

SPIRITUAL GROWTH
INTIMACY WITH GOD

1. RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE

1. Why we need to know him

God has planted in us the desire to know him

There is no satisfaction in this world without knowing him without knowing God

We will forever be hungry and poor but the Lord has been speaking to us and emphasizing the importance of maturity which leads to the intimacy which is today's subject.

The incredible importance of *knowing* God

Inspiration for today has been The CJ City Series on growing.

Can we turn to Matthew 7

Matthew 7

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, .."

1. We need not a head knowledge but a heart knowledge : a whole heart...and
2. To be a disciple not an admirer ..and a whole hearted disciple not just any old disciple, single minded.

I have found that it is not enough to know about God : the word of the Lord is to stop seeking his hands but seek his face. Not to seek his benefits but to seek him. The difference between an admirer and a disciple.

Here is a story that helped me distinguish the difference..

Clarence Jordan was the founder of the Koinonia Farm near Americus, Georgia. It was set up to be an interracial community before anyone knew what civil rights were all about. Jordan himself was a pacifist as well as an integrationist and thus was not a popular figure in Georgia, even though he came from a prominent family. The Koinonia Farm, by its very nature, was controversial and, of course, it was in trouble. In the early fifties Clarence approached his brother Robert Jordan (later a state senator and justice of the Georgia Supreme Court) to ask him to represent legally the Koinonia Farm. They were having trouble getting LP gas delivered for heating during the winter even though it was against the law not to deliver gas. Clarence thought Robert could do much through a phone call. However, Robert responded to Clarence's request:

Clarence, I can't do that. You know my political aspirations. Why, if I represented you, I might lose my job, my house, everything I've got."

"We might lose everything too, Bob."

"It's different for you."

"Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the church on the same Sunday, as boys. I expect when we came forward the preacher asked me about the same question he did you. He asked me, 'Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?' And I said, 'Yes.' What did you say?"

"I follow Jesus, Clarence, up to a point."

"Could that point by any chance be—the cross?"

"That's right. I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I'm not getting myself crucified."

"Then I don't believe you're a disciple. You're an admirer of Jesus, but not a disciple of his. I think you ought to go back to the church you belong to, and tell them you're an admirer, not a disciple."

I don't want anyone to be able to say that about me ; do you ? An admirer ? A bystander ? No I want them to say he got stuck in man. (he did as God asked, more precisely...)

2. DISMANTLING THE BARRIERS

Are we still putting up defences or barriers ?

Whoever defends himself will have only himself for a defender : none other but let him come defenceless before the Lord and he will have for his defender none other than God himself. So to grow we need to come defenceless before God, and throw ourselves into his arms. Keeping in kind Piers illustration of the childrens first race they are wandering all over the place and falling down but their parents are cheering every move. Recognise this morning that Gods desire to give himself for you is greater than your desire to lay hold of him. But there is work to be done we do have to get into that race.

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SLIDE 2

Getting rid of the barriers : we have heard Latana speak on unforgiveness, unconfessed sin are barriers to growth.

There are also barriers that really are not so obvious but they are a barrier

Pride

Spurgeon told the story of the wise man who was travelling in the east and came suddenly on a beautiful valley with a stream running through it. The sun was shining on the stream and the water looked pure and beautiful. As he descended he saw a shepherd filtering the water for his sheep. Why are you doing this he asked. The water is so filthy my flock wont drink it so I am obliged to filter it little by little he replied . It was hard work and the shepherd looked worn out. The wise man asked him to come with him on a journey towards the place the stream rose and after some distance they discovered the source. They saw flocks of wild birds flowing off as they approached. They found the source which was clean but these birds kept coming in and disturbing the stream kicking up mud so that the water was immediately muddy. The wise man counseled the shepherd to guard the source of the stream and keep the wild beasts away and the stream will flow of itself pure and clear and you will no longer need to go through this filtering process.."

So we should seek God to purify our hearts from pride to make us humble. Make the tree good and the fruit shall be good..make the

fountain pure and the stream shall be sweet. Then we are charged to guard our hearts lest this creep back in.

Unbelief Pride goes hand in hand with unbelief. At root we are saying. Not sure about Gods promises 100 % I will keep a foot in both camps. By not yielding to him that is exactly what we are saying.

Having a foot in both camps will make us miserable, if our hearts our temples with idols god cannot come in and growth stops. Where growth stops the people start dying from lack of knowledge.

Reading Kings on holiday I was struck by this :

2 Kings 10

31 But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel *with all his heart:* (italics mine)for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.

Successive Kings kept their idols in a corner King Azah I will use a bronze altar for seeking guidance .." (2 kings 16.15)

Contrast with Elijah h who trusted God from the brook Cherithand the ravens fed him (1Kings 17)

To Zarephath, where God told him to go to the widwow... and inspired trust in those around him.
The point was in following Elijah experienced just how faithful God was.

Jesus wanted us never to forget this story.
He used it as a picture of his lasting grace.
He recalls that Elijah went to this widow at the command of God in Luke 4:25-26

After that obedience and trust came the great events on Mount Carmel later in chapter 18 which are just incredible examples of how God can move through one who trust absolutely.

Do you depend on God or something else
Have you got a foot in both camps
Is it stopping you growing
If the spirit is speaking to you I think I have a thought for you.
If you have been an admirer and not a disciple :

Put your trust in him alone.

Don't wait until he shows you what he could have done for you.

Dont wait until he demonstrates that there was never any need for these idols, how silly they were, how pointless our pride and lack of trust was. All it did was lead us a away from God when he was longing to know us and for us to grow in this knowledge.

Make no mistake God is going to wipe every tear away...remember the brook did run dry on Eijah he had to trust and then humble himself to go to the widow in in humility before the great miracles came..

Trust him now before the river of his grace overwhelms you. Whatever has happened to you, whatever storms life has brought or may bring ...imagine God wiping the very tears from your eye and restoring ..how will we feel then for keeping our unbelief in a corner ?

How will we feel about the pointless little idols we have kept in our temples...

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3. HOW WE CAN GROW

We have great series on growing and there are some great tools already that others have shared.

1. Practising the Presence of God
2. Prayer
3. Bible as Sword
4. **Linked to a change of attitude : a desire to abandon the old and put on the new...**

Bruce added the dimension of employing these in following hard after God... David declares to the Lord in Psalm 63:8, "My soul follows hard after you: your right hand upholds me."

FOLLOWING HARD AFTER GOD IS GOING TO TAKE OUR WHOLE STRENGTH AND SOUL, AND OUR WHOLE MIND AND HEART.

When Tiger Woods won the four major titles in one calendar year do you think he was half hearted ? Was his heart in it ? Did he concentrate.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT :
A WAY TO KNOW AND GROW.

Matthew 22: 37-39

37 Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.

If we think about it is going to be hard to fulfil this commandment if we are not abandoned to self.

With all your heart

The rich ruler failed because his heart was elsewhere

God will help a willing heart

Do we need to go back to the source and get rid of pride barriers to God get the heart pure before God and focussed on him

Is the aim of our heart to live a life pleasing to God or do we have other things like the rich ruler. If we are yearning to grow God will show us those other things. He might be doing this right now through his Spirit. The trouble with holding back is we are left with this foot in both camps. Ask God to change your heart.

We must be whole hearted not half hearted. A whole heart is contrasted with a divided one in Hosea Undivided affections like Caleb who "followed the Lord wholeheartedly.." (Deut 1.36)

With your soul

Get rid of self and you will move from unbelief to belief
Do this as we have heard by being honest and open with God He will honour this

With all your strength

He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly (2 Cor 9.6)
Pour all your strength into knowing him
Choose to follow and keep following
Lay down pride : a daily act of worship
Seek ye first his kingdom

Mind

Single minded in our pursuit of God not double minded (James 1.8)

If you keep faith with God never doubt that he will keep faith with you because he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. He can be our all.

Being ambitious for knowing God means being ambitious for holiness. Getting the foot out of both camps as we have heard in 2 Cor 6.17. Touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you..

How do we get to know God ?

We have heard :
We need to spend time with him
We have heard about prayer and bible reading, practicing his presence which shifts our focus from self to God)

Writing those bible truths on our hearts..

We need to remove the barriers : pride approach him with humility.

We need to focus on Christ concentrate on your walk with the Lord :

We must be whole hearted not half hearted

Single minded in our pursuit of God not double minded

Pour all your strength into knowing him

Choose to follow and keep following

To get to know him he needs to become our all in all..no other gods no other idols with our hearts set on him and our minds soul and strength focussed on him.

We need to make up our minds to seek satisfaction only in doing his will.

Remember God has done some very costly things to enable us to draw near to him..the blood of Jesus has been shed so that the holiness of God will not consume you but thrill you.

Do not settle for a life remote from God as a Christian..

If you keep faith with God never doubt that he will keep faith with you because he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. He can be our all.

We have also heard about persistence, Bruce talked about David following hard after God. (Some of the rest of this come from The God chasers a book by Paster Tommy Tenny)

The bible exhorts us seek God in prayer even when there is no immediate reply (Luke 18 1-8). Wait on him. Ask him to "ruin everything that isn't of you".

Job was a God chaser David as we have heard was one, Paul was one too (that I might know him) these are people whose relentless passionate pursuit of Christ led them to appear foolish in the eyes of the world and others. Yet having tasted his goodness could be satisfied with nothing less.

Here is the conclusion : When you pursue God with your heart soul and strength he will turn and meet you and you will come out of it ruined for this world."

PRAYERS

