

Section V

Leaving Guilt Behind: Reaching to God

As a farm girl, sometimes at night I would look up in the sky and marvel at how vivid the stars sparkled. It was like they were so close you could reach up and bring one down to be your very own night light. However, in the midst of the city lights the vivid light of the same stars would be obstructed. City lights would fight for the visual attention of my eyes and take away from the magnificent beauty the stars gave out with their sparkle. This is what Satan does to us when he fights to get our attention away from God. He will shine whatever he can in our eyes to keep our focus on him and not God. When we have been deceived by the enemy for so long, it makes us feel like God is far away. So far away that you can't even see Him any more. Reaching out for Him is very difficult and we may begin to tell ourselves it is impossible. If this is where you have found yourself lately, then it is imperative that you know that God *is* reachable. Actually, He has always been reachable. He has not moved away from you. You have moved away from Him. Now you must begin to reach out for Him and bring His light close into your life and claim it as your very own.

How do we reach out to God?

Reaching to God seems like a simple task. However, just living in our world today makes it difficult. The world fights for our attention at every turn and as humans we are so attracted to its wonders that when we talk about reaching out to God we look for complex ways to do so. Reality is that any effort you make towards seeking God will be rewarded. Let's begin by looking at the following:

Read Jeremiah 29:13-14.

- In this passage, how should we seek the Lord?

- What does the Lord say will happen if we seek Him?

If we seek God with all our hearts, He will be found. God does not abandon us when we have been taken captive by the enemy. We must remember that He is *always* in control. Even when Satan has had his way in our lives, God has allowed it. Satan can do nothing without God giving him permission to do so. (If you would like to look more into how Satan must ask permission from God, prayerfully study the first two chapters of Job.)

Steps for Reaching:

There are several ways we can reach for God when we have drifted away from Him. In the remainder of this section I will share with you the steps I take to come back to God when I have strayed. However, because we each have a personal relationship with God, it is important that you further develop your relationship by discovering how you personally draw closer to God.

Reach for God by . . .

1. Entering the Presence
2. Requesting the Presence
3. Crying out and Confessing

Entering the Presence

When my children were five and three years old, I got the question all the time of "Are you going to have any more children?" This is a natural thing for people to ask a mother with children of such a young age. However, my answer sometimes became confusing to the person inquiring. I usually smiled and replied, "We are still talking to the Lord about that." I would usually receive a smile back from the person who didn't know how to respond.

I wonder how often God's children make themselves available to the Father. I feel that may be why I get some of the looks I do when I speak about talking to the Lord about a situation. Each morning I spend time being in His presence; reflecting upon His desires; petitioning for my own and worshipping Him. I ask Him to fill me with His Spirit so I can overflow His fruit into the world. My hopes and dreams become more and more like His because I request this presence from Him. It's great to know that all you have to do is make yourself available and He'll do the same.

When we enter into God's presence, His joy enters our lives and the truth of Who He really is penetrates our heart, soul and mind. Our thoughts are altered by the truth molding us to be more Christ like. The reality of who we are in Christ is brought forth to the forefront of our very being. We begin living out the truth instead of the deceptions of the enemy.

Before God the Father sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within each believer at Pentecost they had to go to the temple and have the priest enter the presence of God on their behalf. During Moses time he was the only one who was allowed to enter God's presence. I like the way the book of Exodus describes how Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to meet with the Lord and be in His presence.

Read Exodus 33:7-10 and write down what sticks out to you about the scene described.

You can visualize the scene as the people watched Moses enter the tent. It is magnificent. The people know that Moses, their leader, is going to meet with the Lord, who leads him. They stand at their tents in respect, but mainly in support. And then when the presence of the Lord stands as a cloudy pillar at the entrance of the tent, they worship Him. Wow, what a scene!!

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Where does God's Spirit dwell today?

As a believer today you don't have to go to a priest to enter God's presence on your behalf. You have God's Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you at all times. You are His temple. So to enter the presence the only thing you have to do is take time to be with Him and allow Him to minister to your heart. Enter into His meeting tent by making yourself available. Request His presence and He will reveal Himself to you!!

Requesting the Presence

On our way home from school one day, my five year old daughter asked me one of her questions that stumped me a little, "Mom, what does God look like?" I began to pray for wisdom but my prayer wasn't brief enough before my three year old chimed in behind her big sister, "Yeah, what does God look like?" "Well, honey, I believe He looks like us because when the Bible describes God making man it says He made us in His image." Silence . . . did that take care of the question? Not likely, "Then can we see His face?" This was my three year old again. "Actually, we can't see His face, but Moses was allowed to see God from behind." That gave my oldest one enough time to come up with her next question, "But we can talk to God any time, right?" "Yes, dear, when we pray we are talking to God and you can do that at any time." Then the youngest one started the dreaded never ending question that comes from this age group - "Why?" And that was when I prayed another prayer for wisdom. How was I going to explain this one to a five year old and three year old beyond the point I have already explained!! "Dear Lord, help me out here - I don't know what to tell them!!" As I was at the end of praying this to myself, He sent in the pinch hitter. My oldest daughter tells her sister, "It doesn't matter if we can see His face, sister, because we can talk to Him at any time." Whew, that was enough!! They were both satisfied with their conclusion and so was I.

Any time! Have you ever thought about it? We can talk to God at any time. How exciting!! This is a step forward from entering God's presence. Requesting His presence goes beyond our spending quiet time with God to our communing with Him continually and asking Him to guide us and requesting that He never leave us. This is when our relationship with God goes deeper into a dependency on Him to get us through each moment of our lives.

Read Exodus 33:1-3. Why was the Lord declaring He would not go with the Israelites?

How might our being this way hinder God's presence from "being with us" continually?

Read Exodus 33:12-13. How did Moses request the presence of God to be with them?

This is what Moses did when He entered God's presence by going into the Tent of Meeting. He petitioned the Lord on behalf of all the people. The Lord had already told Moses earlier in verse three of this chapter to lead His people up into the land of milk and honey, the land that He had promised them. Yet, He would not go with them because they are stubborn people and if He did He would surely destroy them along the way.

What a thought? Going on without the Almighty!! I couldn't fathom it and it seems that neither could Moses. I love Moses' frankness and I feel this is how God wants us to be as well. Moses basically tells God, "Lord, You told me to lead these people to the Promised Land. You told me that You know me by name and look favorably on me. Well Lord, if this is true then I must request Your presence. I really want to understand Your ways. Let me do so Lord so I may enjoy You more fully. And don't forget Lord that these are Your people." (Paraphrase of Exodus 33:12-13) Wow!! Moses really just laid it on the line. Respectfully, he told the Lord how he felt and how he longed for the presence of the Lord to go with them. Not only because the Lord found favor in him, but because he wanted to understand the Lord and continue to enjoy His favor.

Write below Exodus 33:14.

The Lord's promise to Moses is the same to us today. When He goes with us He does give us rest.

Are you requesting the presence of the Lord to be with you continually? Are you respectfully and boldly approaching the throne of God saying, "Lord I want to understand Your ways and enjoy Your favor?" As the Lord told Moses, we can't see His face. But as my little ones concluded, it doesn't matter, because we can talk to Him at any time. And in talking to Him, we can request His presence being reassured that He *will* be there to guide us and give us rest.

Crying Out and Confessing

Crying out to God and confessing our sins is the part of reaching out to God that we must not skip over. Christians have the saving blood of Jesus Christ and their sins have been forgiven – past, present and future. However, crying out and confessing to God brings forth growth in our lives.

Read John 13:1-10. What does Jesus tell Peter in verse 8 as to why only his feet must be washed?

Why is it that Jesus said that only the feet needed to be washed? (verse 10)

As Christians, our whole body has been cleansed by the blood of Christ when we accepted Jesus shedding it on the cross. However, as we live in this world our “feet” will get dirty from the influence of the world and our sinful nature. Therefore, we must cry out to God to cleanse the parts that are dirty.

Read 1 John 1:5-10. What are we not living by if we walk in darkness? (verse 6)

How can we deceive ourselves? (verse 8)

What will God do if we confess our sins? (verse 9)

When we confess our sins God is faithful to forgive us because that is His nature. But the verse continues to say that He will “purify us from all unrighteousness.” Crying out to God and confessing our sins draws us closer to God and He begins to purify us by showing us how to overcome the sin and live a righteous life.

Final Reflections: Learning how to reach for God is the most important lesson we can learn when it comes to strengthening our relationship with Him. Each Christian has a personal relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of this personal relationship we will each have different, yet many common, ways we can reach for God. However, these ways should never go against the truth of God's Word. This came to the surface in my own Christian walk through the realization of applying God's Word in truth. I was told all my life by well intended Christians that "God would not give you more than you can bear." This saying and belief was a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:13 which tells us God will not allow temptation in our life to be more than we can bear and He does this by providing a way out so we can stand up under temptation. What's the difference? In one instance the well intended Christians in my life were relating the concept to trials and in truth the Scripture refers to temptation. When we look at it in a manner that God is not giving us more than we can bear during trials then we are placing the emphasis on our own strength. In concept we think, "God knows that I can do it so He has allowed it to happen in my life." However, when we look at it in the truth of the actual text of temptation, we begin to look for God and look for the way out that He has provided.

There are trials that are present in our lives which bring us to our knees. These trials make us realize that we have no strength to bear them on our own and we must lay them at the feet of Jesus - cast the burdens upon Him. They bring forth the dependence we have on God and how much we must reach out to Him for strength to endure. These trials bring a heart wrenching cry from the bottom of your soul and many times we see God in all His glory when we reach for Him during these times. When times like these happen in my life, I have the most healing cries for my soul. Learning how to release guilt in my life was such a time. I will never forget the day that God brought the truths to the forefront in my reading of His Word. My heart was overwhelmed with the truth of who God really was and I began to sob in the awestruck feeling I had for His grace. Ultimately I wanted to reach out for more of God. All this happened because I made the steps to reach out to Him by entering His presence; requesting His presence; crying out and confessing to Him. When we stop to take notice of His grace in our own lives, we can't help but to reach out for more of Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I love You and I want to have more of You in my life. Teach me how to reach out to You in a way that is best for my growth. Lead me in accomplishing the healing from guilt I have carried in my life. Show me how to enter Your presence and request Your presence. Guide me in crying out to You in confession so I may grow closer to You ultimately bringing glory to You alone. I request all this through the relationship I have with You through Jesus Christ. Amen