



Seek the Lord Twenty-One Days of Prayer Series #2

1 Chronicles 16:11

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Today, we are looking at the theme of seeking the Lord. I want to look at key places in God's Word that tell us to seek God continually—to seek His presence and His face. It can be a difficult topic if we are misunderstanding what it means to seek God. We may hear that and think God is lost, hiding from us, distant from us or that He is not everywhere. Those of you who have been studying God's Word know that one of His attributes is that He is omnipresent—He is everywhere. Yet, we are still commanded to seek Him. Therefore, I want us to think about what that means. Ultimately, I want this to fuel us, drive us and motivate us as we pray today. My desire is for us to cry out to our God and express our complete awareness of our need for Him and dependence upon Him. My desire is that we would cry out to our God and seek Him, both individually and as a people. May we earnestly seek Him.

Old Testament Exhortation

Let's begin with 1 Chronicles 16:11, which says, "*Seek the Lord [Yahweh] and his strength; seek his presence continually!*" Here is a command in Scripture for us to seek God's presence and seek it continually. I do think that if there is someone here who is not trusting God and does not have a relationship with Him, the Bible talks about calling on the name of the Lord (or seeking the Lord) as the beginning of that relationship with Him. In other passages in the Bible, we can see that this only happens because God has sought us. He is seeking us by sending Jesus to come and begin a relationship with us. Only then are we able to seek Him. But it doesn't just say that we seek Him and begin that relationship with Him and that is enough. This command is to seek His presence continually. It is ongoing. That is why we are thinking on this theme. We need to continually seek God and His presence.

Just a few chapters later, 1 Chronicles 22:19 says, “*Now set your mind and heart to seek the Lord your God.*” Set your mind and your heart—your thoughts and affections—on the Lord your God.

Our next verse is an example of David doing this for us. Psalm 63:1 is a picture of him crying out to God, expressing to God that David is seeking Him. David said, “*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*” David claimed the truth that God is his God (“*O God, you are my God...*”). But then he expressed his complete need and dependence on this God. He said, “*Earnestly I seek you...*” There is an intensity and passion here, as David said, “*God, I am earnestly seeking You.*” Then he gave an illustration of thirst, saying, “*My soul thirsts for you...*”

We can all think of times in our lives when we have been thirsty. Many of you know that I don’t enjoy running. It is not something that is fun for me. For much of my life, I have not done it. I had to do it when I was younger and played sports, but since then I don’t. However, in the last two weeks or so, I’ve started a little bit. I’ve been running half of a mile or, at times, even up to a mile. For me, that’s about my limit right now. In those moments, it doesn’t take long for me to be very thirsty and tired. I know that’s not impressive to many of you, but that’s the reality.

This is only a fraction of what David was talking about. He did not simply say, “We run for six minutes and get thirsty.” He said, “*God, I’m thirsting for You as if I am in a desert, a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.*” We can imagine the kind of intensity that was involved there in that kind of thirst. He said, “*God, that is describing the way I need You.*” Our bodies are made to need water and food. Therefore, our bodies tell us when that need arises. In the same way, David said, “*God, that kind of intense longing and need—that kind of desperation—is the way I am approaching You right now.*”

Another psalmist says a similar thing in Psalm 42:1-2, “*As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*” Much of Scripture uses these kinds of analogies: hunger, thirst and longing for the way that we should approach God. It is because we need Him. Jesus told us that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). We desperately need Him.

Look at Isaiah 55:6-9, which says:

*Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,*

*neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

The command is to seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon the Lord while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, because our ways are not God's ways and our thoughts are not His thoughts. We forsake our ways and our thoughts and seek God and His thoughts. We call on Him.

Hosea 10:12 says, "*Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.*"

These are all Old Testament passages, which mean we could be tempted to think, "Maybe this is an Old Testament truth, because God's presence was different then." There was a time when God's tangible presence was seen in the tabernacle and then in the temple. There were times when God's presence was more visible to His people.

However, we can say we know God's omnipresence has always existed. It was David who said in Psalm 139, "Where can I go from Your presence? Where can I flee? If I were to go up into the skies, You are there. If I were to go down into the depths, You are there. If I go to the east, You are there. If I go to the west, You are there." David was saying, "There is nowhere I can go to escape You, God, because You are everywhere. Your Spirit is everywhere."

Yet, this same man, who was inspired by God, prayed in Psalm 63, "God, I earnestly seek You and Your presence. I thirst for You." This means we need to understand that God is everywhere and is here now, but we are also called and commanded to seek His presence. I think it is helpful for us to begin to understand what this means. It is not that God is hidden, gone or far away. He is here. Yet, in our pursuit of Him and in our relationship with Him, things can begin to dull that pursuit. In the way that we long for Him, think on Him or call out to Him in prayer, things can hide His face from us and we can go looking other places.

New Testament Exhortation

God was in the tabernacle and in the temple, then Jesus came. Jesus is the very visible expression where God became man. His name, Immanuel, means "God with us." God was here. Jesus said, "It's better for Me to go away so I can send My Spirit upon you" (John 16:7). So the Holy Spirit now lives in us and God is with us here. Still, in the New Testament, there are commands for us to seek Him—to seek things that are above and to seek our God.

Colossians 3:1-2 says, *“If then 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.”* Paul was saying, “Since you are raised with Christ and in Christ, and since you have been given new life, seek things above. Pursue these things. Set your mind and your affections on things above.”

Hebrews 4:16 says, *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

Hebrews 11:6 says, *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”*

James 4:8a says, *“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”*

Three Truths

This is God’s Word for us. As we go into a time of prayer, I want us to think of three areas or three truths that come out of these verses. One is the simple command for us to leave today believing that we are commanded by God to seek Him continually. We may doubt or think, “He is always here and always present,” but we cannot dismiss these commands from our God to seek Him continually. We must seek Him earnestly and desire Him. We must acknowledge our need for Him. Seeking God continually is something we are called by God to do. God commands us to do this and we must obey.

Continually seeking God is difficult, so I want to look at two things from these passages that may bring some clarity. What does that mean? I think we see the first one in Isaiah 55:6: *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”* The parallelism of those two phrases shows that to seek God means to call on Him—to cry out to Him. *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”*

We are going to do that today. We are going to cry out to our God and express our dependence on Him. We will plead for Him. Our example is found in the Psalms and many of these prayers. As people of God cry out to God, they ask Him to act. They ask Him to be there. They ask Him to come and make His presence known. Therefore, we do that. We express our need for God.

This command for us to call on our God does not mean that we have to have everything worded correctly. It doesn’t mean that we have to say things that sound like the person next to us. It doesn’t mean to sound like we have been practicing this for years. What God is asking us to do in seeking Him is to cry out to Him and say, “God, I need You. We need You. God, we desperately need You today.” And that could be it. That could be a very strong prayer of

dependence and faith on your God. So seeking God is at least calling on Him, or crying out to Him.

However, I think there is another aspect of what it means to seek God. We see this back in 1 Chronicles 22:19: *“Now set your mind and heart to seek the Lord your God.”* It is that same kind of phrasing that Paul uses in Colossians 3:1-2, where it says, *“If then 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.”*

The word “mind” in the New Testament also has the idea of affections. It is similar to this Old Testament verse that speaks of setting our minds and hearts—our affections or the things that we love—on God. It is thinking on Him and His Word and being in the presence of God’s people—studying His Word or singing together. These are all means by which we can set our minds on God and the things above.

As we seek Him, we call on Him; we plead with Him; we cry out to Him; and we set our thinking and our affections on Him.

How Sin Affects Us as We Seek God

I want to close by addressing how sin affects our seeking God. Isaiah 55:6-7 says, *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.”*

After Paul talks about seeking and setting our minds on things above in Colossians 3:1-2, he goes on to say, *“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you,”* and lists sins that we should be putting to death. I think it’s helpful for us to be aware of the temptation that the pleasure and satisfaction of sin dulls our seeking of God. As we pursue satisfaction in our sin and things outside of God, it inhibits our view of God. It is not that God runs from us. However, as we pursue these things, we are not pursuing God. We are not pursuing Him or thinking on Him. As we find satisfaction in these things, we are less likely to go to God for satisfaction. So we must be aware that sin has this kind of affect on us. Therefore, we are called to set these things aside as we seek Him.

I want to focus on the flipside of that as well. Just as sin’s pleasures dull our hunger for God, so can Satan’s condemnation. When we sin, the guilt comes. The condemnation comes. The accusations come. We begin to think, “God doesn’t want me. I can’t go to God or pray to Him right now. He knows what I’ve done. He knows who I am.” You think God doesn’t want you, or you need to at least change and do better for a while before going to Him. We begin to

step away from God because of our guilt and condemnation. These passages warn us about that, but they give us hope as well.

Toward the end of this passage in Isaiah, it says, *“Let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”* There is a promise here. He will abundantly pardon.

Again, in our Colossians passage, Paul says, *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above...”* It doesn’t say, “Seek things above so that you will be raised with Christ.” It doesn’t say, “Seek things above so that God will love you.” It says, “Since you have been saved and have been raised with Christ—since your position in Christ is already true—seek God.”

Finally, this Hebrews passage tops it off in 4:16, where it says, *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace...”* We draw near to God with confidence, not because of who we are but because of what He has done for us. We *“draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

With confidence, we come to our God because He is a merciful God. We are not seeking God today so that He will love us; we are seeking Him because He loves us. We are not seeking Him in order to earn His favor; we are seeking Him because He is the only One Who is worthy to be sought. Therefore, we come to Him, cry out to Him, call on Him and seek Him. And He will be near. He will draw near. He will be found. He will draw us into Himself and into a closer relationship with Him.

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