

Session 2 Pursuing the Knowledge of God

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 2:10. “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except for the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the things of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:10-12).

1 Corinthians 2:11. “No one knows the thoughts of a man except for the spirit of that man; even so, no one knows the thoughts of God except for the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11, paraphrased).

Verse 10 pictures the Spirit of God as searching everything—yes, even the deep things of God. The NASB says, “the depths of God,” or the depths of God’s being. The Spirit of God is pictured as searching. I don’t really like the word *searching*. Maybe the Lord says, “Well, that’s the word I put there,” so, sorry Lord. I have trouble thinking of God searching God, because God knows God. I don’t exactly know what that word *searching* means. It’s kind of an interesting concept. I use the word *discerning*. The Holy Spirit is discerning the depths of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit being equally God. The Holy Spirit, who is the One inspiring this to Paul, depicts Himself as *searching* or *discerning* the depths of God’s being. The reason He does this is to reveal these things to us (1 Cor. 2:10). He says, “I have discerned the very glory of the Father in order to reveal it to you.”

It says the same thing in verse 12: “That we might know the things that have been freely given to us.” The things speak of more than events. The Spirit reveals the depths of God’s being to us.

1 Corinthians 2:9 gives us the beginning context. “Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has there ever even entered into the heart of a human being the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9, paraphrased). There are things that, again, are but a representation of the heart that planned the things. Often in Scripture the correlation is that we meditate on the things and we meditate on the event in order to lead us back to the heart that planned the event, or the author of the event, which of course is God.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL BRING US INTO THE DEPTHS OF GOD’S HEART

This is like Revelation 1:1. We meditate on the things that will happen to know the heart that’s the author of the things. There are things that are so glorious that they have never entered into a human heart. In our wildest dreams—think Walt Disney plus Steven Spielberg times ten—we have never, ever imagined the things that come out of the heart of the author and creator of these things.

This is the area called “the depths of God.” The Holy Spirit wants to give us these deep truths of the personality of God. There’s a verse in Revelation where Jesus makes a promise to one of the churches in Asia. The promise is that He would give us the deep things of God. The deep things of God pertain most to the revealing of the passion and pleasure of God’s heart, the splendor and the beauty of God’s heart. We have X amount of time on planet earth, and we have time, money, and energy, and the Holy Spirit is our escort. He says, “I really will reveal these things to you if you really do want them, but I’ll not give them to you if you don’t want them.”

The principle that God operates on is that He gives salvation freely. As a matter of fact, He chases us down to the ends of the earth; He ambushes us; He boxes us into a corner. We don't want salvation, but He ambushes us so that we finally give in and say, "OK, OK, OK, I want salvation."

Then a few years later we tell the story, "I was searching for God and I found Him," and the Father looks at the Son and says, "Do You remember it that way?"

He says, "No, I think We were searching for him. He wasn't really searching for Us. As a matter of fact he was quite resistant for the first five years, and then there was a space of a few years where he was open. I guess that's the part he's talking about where he was searching for Us."

The story will be told very differently in eternity. I hear men say, "Well, I was searching for God for a few years..." and that's about stage three of God's ambush of their life. We interpret it as though we were searching for God and found Him. God ambushes us; He boxes us into a corner and He gives us salvation freely and we didn't even want it, and He makes us willing. Then, now that we have the gift of salvation and the gift of eternal life, the principle is very different. He no longer gives to us on the basis of need and compassion; He gives to us on the basis of hunger. He says, "Now I will give to you according to hunger." For many people, that ravishing hunger doesn't begin until the day of eternity. For the wise ones of the earth, that ravishing hunger begins even while they're on the earth.

God says, "According to your hunger I will give to you."

THE GREAT LOVER OF THE AGES GIVES MOST TO THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY

Ask questions; ask me to repeat or slow down. I actually like the questions because it helps me clarify my own thinking. Yes, even the fact that He gives on the basis of hunger doesn't contradict His love. Do you understand? He gives freely when you're not hungry in order to get you saved, and from then on He gives according to your desire. Maybe a better word than *hunger* is the word *desire*, but another, better term than *desire* would be, "your love for Him." In other words, the Lover unveils Himself in the context of desiring love. You know, to the heart of one who loves Him more, He says, "I will give you more."

Again I appreciate you asking the question, because that helps me clarify my own language. The fact that God withholds until there's hunger means that the great Lover of all ages gives most in the context of those who love and are hungry for Him. There are many passages in the New Testament that tell us that spiritual hunger or desire is the context in which He gives more. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst" (Mt. 5:6). He doesn't throw pearls before swine, meaning He doesn't give valuable things to people who don't count them as valuable (Mt. 7:6). *Swine* doesn't mean that they're evil unbelievers; but a swine doesn't look at a pearl and say, "Oh wow, look at that." A swine looks at a pearl and says, "I can't eat it, so why does it matter?" and tramples on it. That's what swine do to pearls. Swine see no value in a pearl because it isn't something they can eat. A swine with pearls only means that God says, "I don't give valuable things outside of the context of people seeing them as valuable." That's in the context of spiritual hunger.

God gives freely without you even desiring it. He makes us desire salvation. He causes us to desire salvation, and then, from then on, He says, "I will give you more hunger if you want more hunger. If you don't want more hunger, I'll not force you from here on out. I'll not force your hand."

Now I'm thinking of 1 Corinthians 2. The Holy Spirit says, "I have discerned the very depths of God, and the Father has given Me permission to reveal to you what I have studied and discerned. Do you want it?"

OVERCOMING THE STRONGHOLD OF PLEASURE IN THE SOUL OF THE WEST

Again, a certain portion of the Body of Christ is too busy, too preoccupied, and too disinterested in it. They'll get interested in the day of eternity. They'll get very interested, and the journey will continue. I say, "Let's get into the journey now." Why wait until then? Why wait until then?

It seems to me that the Western culture especially has a fearful obsession that we're going to miss out on pleasure. It's an obsession. We can hardly stand to miss a social event or an entertainment or a recreational opportunity, because we're afraid we might miss something. The idea of staying home on a Friday and Saturday night and spending a couple of days in fasting and waiting on the Lord and reading books and searching out things that are hard to understand and difficult to grasp is unbearable. What if we miss a good movie with our friends? That would be an unthinkable loss. We're obsessed with missing out on a little of something that might be pleasurable. It's a real, false stronghold in the minds of the Western world. The rest of the world doesn't think like that, because their lives are so difficult anyway. Their goal is to eat and not starve or get killed in many parts of the earth throughout history. The idea of actually saying no to a little recreation and entertainment, and embarking on a difficult, encumbering, unfamiliar journey of thoughts and concepts about God that we don't grasp easily that takes some repetition and some persevering is painful for us. We think, "Uhh, who wants to do that when we have MTV? Let's go home, turn on the TV and fill our mind with noise and images and sounds, and let's never get quiet and actually go on the journey of the depths of God."

One of the burdens that I have in my heart is a real urgency to challenge people that that obsession with missing out on a little natural, secular pleasure is really not that big of a sacrifice if we actually do it. It takes time and it takes some questing. I think of the metaphor of climbing Mt. Everest. It takes some tenacity, preparation, and earnestness to climb this mountain, but it's worth it because there's treasure up above that's unthinkable.

So the Holy Spirit has things that have never entered into the heart of a man. He has searched the deep things of God. He wants to give them to us. He has the Father's permission. He's waiting to give according to our hunger and desire. It's a lifelong journey that begins in this age, and it goes on through the age to come.

THE LAST INTERCESSORY CRY JESUS MADE ON THE EARTH

Let's turn to John 17, which is the beginning of these notes here. John 17. This is a very interesting passage of Scripture. Why? It's one of the longest recorded intercessory prayers in the Bible. Daniel 9 is a really long one. Isaiah 63-64 is a really long one. I can't think of too many intercessory prayers longer than John 17. This prayer, I think, is even more unique than all of those. Here it is: the Son of God in the flesh. Here He is in His humanity on the earth. He's offering up the last intercessory cry He will make on the earth, and it's recorded for us. That already puts it into a very, very unique category.

He's the eternal Intercessor. I'm thinking of Hebrews 7:25, where Jesus lives forever to make intercession. He's the eternal Intercessor. Jesus was interceding before He became a Man, and He'll intercede forever. He intercedes forever. Through eternity past and present He intercedes for His bride. He was thinking of His bride and interceding for her before He ever purchased her with His blood. Here we have the ultimate Intercessor, the uncreated God, Christ Jesus, stepping out of eternity into time. He's standing on the earth before this incredible

event called “the crucifixion,” and He’s going to give the cry of His heart from eternity one more time. That makes this passage of Scripture one of the holy of holies of the whole Bible.

John 17. Out of eternity, the ultimate Intercessor is going to summarize His cry for His bride. It’s been written down and given to us to study and think on and imitate and understand His heart. This is a fantastic passage of Scripture. It’s one of the places where you say, “Lord, of all the passages of the Bible, when we stand before the Father, we thank You for John 17.” The heart of the Son of God and what He yearned for in private was recorded and given to us. John 17 is worth a lot of diligent study. There are some chapters of the Bible that are worth more attention than other chapters.

There are three basic breakdowns of John 17. Here Jesus is at the Last Supper. In verses 1-5, He prays for Himself. In essence He prays, “Lord, help Me to endure the cross. Help Me through what’s happening tomorrow.”

In John 17:6-19, He’s really praying for the birthing of the early church. He’s praying for the book of Acts church in verses 6-19. You say, “How do you get that?” He’s praying for the foundational ministries. He’s praying for the apostles who will lead it. When He’s praying for them, that’s the same thing as praying for the responsibility entrusted to them. He’s laboring for the birthing of the early church, that these men would have the glory of God on them and that it would be communicated through them. He’s praying that they would be kept throughout their lives from all these things so that they could be the true shepherds of the early church and bring the early church into safety and into wholeness. Really, He’s praying for the birthing of the early church by praying for these twelve.

Then, in verses 20-26, He takes a turn, a change of focus. In verse 20, He’s not praying for the twelve and the early church alone, but for everyone who will hear through the testimony of those who have heard, right down through church history. He’s praying for all those who hear through those who hear.

“THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE, THAT THEY MAY KNOW YOU, THE ONLY TRUE GOD”

Those are the three sections of John 17. In verse 3, look at how Jesus Christ summarizes it. There are so many powerful summary statements. I don’t think John 17 is His word-for-word prayer; I think John 17 is the main points of what He was praying. What He was praying is probably the cream of the crop of what has been in His heart from eternity. It’s coming right to the top. Every phrase is loaded. Probably every phrase could be a book if His heart was fully known. Every single line in John 17 has an eternity of passion and life behind it, far more than we understand in this age.

Look at what He says. He makes this awesome summary statement right here in John 17:3. He says, “This is eternal life, Father, that they may know You” (Jn. 17:3, paraphrased). He says, “The goal of eternal life is the experience of entering into the knowledge of God.” Jesus summarized your purpose for having life and breath on earth, and for living in the eternal city: that you would enter into that experience of the knowledge of God. That’s the essence of eternal life: to go on that journey up the mountain forever into the knowledge of God.

THE MOST TRANSFORMING ISSUE IN LIFE IS RECEIVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

I feel like a novice looking at verse 3. I feel like there are so many sub-departments to that verse. It’s not only the goal of life, but the purpose of life and the power of life. The power of life in this age and the age to come is

in the knowledge of God revealed to our hearts. That's what gives power to life. That's the whole essence of why there's a natural creation: so that they could enter into the experience of knowing God.

I maintain my original point: the most transforming issue in life is receiving the knowledge of God. There's nothing that transforms us like this. It's the most deficient thing, because Satan is attacking it all the time. When it says, "to know God," there's so much more involved in that than just receiving information about God. When God gives information about Himself by the Holy Spirit, there are implications. There's a cause and effect; there's a chain reaction of events that takes place. God's knowledge isn't communicated in a vacuum. When God reveals God, power is released. When God reveals God, when God the Spirit reveals God the Son, power is released. It isn't neutral, powerless information. It isn't data or statistics. There's something about the truth of God, that when the very knowledge is made known by God, it changes the recipients. It changes those who come into contact with it. It glorifies us, it beautifies us, it empowers us to be lovers of God. The very communication of the knowledge of God is the power to be like God. Again this is way bigger than my little peanut brain can get around, but I know I'm talking about something that's really, really vast.

“WHEN HE IS REVEALED, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS”

The knowledge of God, again, isn't statistics and data communicated in a dead form. It's that vibrant, uncreated light. When we come into contact with it, there's power in the very connection. When it says that eternal life is to know Him, it's not only the goal of life, but the very purpose and essence of life. The very unfolding of the power of the life to come is in the knowledge of God being transmitted to us.

That's what John the apostle says later in 1 John 3:2: "We know that when we see You we will be like You, because we see You just as You are" (1 Jn. 3:2, paraphrased). When we see the truth of God and know Him as He is, we automatically become like Him. There's a power transmission in receiving the knowledge of God. When God reveals God, things change in the recipients. We become like Him, says John, because we see Him just as He is. When we see the truth of who He is, our emotional chemistry is completely transformed. Obviously we're not going to be as transformed in this age as we will be in the age to come, but the principle is still the same. Seeing Him transforms us. It really, really does.

THE MOST POWERFUL AND PLEASURABLE WAY TO LIVE

"This is eternal life: that they may know You." To go on the treasure hunt up that holy mountain escorted by the Holy Spirit is the pleasure and the meaning of life on planet earth.

I'm not saying that we're not supposed to be faithful in our natural responsibilities. We are. I'm not saying that we should neglect our natural responsibilities. I'm saying that the most pleasurable way to live on planet earth is to make the knowledge of God the goal and essence of our whole being in this age and in the age to come. Our natural responsibilities are the overflow of that quest in life. I realize that this doesn't sound that realistic, but I'm not questioning whether it's realistic for the average person. I'm saying that it's the most powerful and pleasurable way to live. Whether it connects with the average believer or not, I don't know, but I know that it's truthfully the most powerful and pleasurable way to live in this age and the age to come.

Yes, I know no one would really do that. I've been preaching this for twenty years, and I've never found anyone who actually neglected his natural responsibilities. People are always afraid that someone might do that, and I've never found anyone who has done it. They might do it for a week, and then they think, "Oh well, I'm going to do this a little differently." I've ceased to be afraid of the hypothetical thing. I would like to see someone get

close to that, but I've never seen them try it. I really have been preaching this for twenty years. I've watched the Body of Christ in my little sphere of life be challenged by this to see if they do it or don't do it.

Again, I don't live in the fear of that issue, but the question of what you do with your natural life is way too big to answer in this setting right here. That's a massive question. It's a very, very massive question, and the answer is different in everyone's life, in everyone's season of life. We're so prone to our natural responsibilities that almost no one ever errs in going the other way. They always err by being inundated with promoting their natural life with more pleasure and comfort.

The thing to do is to begin progressively. You begin by touching it a little, and hunger begets hunger; deep calls unto deep. We get closer to it, and then little by little we find out those that are real needs and those that are wants, and we separate between the two.

Again, I'm not saying, "Let's take all these powerful wants and deny them." I'm saying that the want begins to be God, and the way that God delivers us from inferior pleasures isn't by getting us to deny inferior pleasures. The way God gets us to overcome inferior pleasures is by letting us experience superior pleasures so that we never, ever leave the loop of pleasure, ever. Our wants just change, that's all. Most people fill their life with wants and not with needs or responsibilities. Right? We all have the basic needs that we have to do, but it's that extra five to ten hours a day and the extra ten to fifteen hours on the weekends. That's the category that I'm aiming for. The category that I'm aiming for is the *want* category, the amount of time and energy and resource we put on accumulating wants. I know that almost no one ever radically changes the way they pursue their wants. They typically change them just a few percent at a time. My goal is to get people to touch this a little and, over the course of years, the things they want will change, and again, hunger begets hunger and they begin to do this more and more and more. Really, the division between our wants and our needs is so complicated that even we don't know it. Even you don't know it in your own life. It's a complicated thing. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The Word of God is like a sharp sword that divides between soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12, paraphrased). It divides between the things that are confusing in our own soul.

In a pastoral way, I guess I would encourage people to progressively change the way they spend their time and their energy and their money, not radically in one day, but progressively. The very journey itself has wisdom in it. The Holy Spirit will be our escort, and He will show us over the months and years how to adjust. Even then, our propensity is always to go back to the natural and the carnal. The devil is alive and well on planet earth, and the saints are more than willing to put the fire out in us by their discouragement. When I see someone really begin to pursue God, the Church rises up around them and squelches that fire, because that fire makes them uncomfortable. There are so many voices in the Church that help them not do it, and there are so many powers in hell that help them not do it. Our own natural propensities to sin and darkness help us not do it. There are so many reasons not to do it.

At first I was afraid some person would go out and be radical and do something irresponsible, and maybe an eighteen-year old would do that for six weeks or something, and in the course of seventy years they haven't lost that much. I haven't seen too many people do anything substantially irresponsible for more than a week or a month that really hurt their life. So that's why I'm not that afraid of that.

Again, I was always afraid of that in the early days. I would like to see people move just a little toward the glory of what life is about. Again, the wisdom is found in the walking out. The Holy Spirit really does make us discern between wants and needs, and our wants actually begin to change.

OUR WANTS AND DESIRES ARE TRANSFORMED WHEN WE ENCOUNTER GOD

I've seen this happen in a few people's lives. They began to get a hunger in them that drove them into a greater quest for God than the hunger they had before they started. I'll tell my own story in great depth in the next couple of days. You've heard it over and over: I found that the things I liked, I began to not like so much, and the things I hated, I began to like.

My journey into trying to understand the knowledge of God a little began in a very defined way in 1974 through going to a seminar on the knowledge of God. They gave me some books; I read the books and wrestled in anguish over them for a year or two. I say this, and it's humorous but it's incredibly true. It's funny now but it wasn't funny then, and it isn't exaggerated. I couldn't stand Bible study. I couldn't stand prayer. I hated fasting and witnessing. Other than that, I liked the kingdom of God. I used to tell the Lord, "I don't like fasting, witnessing, Bible study, or prayer, but I like meetings, I like singing, I like fellowshiping. I like doing things, going on retreats, and hanging out with people, but I don't like fasting, prayer, witnessing, or Bible study."

I was really in turmoil, because my leaders when I was eighteen years old told me those things were important in growing in the knowledge of God. I thought, "I'm in a jam," because I believed the knowledge of God was important, but I didn't like the things that contributed to it. Those other things contribute to it as well. Fellowshiping and singing and meeting, they contribute to it as well.

I went on this experience where I thought I would be the only man in the Body of Christ who would always hate prayer. I said, "God, I like You, but I hate prayer." It went on for a couple of years. I said, "This is never going to change. I'm in a jam. I hate this, and I'm going to have to do this forever, is what it says. Even in heaven I'm going to be doing this stuff." I said, "Either You'll have to change something, or You'll have to change me."

It didn't happen instantaneously, but I found over the course of a number of years that for moments, and even periods of time, I would get an insatiable hunger for the presence of God and to be alone with God. Not always, but from time to time, this would happen. I thought, "How did this happen?" It takes God to love God.

Now, I didn't hear this, but it's like the Lord was saying to me, "That's an impartation of God." You have it documented in your history that you don't have a natural propensity for any of this. You have a natural aloofness and unfamiliarity and distance from these things, but when we get by that bonfire a little, even if we're far away, we begin to warm. Our heart begins to thaw and we begin to crave it then. Fire begets fire, hunger begets hunger, and desire begets desire. It really does increase. I've had a few lapses over the years where I lost it, but then I began to understand how I could get it back. Those are some of the things I want to go through systematically.

There's always the crisis point where we say, "What do we now?" because all kinds of possibilities hit our minds. The glory possibilities, the fear of what we're going to miss out on in the natural, the condemnation that we're going to be less than a great believer in the sight of God, all kinds of things barrage our brains. I kind of like it, because there's nothing more pleasurable when you're in pain than to see someone else in pain. I went through so much turmoil on all of those issues. I mean, I just died over them, and because I was in the "full-time

ministry,” I was doing my whole journey on a microphone in front of a group of people. I had a few train wrecks because I went to the right and to the left a few times for a year or so. But the Lord always brings you back to the center.

THE STRUGGLE WITH THESE ISSUES IS THE PLACE WHERE WISDOM IS FOUND

Now, I’m not nearly as concerned with people overdoing it a little, struggling and having crisis, and doing it wrongly, because I’ve found, like the caterpillar in the cocoon, that the struggle is the place where the wisdom is found in the end in a tailor-made way. I begged God to deliver unto me wisdom and to send some man or woman who would tell me the way. The Lord said, “No, you’ll struggle in the cocoon and you’ll find wisdom. You’ll find Me and the way for you in this path.”

I said, “Yeah, but I cried a lot.”

God says, “Yes, but that’s the best way to learn.” It really is. You can learn from a book, but pain is ten times more effective a trainer than precept. It truly is.

I’m not saying, “Let’s not give anyone wisdom, and let them all have pain.” I’m not saying that. I’m saying, in all the wisdom you give them and all the qualifiers and all the safety nets you put around them, they’ll still do it less than the right way and have pain, and that’s the way they’ll learn the most. Pain brands it on your heart. I don’t have to memorize certain principles in which I experienced pain; they are branded so deeply on my soul. I don’t have to say, “Now let me see, I read that in a book somewhere. Now let me think. I’ll get back to you tomorrow on that question...” It’s like living light on my heart right now, and the pain was fifteen years ago. The literal struggle with these issues is, in fact, the place where wisdom is found. It’s tailor-made wisdom for every person, and the wisdom even changes in every season of your life. I don’t know about every season, but, “Some of the wisdom applications change in some of the seasons of your life,” is a more accurate way of saying it.

WHAT YOU CAN LIVE WITHOUT IN GOD, YOU’LL GO WITHOUT

As a pastor, I had this desire to deliver everyone from as much pain in the church I had stewardship over as possible. I think that’s a noble thing to do, but you don’t end up delivering them from that much. They end up having to go through the crisis themselves. They have to know from God themselves what He’ll give them and what He’ll honor in them. I had to find out what I could live without. One of the principles is that what you can live without in God, you’ll go without. That tormented me, because I believed that. If you can live without it, you’ll go without it. I said, “I don’t want to go without it.”

The Lord said, “Well, you’re a very limited person, and you can’t have everything.”

I said, “Ah, I want everything.”

He said, “Well, in the age to come you’ll have a lot more than you have right now.”

I said, “Lord, this is hard.”

He said, “It’s worth it; it’s worth it.” Yes, it’s hard but it’s worth it. You’ll find the way forward in the struggle. You really will. Every single person will in every season of their life. There will be different twists.

Anyway, I like the question because it touches a deep part of my life and the pain of what I've experienced. That's why I said, "Oh, that's a good question." I cried through that one and I still cry through that one. In my own life and ministry right now, the Lord is readjusting a few priorities and the way I do things related to this.

LEARNING TO LEAN ON GOD IN THE DISCOMFORT OF OUR LIMITED UNDERSTANDING

We have a large church in Kansas City. We have eighteen pastors on the staff. Some of them are discombobulated by some of the decisions I'm making to change the way I'm spending time. There's turbulence everywhere. Every time I readjust in a season there's turbulence, because I'm so connected with so many other people—a wife, children, a team, a church, ministries, and friends around the nation. Whenever I shift into a different season, I end up throwing them off. I say, "Lord, why don't You give me one way I can stick with and count on?"

The Lord says, "No, no, it's better this way. Let Me lead you." Your life in God will have different intensities in different seasons.

"But I would rather have one season of intensity twenty years ago that brings the same focus all the way through so that I can lock in all the way and not need God in my quest of knowing God!"

Hello! That's really what it is. It's so that I don't have to bother with God in my romantic quest for intimacy with God. You really do have to lean on Him in the discomfort of our limited understanding all the way through.

"Lord, there just has to be an easier way!"

No, for love and the intertwining of our hearts in intimacy, there's no easier way. There's an easier way to get ideas down on paper, but not for your heart to be fused with God's heart. The storms of life add to all of this.

Say more. Just tell me what you're thinking now that I said that. You say, "Well I'm more confused than ever now." It does tend to be a bit philosophical, I realize, that but that's just how it is. I love that; I'm glad you said that. Many of us, most of us are impulsive. Most of us aren't ordered, disciplined, clearly-focused human beings. Most of us are impulsive. Now, some of our impulsive personalities do it differently than others. Most of us aren't ordered with a clear vision and a systematic discipline where we stick to it. Most of us get an urge and we do it. That's a pretty human trait. That impulsive little fling to the right for three weeks will actually contribute in the twenty-year picture to giving you wisdom. I'm not condoning people to go and do dumb things, but let's suppose you seek God in a really aggressive and earnest way that's not balanced in a particular season. In the end, you'll not be hurt by it. You may get a few people mad at you, and you may lose a few dollars, but twenty years from now you'll look back and smile, and it will have contributed to you knowing the way of God in your heart and in your life.

I went on a number of those little, three-week trips. I really did. We always find our way back, because the Holy Spirit is with us. He really, is and He'll always show us the way in those.

WHY DO PEOPLE QUIT THEIR JOBS TO PRAY AND SEEK THE LORD?

Both/and. No, no, no. Mostly, people quit their jobs and got messed up. Most people are too afraid to quit their job because they wake up every day and they're hungry and they want to eat. There are fundamental human things that make us think that through a couple of times. Most people don't end up quitting their job. Most people actually become very isolated in their quest of God for a few weeks or months, but then they get lonely and they go back to the overly-social thing again. They don't typically quit their job right off the bat. Typically, even in the monastic movement in history, they didn't hear a seminar one weekend and then quit their job. They thought on it for a couple of years, and they went out into the desert for twenty years and did strange things for twenty years, and then came back. Those weren't ordinarily impulses, because after being in the desert for a week they would say, "Oh, well I quit my job." But for the men who stayed out there for twenty years, something happened that was probably really substantial. The very necessity to persevere requires some substantial reasoning and motivation, or you won't persevere in it.

Well, it's one thing to quit your job to go to a Bible School or a training center. It's a different thing entirely to quit your job to go train and study. That's different than what you're talking about. You're talking about a much more monastic quest of fifteen hours a day of isolation and meditation. That's what you're thinking about, right? Most people don't do that.

Back here, someone had something. Not always, right; yeah, I'll talk on this for a second and maybe I'll hit some live nerves. Now I'm talking as a pastor and not as a monk here. People quit their job to seek the Lord for about ten different motivations, and I'm just making up the number ten. Let's say five of them are noble, and five of them aren't noble. Some people quit their jobs to seek God simply because they can't cope with life, and not because they're hungry for God. They can't bear the burden of responsibility of getting up and showing up and getting rebuked at their job and staying with it. They get their feelings hurt and they don't want to get their feelings hurt, so they quit their job to seek God. That's not what this is about.

Scores of people in the Body of Christ are tempted to go into God because they don't want to have to face the pain of life. That's not what I'm talking about. That person you described would say to himself, "I'm so hungry for God, I can't endure a job; therefore I should be a pastor." The Church is filled with those people and they make the Church a wreck, because God never called them to do that. The truth is that they can't cope with pressure, and it isn't that they're hungry for God. God seems like the easiest thing to do. Do you see what I'm saying?

In our church we have lots of those; I don't mean the majority, but we've had scores of those over the years who are in that category. The way you can tell is because their life is filled with undisciplined decisions, and it isn't really in line with the kind of hunger they're describing.

It's the other kind. The answer is easy for the person who quits their job, so therefore they ought to get a job in doing this. That's what I did, in essence. I agree that people can do that. If you really think about it, that's what people do who are full-time preachers. How many people want to be full-time preachers, who aren't, who are really hungry for God? It wasn't an escape mechanism, but they weren't called to be a full-time preacher in the wisdom of God. They're in a jam then.

THE TYRANNY OF THE URGENT IS DESTROYING THE MINISTRY

What I've found is that most preachers I know of don't spend time with God. They started the ministry to spend time with God, but now it's twenty years later. When you look them in the eye, they get a tear in their eye and they say, "I've spent less time with God in the last ten years than I ever imagined," because the ministry is filled with so many emergencies. There are so many traps in the ministry to do what I call, "the tyranny of the urgent." The tyranny of the urgent afflicts the person in ministry more than any occupation I can think of. It might exist in other occupations more, and probably is, but I'm so familiar with the ministry. At least in other professions typically you can tell the person, "Pay me and I'll show up," but in the ministry everyone owns the person in the ministry, or at least they think they do. They have to be at everything and everyone is hurting and has a right to them. The tyranny of the urgent is destroying the ministry. Most men I know in ministry are slaves to the tyranny of the urgent. They don't have the communion with God that they started with when they went in. It's tricky.

FINDING GOD IN THE PAIN AND PRESSURE OF ORDINARY LIFE

Then there's the other dilemma where God calls us to know Him, and He wants us to master our free time and find Him in that. What we end up doing is taking our job time to seek God, and then we have as much free time as the other man. Lots of men in the ministry use their free time in a way that I wouldn't depict as seeking God. I'm not trying to make a judgment. I don't look at anyone and try to figure out what they're doing or not doing; that's not my business. There's probably a better term for that than "free time." My point is that they want job time to seek God, and then free time to be like everyone else.

The Lord is saying, "No, I would rather you have job time out in the secular world and take your free time to seek Me. That's where I've called you because I want you to find Me in the pain and the pressure of what you're going to find out in your secular job."

We're hungry to spend five to ten hours a day with God, or whatever the amount of time is. That's an exaggerated amount. He may say, "No, no, no, I want you to cut back on this other arena of your free time and to stay under the furnace of affliction called 'staying out in the world.' You'll know Me better that way."

It isn't an automatic given that if you're hungry for God you'll be called to the ministry. God's way for each person is different, for you find Him in the pains and pressures of life. These are difficult questions to answer, one here and one there. It's a lot easier to answer for an individual, than it is to make a general statement to people with a hundred different backgrounds.

Let's stay on this for a few more minutes. Again, I want to say that the struggle on these issues is real, and it's necessary for every person. It's the caterpillar and the cocoon. You know the old story of how, when you cut the cocoon open, the caterpillar dies, and it doesn't become a butterfly. The struggle produces the change, and every person's struggles are different.

I would say that if you're thinking of quitting your job to pray, pray the five to ten hours a day that you're not working at your job for a year or two. Most people aren't supposed to quit their job to go and pray seventeen hours a day, but if you really want to do that, like I said, keep your job and do it in the other part of life. You'll find the way forward in all of those ways. You really will. You'll be in different seasons and you get stirred up. It's turbulent.

IS IT WISE FOR US TO IMITATE BELIEVERS WHO CHANGED HISTORY?

Let's have a few more comments on this theme. Let's stay on this theme for a few more minutes. One thing about Francis of Assisi is that he was a man whom God called to impact all of church history. He's the not the picture of a person who had a devotional life that we want to imitate; he was the picture of a man whom God called to change church history, like Martin Luther. You can't just will to be in that position in God's economy. It's difficult to take prominent, visible people in church history and imitate their life in order to get their results. You can't do that. What you want to do is find people who encourage you in their everyday lives, common people, and try to imitate them. Don't try and imitate the prominent people of church history because, again, it doesn't work that way. You can't decide to be Martin Luther because you get excited about justification by faith and you're willing to leave your church over it.

There are so many other points, like you said. The Lord called the twelve to it; the Lord called Francis of Assisi to it. You said something about Francis' life, and I want to put a spin on it. You said it worked. No, maybe it worked with Francis from your point of view because he lived in 1200. I just came from Assisi two weeks ago. I was in Francis' monastery in Assisi and I stayed a couple of nights there. I was talking to all the Franciscan monks about the Franciscan movement that was born in that monastery on a hill in Assisi. By coincidence, I was there a few weeks ago. This was a one-time trip. I spent days hearing the story of Francis. No, no. Actually, you're quite accurate on what you're saying. If you went right down to 1226 AD and talked to the first fifteen Franciscan monks, they might not have thought it was working. I just want you to know that. You said it worked. Well, yes, in a nice, comfy chair in an air-conditioned room reading his biography 800 years later, it did work. But the conflicts and the confusion that they were facing in their life in their little world during the first ten or twelve years are astounding to me. It did work. You're right that it did work, but it worked from a different perspective than we're thinking.

When God looks at Francis' life, He says, "Hey, Francis, it worked."

Francis says, "Well, yes, from this perspective it does. Man, down there it sure was hurting." There were divisions and collisions and compromises. Their main man, the man directly under Francis, was stealing money. It was horrible. They were a poverty movement, and the main man was stealing money. It was pretty confusing even for Francis, and he fell into despair a few times and died at age forty-four of sickness and blindness. Blindness fell on him and he died at forty-four, heartbroken in one way and very excited in another.

Did it work? It depends on what you mean by *worked*. I think it worked, but it wasn't easy for Francis in that day. Remember, he did die of sickness and blindness with his team divided against him and against one another at the age of forty-four. They build statues of him and tell great stories 800 years later and it's awesome.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SEEKING DEEPER COMMUNION AND SEEKING GOD'S WILL

Let me distinguish something, because again your feedback is helping me clarify my own thinking. There's a difference between seeking God's will and seeking deeper communion. I'm not pitting them against one another at all. As you're talking I'm thinking, "Yeah, that's really right." The question you were asking was about seeking deeper communion in the knowledge of God, and he was talking about seeking the will of God and obedience. Of course, you'd think obedience to God would be communion. I don't know; I don't know the answer to that. I know that the Lord will grant certain levels of intensity of seeking communion with Him that He may not have commissioned us to have. He may not have commanded us to have it, but He might grant it if we really want it. There's some give-and-take in our relationship with God. Of course He knows all things, so

it's tricky when You're omniscient and omnipresent and You know everything. Then again, how much is He offering to us already knowing whether we're going to say yes or no to it? I don't understand how all that works. I know that in my relationship with God there are seasons where I can be doing the will of God and the Lord may say to me, "I'll give you more of communion with Me even in this season if you want it, or I'll give you more ministry if you want it. I'll bless both of them and I'll love you intensely in both of them."

That becomes tricky as well. Some of them are really our decisions as to what we want in this life. Of course, then the noble things we want have been given to us by understanding, because God gave us an understanding heart even to want them. Again, it's getting a little philosophical.

Are there any other questions or comments? We'll quit in a few moments here and then pick back up in John 17 at the 1:30pm session.

MONASTIC ORDERS: THE CONTEMPLATIVE VERSUS THE ACTIVE LIFE

Let's say it differently. Again, this is helping me get clearer. I've been something of a student of the monastic movement through history, of the monks that go out into caves and do stuff. There are all kinds of bizarre, heretical things that they do, in my opinion. There are all kinds of unnecessary things that aren't heresy, but the Lord might look down and say, "You didn't have to do that. That was kind of dumb, but you know, I let you do it." There were some really necessary things they did that enhanced the quality of their life in God, and there were certain things in the kingdom of God that they had to give up in order to press into other parts of the kingdom of God. Analyzing it is pretty complex. I've been studying it for some years now, because I'm interested in what God did with men and women in history in this struggle that you were talking about. It's this struggle. It's a very well-known historical struggle. What do you do with job responsibilities, lifestyles, and all of this?

The Protestants aren't in the same quandaries in one way, because we don't have spiritual orders where you can get with 50, 100, or 500 people and go live together intensely somewhere out in the desert. Protestants don't have groups like that. Most Protestants aren't thinking of doing that. Catholics do have a problem because they have a whole bunch of people, a million of them all over the world right now, doing just that. The Catholics can go join them, so they have a bigger issue before them, whereas Protestants normally don't. There aren't Protestant monasteries that I know of that would even help this decision be a real one.

My real point is this. The big debate throughout the monastic movement is Luke 10: Mary versus Martha. That's the model of the 300-year debate between monastic orders; we call them *denominations*. There are maybe twenty main and 500 total monastic movements within the Catholic Church. There are about twenty main ones—the Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines, and about twenty others that are famous. There are about 500 lesser, tributary denominations. Probably a lot of you have never studied this subject. Amongst those twenty main monastic movements, which are 500 to 1,000 years old or older, they have had colossal debates that have gone on for centuries on the contemplative versus the active lifestyle, Mary versus Martha. That's the major debate they have. All of them know this. They've written whole volumes countering one another. Martha is the picture of the active and Mary is the picture of the contemplative, the one who doesn't go and do stuff. One of them sits around, and the other one does stuff, and they've been fighting for years within the monastic movement itself. I'm not even talking about within the Catholic church; I'm talking about within the whole Body of Christ, the Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox and the Catholics. The Eastern Orthodox denomination is a whole new world. They have their own monastic movement, which is very different from that

of the Catholics, and they have hundreds of thousands of people doing it too. We think, “Which is the right way?”

“Well,” the Lord tells me, “just struggle and you’ll find the way for you.”

Anyway, it’s the same thing I’m telling you, because I want you guys in pain over this because I’m in pain over it, and pain loves company. So there! This is really the issue, and when I think of James Rile’s comment, he’s thinking of the Martha lifestyle, doing the will of God in active ministry. Then you have Mary the contemplative, and the exaggerated picture of her life is that she didn’t do anything but sit at the feet of Jesus. Of course, we know that was only one Wednesday morning when they were having coffee at her house. It isn’t exactly what she did eighteen hours a day for sixty-three years. It was what she did one Wednesday morning while Jesus was in Bethany at her house. It got in the book, but it’s hard to build a lifestyle over one Wednesday morning meeting at her house. They’ve built lifestyles based on that, and it’s tricky because it was just one event. I mean, all of you sat before Jesus one Wednesday morning once in your life, but you don’t think of yourself as Mary.

THERE ARE MANY DWELLING PLACES IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

Yet again, let’s say it differently. It’s not the will of God versus communion with God. Let’s call it the active ministry versus the contemplative, the passive waiting versus the active doing. What’s the balance? The truth of the matter is that God’s balance is different for every individual, and typically even for that individual it’s different in different seasons of his or her life. There’s typically not one answer even for one person. It changes during the course of a life.

Any time someone gets up and gives an example of one woman or one man or one movement or one denomination or one revival in which the Holy Spirit emphasized that one feature, it’s already going to be off. It isn’t going to work for everyone. Even in our own context of 1997, we’ve had Toronto and now we have Pensacola. Those are renewal centers, and the whole cultures are so radically different. Someone says, “Which is the best?” Neither. There are many dwellings of the Spirit in God’s house. There are many dwelling places in the house of God; there are many places where He manifests His will. He has the Marthas and the Marys and all the others. Paul the apostle is the picture of Mary and Martha put together, but then Paul the apostle would never have been interviewed by James Dobson on family life because he never raised any kids.

Is Paul the apostle the ultimate man of God? No. We’re in the generation of Malachi 4:6, where God is going to restore fathers to their children and children to their fathers. God is really interested in fathers coming forth, and not just Paul the apostle celibates who get beat up in prison and meditate and then become active again. There are a thousand callings. That’s the real dilemma, and we get excited about one anointed man or one anointed woman or one anointed dwelling place of God, like Toronto or Pensacola, and begin to interpret the entire movement of God through that fine lens. Then we want to find one application for our life based on that one example, and it doesn’t work that way at all.

The more I study church history, and especially the monastic movement and monks, and the Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox—which is quite different—and then finally the Puritans, the Protestant version of this in the 1500s and 1600s—they made an attempt at it, but not as intensely as the others—they’re all so radically different from one another, and all the heroes would be against one another if they were sitting in a room debating. I don’t mean that they would be mean, but they wouldn’t agree with one another.

I go back to base one again. Jesus and me have to work this through for 1997. It changes through the seasons, and then it disrupts the people who had grown accustomed to the way you were before.

Amen. Let's stand.

MINISTRY TIME

We're going to pray for just a moment. This won't be a lengthy ministry time, but we will have a few of those.

Lord, we want to know the way into the knowledge of God, even in an introductory way. We don't have to know the whole picture and see the whole panorama, and we don't have to do it more intensely than anyone else in history. We just want to do it more than we have been doing it. We want to do it the most that You will enable us to do it in the will of God in this year in our lives; that's what we want. We want the most that You would give us for our life in 1997. We don't know the way You would give another person for 1997. We don't want to be the most in history. We want to be the most intensive in communion that we're called to be in our life in this season.

We ask You to lead us. Divide between wants and needs, responsibilities and the way we use free time. Woo us into Your heart with the use of our free time. Woo us into a greater communion, and then out of that tell us what You want us to do in active ministry. Tell us when to draw back from active ministry and to give more to communion. Tell us when You want us to do less of the responsibility arena of our secular lives and more of the communion. Make a way for us if You have exceptional ways for us, and show us whether we're to be the exception to the rule in those things. Make a way and confirm it. Confirm it to us and show us the way in all these tensions that are so important to wrestle with. Come and be our God, because we love You, and awaken our hunger, and we thank You in the name of Jesus.

Amen and amen.

Good. Well, that's a good introductory morning, and we'll see where we go in the next four mornings. Maybe we'll start a new spiritual order and tell Francis he was wrong. That's just a joke.