youth in a wrong direction.

I made a decision in 1969, that instead of following Mr. Leary's advice, I was going to turn on to Jesus! I was going to tune in to God's Word and drop out of this world that promised me nothing but dead end streets and lies. I built my life around Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). And I don't regret a day, not one day of living for Jesus! The only regret I have is that I didn't do it sooner.

Christianity is not about following the rules. Don't get me wrong; I am all in favor of rules. As a matter of fact, God put ten big ones in the Scriptures. And they are commandments, not suggestions. Have you every wondered what is the main reason God placed these rules in the Bible? Yes, it does make civilization much more civil if we follow those rules. Governments that have any semblance of order have in some way or another followed these rules as a guideline. We should never forget the rules were given for a very specific purpose according to Galatians 3:24, 25: *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."* The rules were given to bring us into personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A good Christian is not a good Christian because he constantly lives under the rule of

the law. He or she has gone above and beyond the law to a life that pleases God because he or she now loves God with all their heart.

What brought you close to Christ? May I encourage you to do again those things that brought you close to Him. Stir up your heart to seek God. Turn off the interference that is keeping you from Him. Turn on to Jesus today and love Him with “...all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength...” (Mark 12:30).

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the name.