

Seeking Him with the Language of Praise

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[0:00] Well, the notes are relatively brief.

The point that we're going to be looking at tonight, I've been here the last few Wednesdays, I'm not sure, but kind of launched out into a study that I've entitled Seeking and Finding God and reminded of the promise of Scripture that God said, you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all of your heart.

So that's what we're looking at. And the subject we're looking at, I think, defines the difference between what I might call Christianity that is just strictly practical.

Maybe even I would add the word pragmatic. That is that our Christianity is just so practical that it doesn't go into the area of intimacy with God where we desire a fellowship and a communion with God, that our Christianity and even our prayers go further than just kind of the need or the practical things.

You know, we go to church, we pay our tithe, we pray before we eat our meals. Maybe we'll have a little prayer time before we go to bed or maybe around the morning if we do that.

[1:49] For many Christians in America, it's just so practical, so basic, that we have even forgotten, I think many, have forgotten the richness of our relationship with Christ.

It goes way beyond just what we can get out of it daily. It goes way beyond that and really ought to be characterized by an intimacy with God that's not just, you know, compartmentalized.

That's another thing that we do quite often. We have our intimate time and then we have everything else. You know, that, but really our intimacy with God, our familiarity with God, our walk with Him, that is a constant thing, a daily thing.

And so, I think this subject, seeking and finding God, is what defines that. And this is then further defined as our Christian walk that has this priority, and this kind of the premise that this whole study is based upon, this priority to seek God so that we can find God, so that we can know God, so that we can love God.

And I'm not just talking about, again, not just talking about an event that takes place and then we never have to revisit that, never have to consider that again.

[3:16] But we're talking about a daily thing. We're also talking about a progressive thing that we seek and seek so that we can find God and find God and know Him more and more and more so that we can love Him more and more.

So it's progressive. It's a daily, ongoing thing. But this is the premise of this whole study. And so, if you're going to find God so that you can know Him and so that you can love Him, then you must seek Him the right way.

This is the whole premise of this study. And there are right ways to seek God. There really are. And we are kind of naming those here. And I'm not suggesting that this is somehow an exhausted list. And I'm also not suggesting that our Christian walk is a formula that's formulaic, that, you know, if you just do step one, two, three, four, five, then you're not going to have any struggles, not going to have any setbacks.

I'm not suggesting that either. And I'm also not suggesting that a person could not know these things and that God would somehow withhold Himself from them.

[4:31] God is gracious to reveal Himself to us even though we're not looking for Him. Okay? So God's gracious to do all those things.

There are many other dynamics to this. But as we determinately look into the Christian life, the Christian walk, then there are some things that the Scripture prescribes that we should do so that really come under that category, seeking God so that we can find Him and know Him and love Him.

All right, so we've looked at several of these already. In fact, three of them. Seek His face and not His hands only. That is, seeking Him for Him and not just simply for what He can do for you. This is so key, so important. Second, seek Him with an obedient spirit. An obedient spirit. A spirit that always says yes to God.

It is ridiculous. It is a waste of time to endeavor to seek after God, to find God if you have not made up your mind to obey Him.

[5:42] If your desire is not to obey Him and to do whatever He wants you to do. If you have no desire, have not made up your mind to say yes to God, then you're wasting your time seeking for Him.

Number three, seek Him with a heart that is pure. That is a heart that wants one thing. And that one thing is God. And we looked at this last time.

If your greatest He, that is, He is to be your greatest desire, your greatest love, your greatest fear. We kind of talked about those three things and they're progressive as well because if your greatest desire is God, then your greatest love will be God.

And if your greatest love is God, then your greatest fear is losing His presence in your life, His manifest presence in your life. That ought to be your greatest fear. All right, so now we're ready for number four.

Seek Him with the language of praise. And I approach this subject with a lot of intrepidation because now I'm getting into the area of Jonathan's expertise back there.

[7:00] Praise, worship. And so I know there's at least one guy in the room that's going to know exactly what I'm talking about here. And if I make any mistakes, Jonathan, you can correct me later.

But do it privately and not publicly. Oh, really, we're not going to get that technical into this whole thing of worship and what worship is. It's a big subject in our day.

Jonathan knows that. Many, many books have been written on the subject of worship over the years. But it seems in the last several years that has intensified a lot of debates about worship, true worship, and specifically in the context of music.

Context of music. And so we're going to talk a little bit about praise, the language of praise. And I'm going to approach the subject, first of all, in that context of singing.

Now, not all of you are singers. And I'll have something for you a little bit later in the study, okay? So I'm going to leave you out. But the point is that the genuine praise, and I emphasize genuine, the genuine praise of God's people is something God loves, intensely loves, and desires from His people.

[8:26] Now, I'm going to come just short of saying this is something God needs. Because God doesn't need anything. He is self-sufficient. He could get along just fine.

I would even argue get along better without us. But that's just from a man's perspective. But God is self-sufficient. He's not needing anything. Nothing needs to be added to Him in anything.

And yet, you do understand, you do get the sense from Scripture that the praise of His people is something He desires and loves and responds to.

And I would even go a step further and say that is something He demands of us. The praise of His people. Praise and worship. Someone has said that there is nothing more attractive to God than genuine praise.

Now, whenever I say someone has said, it means I can't remember who said it. Alright, so don't...

This isn't a dissertation. I don't have to footnote this and reference all this. You know, I don't have to do that.

[9:27] I can just throw it out there and say someone has said it. Now, I might also add that sometimes preachers say that because it's a lie. You know, they made it up. And that's not the case here.

I jotted this down on some notes from years ago and I didn't put the name down. So, anyway, I don't know why I go off in that shmier. But someone did say this and I agree with them.

There's nothing more attractive to God than genuine praise. It's attracted to Him. And I take this to mean that God is attracted to it.

And we're going to look at a verse of Scripture. In fact, I'm going to end our little discussion tonight with a passage out of Psalms that tells us that God inhabits the praise of His people.

We'll talk a little bit more about that later. But there's, again, the same idea. God is attracted to it. He desires that. He comes to that. Psalm 147, verse 1.

[10:38] Did I put that in your notes? All right. Praise the Lord for it is good to sing praises to our people. I've got to tell you, some of you who just refuse to sing on Sunday morning, you'd better wake up because it's good to sing praises to our God.

You say, but I can't carry a tuna in a bucket. Or a tuna. Is it a tuna? All right. Who would want to carry tuna in a bucket anyway? Yeah, yeah.

I'd say leave it in the ocean. Forget about the tuna. But it's good to sing praises to our God for it is pleasant and praise is beautiful.

All right. So let's talk a bit about praise. First of all, here in the context of music or singing. In the worship of the church, I'm talking about the collective, the corporate worship.

When we assemble, that's what the church is, the assembly of God's people. When we assemble for worship and we do a number of things, we sing.

[11:51] And so that's what I'm referring to here. In that aspect of our worship, there are basically three kinds of hymns that we sing.

I'm going to use hymns in kind of a broad sense. I'm talking about choruses as well. All right.

There's a fine distinction between the two.

But anyway, there are three kinds, three types, three categories. All right. Might be a better way to define that. First, there is the hymn of testimony.

testimony. The hymn, or chorus, of testimony. That is, they give testimony of what God has done, He is doing, will do for me.

And generally, a hymn of testimony is more personal in nature. This is what God has done for me. I'm singing about that.

[12:50] It's a hymn of testimony. Here's an example, an old example, since Jesus came into my heart. Think of these words here. What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought.

You know this hymn? We could sing it. Yeah. We could sing it. What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart.

I have light in my soul for which long I have sought since Jesus came into my heart. Floods of joy o'er my soul, like the sea billows roll since Jesus came into my heart.

I like that old hymn. That's a hymn of testimony. Isn't it? Now, we might just, I might just say here that we have a tendency to just say old hymns are praise.

But, strictly speaking, they're not. This is a hymn of testimony. Let me give you one that's more contemporary. Mighty to save.

[13:50] We sing. Sing this from time to time. Everyone needs compassion. Love that's never failing. Let mercy fall on me. Everyone needs forgiveness.

The kindness of a Savior. The hope of nations. Savior, He can move the mountains. My God is mighty to save. He's mighty to save. Forever author of salvation, He rose and conquered the grave. Jesus conquered the grave. That's a chorus or hymn. I would call that a modern hymn. Of testimony. Of testimony of the greatness of God.

Alright? And what He can do. What He has done. It's testimony. Or how about this one? Give me Jesus. Jeremy Camp. Hear the words. Very simple words.

In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus. That's all I want. I just want Jesus. You can have all this world. Just give me Jesus. When I am alone, give me Jesus.

[14:51] You can have all this world. Just give me Jesus. Jesus, give me Jesus. That's testimony. Here is the singer testifying to the thing he wants most or she wants most.

It's testimony. Now, God, you know, it certainly would maybe fall into some other categories. Could, in some way, but strictly speaking, it's a hymn of testimony.

How about this? Very popular one. In Christ alone. Very popular. That just becomes so popular, I'm afraid we're going to wear it out. Wear it out.

But the Gettys. In Christ alone, my hope is found. Is that a word of testimony? Absolutely. Is that your testimony? I hope so. He is my light, my strength, my song, this cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are still, when strivings cease, my comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand. That's testimony.

[16:04] Alright. That's a hymn. I think. Strictly speaking, a modern hymn. We have hymn writers today. The Gettys are, I think, one of the best.

Alright. So these are hymns of testimony, choruses. Test. Alright. The second, there's the hymn of exhortation.

Exhortation. Where, in singing him, you are exhorting. Exhorting others to do something. You know, let's join together and respond to something God has done or Christ has done. So, hymns of exhortation call for a response to what God has done, is doing, will do for us. That's more kind of corporate kind of worship. And we are encouraging and exhorting one another to respond to the Word of God, the greatness of God.

[17:09] Relatively old example of that would be the Gaithers, let's just praise the Lord. We don't sing that very much anymore, but, you know, hymns come and, you know, we don't sing the popular, but still, it's still sung very popular.

Let's just praise the Lord. How do the words go? I mean, they're very simple. Only four lines. Let's just praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Let's lift, just lift our hands toward heaven and praise the Lord. That's exhortation. Because who are you speaking to? Speaking to one another. We're coming together. You know, let's, all of us, all of us, come on, let's, let's all join in this.

Let's just praise the Lord. That's a hymn of exhortation. Here's a more contemporary example. One of my favorites. Untitled Hymn.

Or maybe a, some would know it by Come to Jesus. There's several lines. Let me just give you one, or stanza. Weak and wounded sinner, lost and left to die.

[18:19] Oh, raise your head, for love is passing by. Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus and live. That's clear exhortation. Exhorting.

Pleading, really, for people to come to Jesus. And this one, How Great is Our God, Chris Thomas. We've seen that one as well. The splendor of the King, clothed in majesty, let all the earth rejoice. All the earth rejoices. He wraps himself in light and darkness, tries to hide and trembles at his voice, trembles at his voice. How great is our God. Sing with me.

That's how he wrote it. Sing with me. How great is our God and all will see how great, how great is our God. That's a hymn of exhortation. All right.

So, all these, I've given many, many other examples that I could give you. In fact, I took out several because I thought it would take too much time and I am. But we sing them in a sense to one another in exhortation.

[19:27] That is a call for a response. Now, should we sing hymns of testimony? Absolutely. Should we sing hymns of exhortation?

Sure. I'd say our hymnal, just the old Baptist hymnal. Well, even the new one. Primarily, those are hymns of testimony and exhortation.

Very few of them would fall into this third category, strictly speaking. That would be hymns of praise. There is the hymn of praise.

That's the third category. And I, you know, I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings or offend anybody, but most of the older and familiar hymns that the church has been singing for years upon years are not, strictly speaking, hymns of praise.

Now, they highlight, obviously, highlight many of them. The good ones do anyway. they highlight the character of God, the work of God, the blessing of God, the, you know, the Word of God.

[20:39] They highlight these things, but they are primarily exhorting us to respond to them or giving a testimony of what those things have done, you know, what those things mean to me in my life.

Very few are hymns of praise. Here's an example. not an example of a hymn of praise, but an example of something we generally would call a hymn of praise.

That is, O come, let us adore Him. The chorus version of that, not the Christmas hymn. O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

There are three verses, but the first verse, we would generally call that a, you know, kind of a hymn of praise, but it's a hymn of exhortation. O come, let us adore Him.

That's exhortation. Now, to make that a hymn of praise, we'd have to change a few of the words. It'd be a little awkward, but we could sing it this way.

[21:41] We come to you to adore you. You know, it might be a little, we might do something a little different there, but that, see the difference?

O come, let us adore Him. There isn't anything wrong with singing that and exhorting one another and, you know, that being a part of our worship. But, what a difference there is to, from that, to say,

we come to you to adore you.

Now, the other two verses of it are praise. we give you all the glory. And, for you alone are worthy. And, we sing it that way in those, that's praise. Alright, so, so then, what is a hymn of praise? Let me give you a few examples of what I would call hymns of praise.

Phillips, Craig, and Dean. Your grace still amazes me. We sing that. My faithful Father, enduring friend, Your tender mercies like a river with no end.

[22 : 58] It overwhelms me, covers my sin. Each time I come into Your presence, I stand in wonder once again. Your grace still amazes me.

Your love is still a mystery. Each day, I fall on my knees because Your grace still amazes me. O patient Savior, You make me whole.

You are the author and the healer of my soul. What can I give You, Lord? What can I say? I know there's no way to repay You, only to offer You my praise. It's deeper, it's wider, it's stronger, it's higher, it's deeper, it's wider, it's stronger, it's higher than anything my eyes can see.

Now that's a hymn of praise. A hymn of praise, clearly. And this one, one of my personal favorites, Chris Tomlin, entitled, Indescribable.

From the heights, highest of the heights to the depths of the sea, creations revealing Your majesty. From the colors of fall to the fragrance of spring, every creature unique in the song that it sings, all exclaiming, indescribable, uncontainable.

[24 : 15] You place the stars in the sky and You know them by name. You are amazing, God, all-powerful, untamable. Awestruck, we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim You are amazing, God.

And we go on with it. That's a hymn of praise. Clearly praise. Alright, so what makes the difference? They're not really subtle differences.

The tip, or the key, right off, are the personal pronouns used. Because it's your and you and the song is directed not to one another, not even to self as a matter of testimony, but directed to God. directly to Him. In fact, I think that's in our kind of era of the popularity of choruses, call them choruses.

I mean, there's downside to a lot of that. You know, 7-11 songs, right? You know what a 7-11 song is?

[25 : 31] Somebody just yesterday said, I had never heard that before. 7-11. What is a 7-11 song? It just has 7 words in it and you sing it 11 times.

Over and over and over and over again. And there is a lot I would might as well insert here, can't resist it, a lot of bad theology in the choruses.

They are, many of them are me-centered. And if they have any theology at all. Some that do are not correct.

There are some great choruses out there and the pro, the plus to that is that many of them are true praise.

They are directed toward God. that's the difference. So here is the definition of praise is the direct adoration of the heart.

[26 : 35] to God the Father and God the Son through the power of God the Holy Spirit. I think that's a pretty good difference.

I mean, simple. Concise. And I emphasize the fact that it's through the power of God the Holy Spirit. I don't include direct adoration of the heart to God the Holy Spirit because nowhere in Scripture do you read about us being commanded or exhorted to praise or worship the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit always gives testimony and witness to the Son. He doesn't speak of His own. He speaks of Christ. And so the Holy Spirit's role is to empower us to worship Him.

I mean, the Bible tells us we must worship in Spirit. So here's the definition. Praise is the direct, not round about, but direct adoration of the heart to God the Father and God the Son through the power of God the Holy Spirit.

And God loves that. God desires that. God demands that. And I suggest to you that this is how we must seek Him so that we can find Him and know Him and love Him.

[28 : 04] Now, I need to let some of you off the hook here. Well, somewhat off the hook. Because there are other ways to praise Him. Alright, you are shoo.

That's what I need to hear. Because, Pastor, I can't sing a lick. I know Tom has testified that he sings on his lawn mower. And, you know, I don't know. Every once in a while, I'll be in the worship

service.

you know, Tom's pretty close to me over here to my back, to my right. And I try to listen, see if he's singing. I don't have the nerve to look back and see. I'm up with a signal if I'm getting a little out. But, anyway, there are other ways. And, really, I would suggest that all these ways we need to be involved in. we sing praises to God.

First of all, that's clear. And there are many psalms to highlight that and I think even exhort us to sing.

[29 : 10] I don't want to offend anybody, but there's something not quite right about a believer who doesn't ever want to sing.

Now, in private, okay, all right. But we need to sing. Several years ago, and I may have told this story, but when I was a Walmart manager down in Texas, and we attended a church while we were trying to decide where God wanted us and attended this church a number of Sundays and at least a half a dozen times.

I guess the pastor just had a thing about this. He would mention that angels don't sing. They can't sing. That you never have in scripture anything about angels singing.

They're always saying, but never singing. And he just had this thing about that. And I did a little study on that, and to a point strictly speaking, he's right.

But I came to this conclusion. If angels do not sing, they've just not been given that ability, created with that ability, then, hey, that's one other thing that makes us quite unique.

[30 : 29] God has given us the ability to sing. And I know many of your convinced you can't, but I'm just as convinced you can. And I'm also convinced you should.

And so maybe this Sunday, I'll sit up on the pulpit area, and look, and watch, and make notes.

See, Oscar, he's not right. All right, sing praises. I've got to move on here. you can think thoughts of praises to God.

Have you ever thought about that? Don't you do that? You don't actually verbalize, but you think thoughts of praise to God.

You can speak praises to God. speak. I mean, that goes without saying.

[31 : 34] And then this fourth one, you can even write praises. Some of you might keep a prayer journal. I have off and on over the years.

I'm not right now. I'd like to get back to that. But you can write praises. In fact, I brought with me a book that I've been using my devotional. About done with it.

It's by Jerry Bridges. It's a devotional book. I highly recommend him. It's entitled I Exalt You of God. After he gives a little devotional, he closes it off with a prayer.

It's written as if he were speaking directly to God. I'll give you an example. Great God, in public and private, in sanctuary home, may my life be steeped in prayer.

Let me give you another example. He says, Infinite God, eternal God, unchangeable God, I worship you in amazement. This is just his words.

[32 : 36] He's expressing in print his praises to God. You can do that. Maybe nobody will ever read it. But you're directing it toward God. Alright?

Now, let me add this very quickly. you must mean it with all your heart and spirit. You're going to praise God whether in singing or thinking or writing or speaking, whatever mode communication, you better mean it.

Because you might be able to fool me. In fact, it would be easy to fool me. And others, but you can never fool God. you never fool him. And, I'm sorry?

I have a question. Yes? Can you hear music that without words plays praise to God? Well, I think music leads to thoughts.

Words are crucial in praise. We have the word. God didn't express truth through images, I mean, in a sense, but their words and our praise should be words as well, whether they're thought or spoken.

[34 : 01] I think so. And, you know, I like to listen to instrumental music, and, you know, and especially if, I mean, when they are songs that I'm familiar with and I know the words, they prompt me in my prayers and devotion.

And I, you know, but yeah, words are, I think, all important. All right. You must mean it with all of your heart. John 24, God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth. That's such a familiar passage, and yet it gives us some pretty important instruction. If you're going to worship him, these are the words of Jesus. You must worship him in spirit, and you must worship

him in truth.

All right. So this is key, I think, to seeking him with the language of praise. If, for example, we sing the hymn, the old hymn, and it's really, I hear it quite a bit, even today, it's been redone.

All to Jesus I surrender. An old hymn. All to him I freely give, I will ever love and trust him in his presence daily live. All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

[35 : 12] I surrender all. Now, if we sing that, and all the time we're holding back 99% for ourselves, then we're lying. And also, I would even say, if we sing that, and all the time we're grudgingly giving our 1%, that's lying too.

Because I freely give, we're singing here. I ever love and trust. And if we sing that, and we show very little love for God, and exercise very little faith, then I think God hates that.

When we sing things like that and don't mean that, and our lives and the decision of life say the absolute opposite of it, then that's lying.

That's lying. Did you know that there is more lying going on in the church while we are singing than any other time? I don't know, this isn't a warm, fuzzy kind of thing to say, but maybe this will just destroy you next time you have worship and you're out there and nobody's going to see.

So maybe this is counterproductive. But really, to give you an example, and this is a Gaither chorus, Because He Lives.

[36 : 40] And it goes like this, Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future and life is worth the living just because He lives.

I've just got to skip around. You're very familiar with that. Is that true? I mean, how are you really doing when it comes to facing the future?

When you sing it, how are you doing with that? That's a pretty resolute statement. I'm making an extreme point here, all right?

Not any of us are ever going to arrive in this life, but I've got to ask you, how are you doing with that? about the future, when it comes to facing the future.

Do you really know that He holds the future? Do you really know that? When you sing that, that's what you're saying. I know He holds the future. And what about this part of it?

[37 : 49] All fear is gone. Is all fear gone? is not true. In fact, I would kind of take issue with some hymns. Sometimes we lie because we don't mean it.

Sometimes we lie because the words we can't possibly mean. Not yet. Because all fear is not gone. Now, it's really difficult to sing that and mean that.

In fact, I would say that, again, that it's impossible to say that. All fear, to say all fear is gone, is not true. It's going, but it is by far not gone.

Not gone. I'm just making a point. You know, maybe I should take a little survey and let people stand up. You stand up if you can say unequivocally that all fear is gone.

Go ahead, stand up. 90%. All right, 90%. Well, the psalm said I fear nothing. All fear is gone.

[38 : 54] And really, that's not true. The point I'm making is be careful what you say, be careful what you sing. But what if we took those words and tweaked them a little bit and changed it this way?

Because, and we're making this a praise saying, because you are living, I can face today, tonight, tomorrow, or tomorrow, and life is worth the living because you live it.

And all fear is going. Now, that's true, isn't it? I hope. I think then that God says there's somebody who's telling the truth.

Somebody who means what they're singing. And I like that. And so, if you want to learn, I'll say to you, if you want to learn more about praise, singing praises, read the Psalms.

Right, John? In fact, I counted it up, and I probably missed a few, but David refers, and other Psalm writers refer to praising God 160 times in the Psalms.

[40 : 05] It must be important. and we need to learn what it is, what it means. Alright, so let me close then with this Psalm, Psalm 22, verse 3.

I don't think I put that in your notes. You can jot this down. And it's a promise, I think, that relates directly to this whole idea of seeking and finding and knowing and loving God.

Psalm 22, verse 3. But you are holy, and this is the New King James version. You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.

As some of us have grown up with the King James, and the King James uses the word inhabit. You're holy, you inhabit, say it that way, inhabit the praises of Israel.

Israel stands for the people of God. That would include us. He inhabits the praise of His people. The word enthroned in or inhabit is a Hebrew word that means to sit, to remain, to dwell, to inhabit. [41 : 25] In fact, I don't know if enthroned really catches the idea, that, but He takes up residence in the praises of His people.

Do you see how important it is to God? That we praise Him. We're wanting to find Him. And if we're going to find Him, we must seek Him, seek Him the right way, and one of the right ways is to seek Him with the language of praise, because He sits down with us and I praise, inhabits it. What a wonderful promise.