

Session 11 Ways to Behold the Knowledge of God

INTRODUCTION

Seven ways to behold the Lord. Personal prayer. Just to get your mind around it, it's me alone with my Bible and my cup of coffee at home. I had to put that coffee in there.

It might be the corporate worship setting; it might be like the worship we had a few minutes ago. You don't have to have the whole band there; you could be in a little home group with a handful of people, with someone playing the guitar, or with a worship tape on, but you're beholding. You're looking at the throne of God. It might be your time where you're meditating on the Scriptures. It might be praying in the Holy Spirit. I'm thinking of praying in tongues—your spiritual prayer language. It might be times of silence, gazing on the throne, meditating, not saying anything, not necessarily worshipping, just fixing your attention there. You're actually beholding the Lord in some ways when you're laying hands on someone and praying over them. Really your mind is on the throne of God. You're laying your hands on them, your spirit is open, and you're really beholding. You're gazing on God even while you're laying hands on someone. It may be when you're praying for revival for the city or the nation. Those are all different ways in which you come into contact with the throne of God.

SPIRITUAL REASONS PEOPLE DON'T BEHOLD THE LORD

Roman numeral IX. Spiritual reasons people don't behold the Lord, or why people don't pray. Number one: persistent sin that they refuse to confess. I should say "unconfessed sin," because there's always weakness and struggle in our life. I'm not saying you get free of the struggle and then you can pray. I'm not saying that. It's persistent sin you refuse to confess.

We blame-shift it: "Well, someone is making me do it."

Or we rationalize it: "It isn't really a sin."

God says, "You confess it. Come honestly with an unveiled face."

Prayer is really boring if you're telling the Holy Spirit no in a major area of your life, because you need the Holy Spirit to help you pray, and if you're telling the Holy Spirit no and He's the one who helps you pray, you're in trouble. He says, "Well why don't we talk about this issue first?" I'm not saying you have to conquer the sin, but you have to be honest with it, call it sin, and live in an honest dialogue with the Lord about trying to get free from it; the Lord will anoint you even in your struggle.

The idea that you get free from the struggle and then you get anointed is wrong. You get anointed in your life in God, and then you get free from the struggle later, if you do get free from it.

UNANOINTED, UNINSPIRED PRAYER IS STILL RELEVANT

The other spiritual reason people don't behold the Lord or don't have a prayer life is unbelief. What I mean by unbelief is praying when it's unanointed. They find prayer irrelevant, and that was my big problem. When I couldn't feel God, it didn't seem like the prayer was important, and the Lord showed me that that was unbelief. He says, "No; unanointed, uninspired prayer with no feeling is still relevant."

When it connected with me that that was relevant, I said, “Well, I’ll do it if it matters.”

The Lord says, “You bet it matters. You just keep bringing your mind before Me and I’ll take care of the inward stuff.”

Unbelief is manifest in quitting, in living without consistency. People quit praying, not because they don’t like God, but because they don’t think their prayer matters. When you look at your life, when you quit praying consistently, it’s because you thought, “Man, this is so boring and dead. It doesn’t change me, so why bother with it?” That’s the inconsistency that’s rooted in unbelief.

God says, “Oh yes, it does. You behold the Lord like in a mirror. It can be dim, it can be faint, it can be at a distance, and I will change you in due time” (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

NATURAL REASONS PEOPLE DON’T BEHOLD THE LORD

Roman numeral X. A moment ago, we talked about the spiritual reasons. These are the natural reasons why people don’t pray. They don’t ever schedule it; it’s just that simple. I’ve been really committed to scheduling prayer. I believe in that very strongly. I don’t always keep my schedule. I mean, maybe 70 percent of the time I keep it, and 30 percent of the time I don’t. I roll over, turn the alarm off, and go back to sleep. Then the next day I say, “I’ll start tomorrow,” and sometimes I blow it. I say, “So what?” I don’t think about blowing it, I don’t beat myself up for blowing it; I forget it and say, “I’ll start tomorrow. I’ll do it tomorrow. I’ll do it today. I’ll do it some other time,” but I do schedule it.

YOU’LL RARELY PRAY IF YOU DON’T SCHEDULE IT

It’s important to schedule time with the Lord into your routine, and that schedule has to change in different seasons of your life according to different circumstances. I predict to you that you’ll rarely ever pray if you don’t schedule it.

Someone says, “I’ll pray when the Lord moves me.”

See, biblically that’s not how it is. I mean, you do pray when the Lord moves you, but you don’t only pray when He moves you. As a matter of fact, if you pray according to obedience, you’ll be moved many more times. Rarely do I go into my prayer time feeling moved. “OK, I’m distracted; I’m tired; I’m mad about something. Here I am. OK, let’s get this going, Lord.”

It takes me a while to dial down. My mind is rambling and the Lord says, “That’s all I asked you to do. Just look. Set your mind on Me. Take the Scriptures and do it.”

So, schedule. Make a date with Jesus, and you won’t keep it all the time, but you’ll keep it more often than not. If you find you’re always breaking it, then your schedule is too intensive, your standard is too high. Lower it so that you can succeed in it, and the hunger will grow. The hunger will grow. It doesn’t have to be the same time every day. I pray early in the morning twice a week, one or two days in the afternoon, a few times late at night. Sometimes I do it even without scheduling it, but my point is this: some people think it has to be the same time every day. No; just be creative. Just have your date times with Jesus.

DEVELOPING A LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS OUR HEARTS

One of the biggest reasons people don't pray? They don't have a vocabulary. They don't know what to say when they pray. Back in the early days when I was eighteen, nineteen, and twenty years old, I would complain to God, saying, "O God, none of this works." I said, "You made this thing so hard," and I started complaining to God. I said, "Lord, please help me to pray. Would You give me Your Spirit and help me to pray?" I felt a little anointing on it and I said, "Ooh!" and so I wrote that down: "Please help me to pray." Literally, whenever I felt anything that was better than boring—not that I felt power on it, but it wasn't boring—I would write it down. In those days, anything that was neutral was awesome. I would say, "That one didn't feel boring! I'll write that."

I was developing a language to express my heart. Over the course of a few years, I ended up with seventeen pages. I won't say it happened every day, but I did it almost daily. I would go through that prayer list. I would say the same phrases that worked one other time; sometimes they would be really boring and I would say them anyway. At least I had something to say, you know. It was better than the other years when I had nothing to say.

That prayer list grew and grew, and eventually I developed a vocabulary of expressing my heart to God. Then when I developed that vocabulary, it was amazing how much easier it was to pray when I actually had a scheduled place. I forgot to mention this: I actually found an environment in which I was comfortable. You know how different environments bother different people? I would go to the library. Believe it or not, my favorite place to read my Bible was the hospital. I would go up to the waiting room on the fifth floor, which was empty and closed. There was no one there. I had a nice lamp, good chairs, free coffee. I was one of those bums who never put a quarter in the cup; I just drank the coffee all day long, and uh... felt convicted about that, but the bathrooms were close, there were nice couches, lights, good air-conditioning, good coffee. I said, "This is phenomenal. There's no one calling, there are no phones." It was perfect.

Sometimes I would go to a park and stay in my car; sometimes I would go to a library, sometimes a hospital waiting room, because it was always a zoo at our office at the church; it was impossible. And then at home, you know, my wife and sons would say, "We'll let you pray! We'll leave you alone!" Then, every seventeen minutes, they would burst in again: "Just one minute! Could we ask you one question?"

I would say, "Quit asking me questions while I'm praying." Then I would get in the flesh or get mad for being interrupted. I said, "No, no. I have to get away from here. This isn't working." I would find a place that worked for me. There are all kinds of places that you can find that work for you.

WHEN YOU VERBALIZE YOUR PRAYER, IT'S HARDER TO WANDER

One more principle here under ten is, "Pray out loud." I don't mean loud; I mean even a whisper. I would whisper to keep my mind from wandering, because when you verbalize your prayer, just a little, your mind can't go somewhere else. Your mind can't go right if you're speaking out loud. Your mind follows your words. Now if you pray silently, your mind tends to wander. That was one of the most helpful things someone told me many years ago, and I really believe it. Pray in the Spirit. There are all of these things I would do out loud. There are times when you don't, but if your mind wanders, then do it.

CULTIVATING DEEPER KNOWLEDGE AND PASSION FOR GOD

OK. Roman numeral XI. Practical prayer categories to cultivate deeper knowledge and passion for God. I would ask for spiritual growth. I would ask Him, number one: "Fill me with qualities like love for God, compassion for people." These were the things I would put on my prayer list over the weeks. It's pretty simple stuff.

Ask to be freed from negative bondages. Ask to be healed from abusive experiences. In other words, earnestly ask the Lord to help you in these areas. Talk to Him about it; He really will. I created a prayer list that I went through, I wouldn't say every day, but near daily. Sometimes I hit five or ten items on the prayer list in a row that were really boring. They were anointed a month ago, but I still did them because I couldn't figure out how to do it; so I did it anyway. If something had life on it, I stayed with it. If something didn't have life on it, I still did it for a second or two and then moved on to figure out what the Holy Spirit would register in my heart that day on my prayer list. Typically, I even got new sentences. Every day or so I got a new sentence or two and added it to my prayer list. It was really a wonderful romance of the Lord to learn and grow in prayer language. It took a few years to develop a real freedom in expressing my heart to God; it didn't come automatically at all. For some of you it might come a lot more quickly, but it took me a few years before I could speak my heart freely with clarity for any length of time.

So first I would pray for things that would help my spiritual growth. Next I would make declarations about God, declarations recognizing who He is: "Lord, You're filled with kindness for me." I would tell Him who He is towards me. I would declare things about Him, and sometimes they would be really anointed—I would say, "Wow, that's great"—and sometimes they weren't.

BLESSING HIS PERSONALITY AND HONORING HIS COMMANDMENTS

Number two: I would declare gratitude and emphasize aspects of His personality: His passions, His pleasure towards me. I would say, "Oh, I thank You for Your passionate love for me. God, with gratitude I thank You that You like me so much." I would declare to God with gratitude how He felt about me.

Sometimes I would request more knowledge of Him. "Lord, fill me with knowledge of Yourself and who You are."

Page fifteen. One thing that I really enjoyed is what the Puritans used to call "sweet resolutions" to the Lord. I would set aside time and renew my intention to obey some of His commandments. I would list commandments, like bridling my tongue. I would say, "Lord, I make a sweet resolution; I renew my intention to obey You. I know I'll fail on this, but I resolve to obey His commands, to believe His promises." There are times for those resolutions of faith and obedience; there are times when you declare them to the Lord. Don't make vows and promises. I mean, be very, very careful on those.

Renew your intentions; sometimes the Lord will anoint them. It's sweet when that happens. When you partner with God in declaring who He is, when you tell Him you like Him, you recognize who He is. You renew your intentions; you make resolutions to give yourself to Him. The Holy Spirit loves that stuff.

"I HAVE SET THE LORD CONTINUALLY BEFORE ME"

Number two: ask God to write His commands on your heart and mind (Heb. 10:16).

Number three: ask God to fill you with desire. That's really called, "Writing the Word of God on your heart." "Fill my heart with these desires."

Now, in this language of beholding the Lord, David said in Psalm 16, “I have set the Lord continually before me” (Ps. 16:8, NASB). There was the setting of the Lord; He said, “I set the Lord before me.” There’s a place without any feeling, where we set God before us when we meditate on the Word, etc.

David spoke of this again in Psalm 27. He said, “This one thing I have done all the days of my life” (Ps. 27:4, paraphrased). All the days of his life, from his youth to his old age, he beheld, he thought upon, he meditated on the beauty of the Lord. That was one of the number one keys to David’s life. I’m sure it wasn’t an automatic anointing, but he spent time meditating and thinking on the beauty of God’s personality. That was one of the absolute keys to David’s life. He said, “I did it all the days of my life. This is one thing I have always done.” He says, “I’ve had bad seasons and good seasons. Sometimes I went to war, sometimes I didn’t. Sometimes I worshiped in different ways, but one thing I always did, through all of the seasons, was to focus on the beauty of God’s personality.”

JESUS WANTS US TO BEHOLD THE GLORY OF THE LORD, BOTH NOW AND FOREVER

In Acts 2:25, Peter is quoting David and he says, “As David said, ‘I’m always beholding the Lord’” (Acts 2:25, paraphrased). Now the point I’m making here is this: it’s that setting of your mind. It’s a biblical thing to do if you feel nothing.

In John 17:24 Jesus asked the Father that believers may experience the nearness of God now and in eternity, so that we might experientially behold His glory. Remember from the other day, Jesus said, “I want them to behold My glory that where I am they would be with Me also, that they would behold My glory” (Jn. 17:24, paraphrased).

He wants us to behold His Glory in the eternal city, of course, but we can behold the glory of the Lord even now in this age. That’s the very phrase that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 3:18. I’ll read this passage to you again phrase by phrase, and I trust that you’ll have ideas behind each one.

“But we all”—not just the preachers, not the just the prophets, not just the famous mystics of history, everyone, the everyday common people—“with unveiled face”—with honesty, transparency, confidence in mercy—are beholding. We’re looking; we’re setting our mind, as in a mirror. It’s dim; it’s faint. We don’t feel anything; we’re thinking on the knowledge of God’s personality, the throne of God, who He is. What’s happening is that now God is doing His part. He’s transforming us. There’s a supernatural activity of the Lord. We’re being brought into the image of Jesus. It’s happening little by little—subtle steps, inching forward. “Glory to glory” means the subtle experiences as well as the great ones, and it’s the Holy Spirit who does it. It isn’t your discipline that makes it happen. You’re not disqualified because you have a wrong temperament.

You say, “Well, I don’t have a passionate temperament.” You’re not disqualified because of your past record of sin or because of your present bondage. It’s the Spirit who will do it if you’ll set your mind before Him.

Amen. Let’s stand.

MINISTRY TIME

We’ll actually talk on more specifics tomorrow. This is an introduction on specifics.

Lord, I ask You for one thing—for faith. I ask that the spirit of unbelief, that the sense of how routine without feeling is irrelevant, that it won't change them in due time, that the very spirit of unbelief, will be lifted off of them.

The routine, un-anointed, unfeeling giving of yourself to God will change you. For the kingdom of God is like a farmer who sowed the seed and went to bed, and when he awoke he was totally unaware (Mk. 4:26-29). He awoke and suddenly the fruit was there. There was change on the inside. He never knew when it happened.

I ask You, Lord, for the Spirit of faith to touch them. They can be transformed, by the Spirit, from glory to glory. They can know the glory of the new covenant—inward transformation and enjoyment of God. I ask for the spirit of unbelief to be lifted off of them. I speak against the spirit of unbelief now in Jesus' name; I ask that they would be changed inwardly. They can enjoy God by the power of the Spirit; no matter where they are in their brokenness and in their pain and in their bondage, they can know You in this life. I ask You to stamp that on their spirit. Stamp that on their spirit. Give them a sense of relevance, that the routine is relevant to You. This routine really matters. In Jesus' name. Amen and amen.