

ADVANCING GOD'S KINGDOM: DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

Introduction:

- Needless to say, we are living in times of tremendous spiritual, political, and economic upheaval. Many natural disasters have been occurring in the World. We see a lot of evidence of moral decline. These are signs of the times (Luke 21:25-28).
- All of these situations should serve as a “wake up call” for the Body of Christ (Luke 21:34-36). The conditions in our world should certainly motivate us to draw near to God.
- These days provide the Church of Jesus Christ a unique opportunity to demonstrate God’s love and Christian character. We are called to “*shine as lights*” (Matthew 5:14-16; Philippians 2:12-16). Drawing near to God will help us to “*let our light shine.*”
- In spite of the spiritual darkness and world-wide challenges, GOD’S KINGDOM IS ADVANCING! God’s Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom and will endure (Hebrews 12:28).
- Drawing near to God is a huge key to enduring in these troubled times. In the midst of the battles of life, only those who draw near to God will have calm assurance and clear discernment on how to live as overcomers in this broken world.
- As leaders and members in Christian ministry, it’s very easy to get so busy that we fail to take quality time to draw near to God. As a result, one’s life may be filled with frustration, lack of peace, impatience, fear, and lack of direction. This is NOT God’s will!
- Being in communion with God should be as important as the air we breathe.
- “Drawing near to God” simply means that we live with a continual awareness of God’s presence in our life and take quality time to commune and fellowship with Him.

Objectives of this lesson:

- 1) Discover the basic foundation for drawing near to God
- 2) Review God's invitation to draw near to Himself
- 3) Know and embrace the benefits of drawing near to God
- 4) Be aware of obstacles to drawing near to God
- 5) Learn practical ways to draw near to God
- 6) Be refreshed, motivated, and encouraged by the Holy Spirit to pursue more passionately a greater communion and fellowship with the Lord
- 7) Learn from one another how to pursue communion and fellowship with the Heavenly Father

A. BASIC FOUNDATION FOR DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

1. Acknowledge God's _____ and our lack of _____ about Him -Job 36:26-33. It's easy to become arrogant and think we don't need to learn more about God or commune with him in a special way. As a result, it's tempting to become passive in our pursuit of drawing near to God.
2. Realize that God wants to be _____ – He revealed Himself to Adam, Moses, Abraham, and the prophets. His ultimate revelation was through Jesus Christ. *"He who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). Yes, as little and insignificant that we may seem in contrast to the vast universe, God does care about us personally (Matthew 5:25-24).
3. Know that God _____ unconditionally – Jeremiah 31:3-4; 20; Hosea 11:1-8 (Note the love of the Father toward His wayward people). Romans 5: 6-8 shows how much love God has toward us. **We don't pursue God to earn His favor.** That is dead works. We pursue Him because we love Him. We have deep gratitude for the marvelous love He has for us.

B. GOD'S INVITATION TO DRAW NEAR

1. God gives a _____ with a _____ (James 4:4-10).
2. Jesus Christ desires _____ with us (Revelation 3:20).
3. God invites us to true _____ (Isaiah 55:1-3).

C. TEN IMPORTANT REASONS FOR DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

By making a conscience effort to draw near to God I will...

1. Live a _____ life– As believers in Jesus Christ, victorious living should be our normal way of living, not the exception (Romans 5:17). In drawing near to God we become more knowledgeable of God’s promises and will live securely in them.

“One on God's side is a majority.” -- Wendell Phillips

2. Live a _____ life – We are called to be fruitful (John 15:1-8). We can’t produce fruit apart from being connected to the True Vine. That connection comes through a vital communion and relationship with the Father.
3. Live a _____ life – Holiness is achieved by God’s grace (II Timothy 1:8-10). As we draw near to God, His character and holiness will permeate our life.
4. Live a _____ life– The more we live in communion and fellowship with Christ, the more likely we will take on his “yoke” (Matthew 11:29-30). As a result our life will be a living demonstration of God’s peace and grace.

“Purity happens because of being close to God! Don’t wait to draw near to God until after you think you are pure enough. Depend on God to do that for you.”

5. Live a _____ life – Jesus lived in complete union with the Father and demonstrated a life of surrender to God’s will (John 6:38; Luke 22.42). When faced with everyday choices of the human will, living in close communion with the Lord will help us to surrender our will to the Lord’s will.
6. Live a _____ life – (Psalm 25:14; 73:23-24) -So many believers live without purpose and direction. Life is often chaotic, hectic, and frustrating. When we draw near to God, we get His plan of action for the day. Jesus is our example (Mark 1:35-39). Even though we might have good ideas or plans, we must ask ourselves the question, “Is this what I think I should do or is it what **GOD** wants me to do?”

7. Live a _____ life – “In God’s presence there is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). Living in the awareness of God’s presence and spending quality time with Him, brings great joy into one’s life, even in the midst of trials.

8. Live a _____ life – David experienced God’s protection in difficult times (Psalm 18:6, 16-19; 32:7; 61:1-4). This is yet another example of God’s love for us as His people. Sometimes when we don’t get an immediate result we may question his help. God allows us to pass through tests to rely fully on Him.

9. Live a _____ life – David was God focused—his hope was in the Lord (Psalm 33:20-22). As a result, he trusted God for “*his unfailing love to rest upon him.*” To experience his love resting on us will result in: comfort, peace; calmness; reassurance; security, joy....

10. Live a _____ life – “*Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame*” (Psalm 34:4-5) – As we draw near to God, we develop a growing confidence in His love for us. We don’t allow the lies of Satan to defeat or discourage us and cause us to live in shame. As we trust in God, old wounds are healed, we find deliverance, and we become radiant Kingdom citizens! Hallelujah!

For reflection and action:

-Following each main point above, place a number from 1 to 10 (*1 = little victory and 10 = great victory*) that would help to evaluate your current status as it relates to your communion with the Lord.

-What areas am I experiencing victory? What areas do I need to grow in?

D. OBSTACLES TO DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

1. Living with _____ consciousness rather than _____ consciousness. Some believers live with an almost constant state of guilt resulting in a mentality that they do not qualify to draw near to God. They feel they are too unholy. The Holy Spirit will convict us of sin. But, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (I John 1:9; Romans 8:1).

How to overcome this obstacle?

- a) Focus on what God has _____ for you through the cross that enables you to overcome sin and live in spiritual victory.
 - b) Thank God daily for His _____ and the cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ.
2. Wrong _____ and _____ (Psalm 15). David lists eleven qualifications in Psalms 15 to “*dwelling in God’s sanctuary.*” Doing the opposite of these qualifications, of course, would be an obstacle to drawing near to God. Yes, God covers our sin by the blood of Jesus to all who believe. But, we need to be aware of specific areas in our life where our attitudes or actions are not in alignment with God’s will and confess it as sin.

How to overcome this obstacle?

- a) Repent when we are out of _____ of doing God’s will.
 - b) Depend on God’s grace to obey His _____ for coming into His presence.
3. Spiritual _____. The churches in Revelation experienced spiritual indifference: Ephesus – “*You have forsaken your first love*” (Revelation 2:4; Sardis – “*You have a reputation of being alive but are dead. Wake up...*” (3:1b, 2a); Laodicea – “*You say you are rich and need nothing...you are wretched, poor, blind, and naked*” (3:17). If a person is spending hours a day in watching TV, communicating on and reading Face Book, casual talking on the phone, (*all of these things O.K. if done in moderation*) but is only taking a few minutes to read the Bible and pray, this would be an example of spiritual indifference.

How to overcome this obstacle?

- a) _____ – This is what Jesus said to the churches.
 - b) Ask God for a _____ desire to commune with Him (see Psalm 42:1-2).
4. _____ – Indicators of pride as it relates to “*drawing near to God*” include the following: 1) –Finding it difficult to say “I’m sorry” to God or to others; 2) – Feeling of superiority, that I’m better than others (Luke 18:9-14); 3) Thinking I can do things in my own strength without taking time to meet with God.

How to overcome this obstacle?

- a) Repent of _____ thinking, attitude and actions.
 - b) Ask God for a spirit of _____
5. Lack of _____ or _____ in God's invitation to draw near – Some people have a low opinion of their ability to draw near to God. They want the pastor or their spouse to draw near and hope they will be the beneficiaries of their prayers. God's invitation to come into His presence is for everyone (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-23).

How to overcome this obstacle?

- a) Renounce the _____ of Satan that tell us we are not qualified to enter into God's presence.
 - b) Be _____ in your requests to God and testify to His specific answers, small or large.
6. _____ and _____ of this world – One of the greatest tools of Satan to keep us from a growing relationship with God is busyness (*even good work*) and the daily cares of this world. Jesus warned us concerning this matter in (Matthew 13:22).

How to overcome this obstacle?

- a) Repent of incorrect priorities
- b) Evaluate and rearrange your priorities

For reflection and action:

- What obstacle do I struggle with the most in my desire to draw near to God?
- What steps am I willing to take to overcome these obstacles?

E. PRACTICAL WAYS TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD

Drawing near to God is a life-long process. Remember, we don't draw near to earn God's favor or love. God loves us unconditionally. *We draw near because we want to develop a growing relationship with Him.* Just as developing human relationships take an investment of time, (examples: marriage; family; church) so it is in our relationship with God. We should live with a constant awareness that God is with us as has been mentioned in many Scriptures we looked at today.

We should also develop spiritual disciplines that will help to enhance our relationship with the Lord. These disciplines or spiritual habits take time but the investment of time pays off as we discussed in Point C above, "Ten Reasons for Drawing Near to God." Below is a list of some practical ways to draw near to God.

1. _____ – Psalm 119 is devoted exclusively to the importance of understanding God's Word. It is the longest chapter in the Bible and is the exact middle of the Bible. The very first verse of Psalm 119 says, "*Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.*" We cannot walk according to His Word if we don't know what it says or only read it casually or occasionally. God says, "*Is not my Word like a fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces*" (Jeremiah 23:29). Study the word for yourself and discover more reasons why the Word is so important. Begin with Psalm 119.

Now, let's look at some practical ways to read the Word:

- a) Select a translation that you can understand and enjoy.
- b) Read a few verses and meditate on them and/or a larger section of Scripture.
- c) Find a reading guide if you want to read through the Bible in a year.
- d) Underline verses that are meaningful to you.
- e) Pray before you read, asking God to help you to understand His Word.
- f) Write verses on an index card that are meaningful to you...promises that help you in a certain situation you are facing.
- g) Listen to the Bible on the road if you are limited in your time because of work schedule.

2. _____ - Prayer is as vital to the Christian life as the air we breathe. Jesus, the Son of God, saw the need to pray (Luke 5:16; 11:1; 22:39-44). This section is not a teaching on prayer but rather gives some helpful ideas how to keep your prayer life alive.

- a) Pray to God in the manner you talk to a friend. Sometimes you speak calmly and other times with more intensity, depending on the situation.
- b) Find a private place to pray so that you can focus on your prayers.
- c) Pray with an audible voice – it helps with the concentration.
- d) Pray when you walk or drive.

- e) Make a list of specific persons or situations that you want to pray for. You can divide them up for different days.
 - f) Remember, prayer is communication with God. Don't just talk to him. Also, be quiet and let him speak to you. (More on this later).
3. _____ (if you so choose)
- a) Use a devotional guide such as Daily Bread to at least get started with a quiet time with the Lord.
 - b) Expand beyond the guide to dig deeper into the Word.
4. _____ – One of the biggest deceptions of Satan is that we as believers cannot hear God speak to us. Most likely, God is not going to speak to us in an audible voice. God speaks to us through His Word. But, when we take time to listen to God, He can speak specific words of comfort, direction, and wisdom to us. Jesus said His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:4). One of the best ways to do this is the following:
- a) Write on a paper a question you have for God and ask Him, “What do you say---concerning a situation, etc.?”
 - b) Begin to write and you will be amazed how the Holy Spirit will lead you to write what God is saying back to you.
 - c) Be aware that God will never speak to you something that is contrary to His Holy Word.
5. _____ – You can keep a journal (a notebook) for the following reasons:
- a) Write verses that are meaningful to you.
 - b) Write what God has spoken to you.
 - c) Take a verse and ask God how you can apply this verse to your life. You can write, “This verse means that I will...”
 - d) Express your feelings to God about your current situation in life
6. _____ – “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (II Timothy 2:15 - KJV). Bible study is going further than just reading the Bible. A simple guide to studying the Bible can include the following:
- a) Observe (*words, context, situation, persons, etc.*); interpret (*what is the meaning in the context, etc.*); application (*how do I apply this*

passage to my life?). There are many good books that can give help in this kind of Bible study.

- b) Do a word study. The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible is very helpful for doing a word study.
- c) Buy a Bible Study book. There are numerous options that can help you study a book of the Bible or other subjects.

7. _____ – Sometimes our best intentions go unfulfilled because of a lack of accountability. Accountability is a practical way of helping to motivate us to keep our goals. In being accountable, I will do the following:

- a) Set spiritual goals you want to accomplish and share them with a person you want to report to.
- b) Establish how often you want to report to the person.
- c) Evaluate your spiritual progress and development and discuss with your accountability partner or person you report to.

8. _____ – While our priority should be in reading God's Word, there are also helpful books and articles that we can benefit from reading. A common reason people don't read is because they claim they don't have time. Perhaps a way to overcome this dilemma is to do the following:

- a) Evaluate how you are using your time
- b) Set a goal to read a chapter or two a day at least five times a week

9. _____ – It should be a high priority to attend and actively participate in congregational church life. In this way our spiritual life will be nurtured (Hebrews 10:25).

For reflection and action:

- In your personal life, what spiritual disciplines have you found most helpful?
- Which spiritual disciplines would you like to grow in?
- What steps do you believe the Holy Spirit is asking you to take to grow in your spiritual disciplines?

F. SIX EVIDENCES OF CLOSE COMMUNION WITH FATHER GOD

In Psalm 63:1-8, we can see at least six evidences that should characterize a person's life that has a close communion with God. In this passage of Scripture, David is in the desert of Judah. It probably is one of the times he is fleeing from Saul. - I Samuel 23:14 – *“David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.”*

To have evidence of close communion with the Father, it means that I will, above everything else (*based on this Psalm and the life of David*) ...

1. Desire God fully – Verses 1-2
2. Worship and esteem God continually – Verses 3-4
3. Find satisfaction in God alone – Verse 5
4. Have creative communion with God – Verse 6
5. Have joyful dependence on God – Verse 7-8
6. View God as my Victor – Verses 9-11)

G. HOW TO DEVELOP A HOLY PASSION FOR THE LORD

-“A **wish** is a passive mental thought pattern with the expectation of seeing fulfillment sometime in the future.”

-“A **desire** is an active, strong willed effort to bring into fulfillment the expected event or answer.”

-“A **passion** is a driving force of energy that shapes a person's lifestyle, thoughts and actions until that person sees a total fulfillment of what they are pursuing.”
(Quotes from Apostolic Strategies by Dr. Jonathan David.)

How could our close communion with the Lord be defined? Do we **wish** it were better? Do we **desire** it to be better? Or, do we have a **passion** for a closer communion with the Lord?

HOW TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A HOLY PASSION FOR CLOSE COMMUNION WITH GOD

1. _____ – James 4:2 – *“You do not have, because you do not ask God.”* Matthew 7:7 - *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”* (Example of David – Psalm 84:1-2)
2. _____ – It’s very easy to allow the earthly passions to supersede the presence of God in our life.
-We must ask God to expose any “idols” in our life that hinder our pursuit of God.
-This involves humility and repentance of anything that hinders our passionate relationship with God.
- I Corinthians 15:31 –*“I die every day-- I mean that, brothers-- just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
3. _____ – It’s God’s grace or power that enables us to pursue God’s presence with passion. We can’t grow in discipline to seek the Lord or overcome idols without His grace (Romans 5:17).
4. _____ – A life full of the Holy Spirit will have a passionate desire for God. (Example – Acts 2:42-47)
5. _____ – David had one desire---
The Lord (Psalm 73:23-26).

For reflection and action:

- On a scale from 1 to 10, what is my passion level for having a close communion with God?
- How is God specifically calling me to develop and maintain a passion for Him?
- What steps will I take to develop this?

Conclusion:

- The Lord is looking for people fully devoted to Him. The Apostle Paul is an example of one who was fully devoted to the Lord – *“I want to know Christ...”* (Philippians 3:10-16). No obstacles in life would stop him from pursuing that goal. Ultimately, it cost him his life. The reality of dying for his faith didn’t bother Paul because he also said, *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21). We’ve also seen examples from the life of David who had a passion for the Lord.
- In the midst of our daily life that is often full of activity, busyness, noise, constant demands, pressures, stress, interruptions, ...a life that offers pleasure and success if we “buy this or do that,”...the Lord of the universe says to us, **“BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD”** (Psalm 46:10). Are we willing to take the time to pause and pursue a passionate and close communion with our Creator? Remember, “He’s knocking at our door” (Revelation 3:20). He won’t force His way in. It’s our choice to invite Him into our heart and life.
- As we make an intentional effort to draw near to God in an ever-increasing way, we will experience His joy, peace, grace, love, contentment, direction, and all His rich blessings overflowing in our life. We will bear fruit for His Glory! HIS KINGDOM WILL ADVANCE!

Master copies of this teaching (teacher and student) are available for teaching by contacting Bishop Henry Buckwalter at henrymillieb@verizon.net