

The Pursuit of God

by Stephen Olford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of cultivating the presence of God and contemplating his person, nature, and mighty acts in order to deepen our love and worship for him.

Duration: 33:09

Scripture: Psalm 27:1, Psalm 27:3-6, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Seeking God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of pursuing God in a world that is becoming increasingly materialistic and losing sight of spiritual things. He highlights the decline in church attendance and the need for a revival of religion. The speaker encourages the audience to be people of one desire, to cultivate the art of being focused on God alone. He emphasizes the need for contemplation and beholding the beauty of the Lord, urging the audience to spend time in quiet contemplation and to seek after God diligently.

Transcript

Psalm 27, Psalm 27, and reading the first six verses only, shall we then hear what the scripture says? The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion, in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. He shall set me up upon a rock, and now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me.

Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy. I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord. May the Lord bless to our hearts these words of holy scripture, and to his name the everlasting thanks for such a revelation.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we've looked up into thy face in song, and ask thee to speak to us, to teach us, to lead us.

By thy Holy Spirit, through thy word, do just this now, to my waiting soul, to thy worshiping people in this holy place, we ask it for thy name's sake. Amen. We turn to Psalm 27, and especially at verses 4, 5, and 6. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion, in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. He shall set me up upon a rock, and now shall my head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me. Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle the sacrifices of joy.

I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord. It is claimed by many that this psalm was composed by King David, on the occasion of his dethronement, through the conspiracy and subtle planning of his beloved son Absalom. Absalom had stole away the heart of the men of Israel, and with craftiness and cunningness had worked the dethronement of his father.

And David hath to leave his throne, flee his beloved city, and be stripped of everything that the world held dear to him, and driven into absolute poverty, privation, distress, and discouragement. There is only one thing that matters in his life, God. He breaks out into the language of the opening words of this psalm, the Lord is my light, my very sunshine, my salvation, my stronghold, my strength.

The Lord is my light when everything is darkness. The only glimmer of light is the shot from the throne of God to my soul. Amidst danger and even death, he is my deliverance, my salvation.

And amidst all the wily planning of the enemy, he is my stronghold, my fortress, and my refuge. So he goes on in this glorious psalm to speak of the one thing he is purposed to do for the rest of his life. He has learnt this one great supreme lesson, which I've been learning over the past weeks, that the only thing that matters in a man's life, in a woman's life, is God.

For ultimately when we're driven, when we're driven even to the very brink of death, everything we've discussed and lived for and held dear upon this earth, falls from us. And all that remains is that which is eternal. All that remains is God.

And if that be so, then obviously the only one thing that matters, the only one thing to be desired, the only one thing to seek after, is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, to behold his beauty, and to inquire in his temple. And so beloved friends, this morning I want to speak, for the time allotted me, on the subject of the pursuit of God. And I want to look into the faces of you young people, and older ones too, and say beloved folk here this morning, in the midst of this great city, in the days of utter uncertainty, in an hour when the so-called revival of religion, which boomed at the end of the second world war, is beginning to die off, as some of our Gallup poll findings have revealed only this past week, when the 69 percent that went to church have now become the 40s, and people are losing sight of God, and sight of worship, and sight of spiritual things, and are rushing after that which is merely materialistic, I want to say afresh this morning, that the only thing that matters is the pursuit of God.

I said David, don't be a man of many interests. Be a man of one desire, one thing, one thing. Discipline and cultivate the art of being a man of one thing.

Somebody has said, somebody has said, if you aim at nothing you're sure to hit it. David is saying here, one thing, one thing. I am not a man of divided loyalties, I am a man of one desire, and that desire I'm going to seek after until I find it.

You remember when the Lord Jesus sat in the little home at Destiny, and Martha was busy serving, and was cumbered, and laden, and frustrated because of much serving. He gently rebuked her, and pointed to Mary who was sitting at his feet, and said, Martha, Martha, thou art cumbered about much serving. One thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that part.

What was it? To sit at the feet of the Master. One thing have I desired, and that will I seek after. So many of us desire, desire this pursuit of God, but we fail to pursue, we fail to diligently seek after.

Now what is David talking about here? I want to suggest to you three things. First of all, what I'm calling the cultivation of the presence of God. The cultivation of the presence of God.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. The cultivation of the presence of God, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. Somebody has spoken of this as the practicing of the presence of God.

It involves two things. First, the designed, the designed approach to worship. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord.

If it's true that David composed this psalm while a fugitive king, then he had only memories of going up to the temple. And the fact that he was deprived of that blessed experience of entering the temple and worshiping God is deep in his soul. He thinks of the ordinances.

He thinks of the singing of great choir. He remembers the sacrifice of the lamb in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, and remembers all that that meant to him in terms of worship. How it brought into his soul the sense of the presence of God.

And he says one thing, have I desired, that will I seek after, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. My friends, the fact that you are here this morning is no fortuitous concurrence of atoms. It's not a chancy thing that you're here this morning.

With very few exceptions, I believe that you have designed to be here, and that is right and proper. God has provided means of grace which will continue right through to the end of time. And it is incumbent upon every man or woman who wants to cultivate the presence of God, to attend the house of God, never to be absent from the place of worship at a point in time, to address yourself to that fact, to rise early and to prepare your soul that you might address yourself to worship in the house of God, to open the hymn book and to sing these majestic hymns of praise as an expression of your worship to God, to approach unto the holy hill of God with clean hands and a pure heart and a spirit that is undefiled by God.

Yes, to break the bread on occasion, to drink of the cup, to remember the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and to celebrate his triumph at Calvary, to open this precious book and to look into it and to seek his will for your life, and to leave from this place tingling all over with the sense that you've met with God, you've looked into the face of Jesus Christ, cultivating the presence of God. It is recorded of Anna, the saintly Anna, that she departed not, she departed not from the temple day and night. It is recorded of the early disciples that they continued steadfastly in the apostle doctrine and in fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayer.

And they continued daily in the temple and from house to house, breaking bread with singleness of heart. And the scriptures exhort us, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. Beloved, it's no vain thing to be here in this place

this morning.

And there is something that's going to happen in your soul as you wait in God's presence in this fellowship of service, in this encounter with God in the word, which is going to make all the difference to your week as you go out with the sense of God's presence, cultivated by the designed approach to worship. But I'm sure that doesn't exhaust the meaning here. I am positive that David has something more here.

He's not only dependent upon one place, the temple, or the tabernacle, as might be more accurately translated here. David wanted a temple. It was in his heart to build a temple, but God told him he could never build that temple, for he was a man of blood, a man of war.

He prepared all the equipment and Solomon built the temple, but it was in his heart to build a temple, for he knew, he knew the value of meeting God in his appointed place. But the cultivation of the presence of God involves not only the designed approach to worship, but listen, the disciplined attitude of worship, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. David is projecting the thought that not only in God's appointed place, but everywhere he goes, might be an act of worship.

And my beloved friends, I've asked God to do something in my heart, which I believe he's begun, and he's going to consummate in his own time, that I shall be a man in whom the presence of God is so real, that every moment I live is a conscious and singular and joyous act of worship. That if I shake the hand of a man or a woman, he's conscious that he's meeting with God. That if I bow my head to give thanks for the food, the restaurant becomes a temple.

That as we go down in a taxi cab and I seek to witness to that driver, he suddenly becomes aware that the taxi cab has become a tavern apple. God is in this place, and I knew it not. But as we walk the streets under God's canopy of heaven, the whole place is a resounding temple with the voice of God breaking through in beauty and glory and wonder, because he is filling the And all the days of my life are an act of worship.

My dear housewife friend, it can be so in your kitchen. As you scrub the pots and peel the potatoes, as you tend to the children's needs and wait upon your husband, that kitchen temple, that bedroom temple, can be a place where you cultivate the presence of God. One of the great Bible teachers of Britain was the beloved late Harding Wood.

He had a most saintly wife who constantly attended on his ministry from place to place as he took conventions and Bible study hours. But when the children came along, and she had to restrict her movements to the home, she began to gripe and become discontented. She loved going around with her husband, until one day God convicted her by the Holy Spirit, and she realized that the ministry she was performing with the children, and in her kitchen and at her sink, was just as important as Harding Wood.

And it was she who originated the words that you have often seen in bookshop and bookstore around the country. For she thought it out, and she wrote it out, and she placed it over the sink in her kitchen, reading as follows. Divine service held here three times daily.

Practicing the presence of God. I said Jesus to the woman of Samaria, neither in Jerusalem nor in this mountain shall men worship God. They that worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.

And Paul on Mars Hill said, God dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as though He needed anything, for He giveth to all life, breath, and all things. And it doesn't matter where you are, you can know, you can know deep down in your soul, the presence of God. And I'm absolutely convinced that conviction will never come to this world.

Conscience, conscience that we call the great conscience of the church, will never be felt in the midst of society, and industry, and politics, until the Christian church, made up of individuals like you and me, walk around with the conscious presence of God. And I'm resolved on this Sunday morning, back from an operation, back from sickness, back from weakness, that if there's one thing I'm going to pursue more than anything else, one thing I have desired and that which I, which will I seek after, and that is to cultivate the presence of God. In the designed approach to worship, on such occasions as this, and in the disciplined attitude of worship, anywhere, at any time, practicing the presence of God.

But the psalmist goes on, and he says, in my pursuit of God, I am determined not only to cultivate the presence of God, but in the second case, to contemplate the person of God. One thing have I desired, and that would I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty, literally the loveliness, of the Lord. My dear friends, I want to spend a moment or two on this glorious praise, and I trust by the Spirit of God to make such an impact upon your heart, that you'll never, never think again, quite the same, after the exposition of this praise.

To behold the beauty of the Lord. We're living in a world of utter distraction, with the glitter and glamour and noise of great cities, and a fast-moving program of so-called modern civilization. We've lost the divine art of contemplation.

How long is it since you sat in a quiet room and just contemplated God? How long is it since you knelt at your bedside or in your paddy, and with undisturbed contemplation, you just rolled the great panorama of the infinite? You spent hour after hour just beholding the beauty of the Lord. The word behold is to gaze. It's the gaze of the soul.

It's the sustained gaze of the inner eyes of the heart upon all that God is. The beauty of his being. The beauty of his being.

No man has seen God at any time, says John in his opening prologue, but the Son, the only begotten of the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has told him out. He has declared him. And the unapproachable, unseeable God has made himself approachable and seeable in the person of Jesus Christ, and John goes on to say, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Here is the definition of beauty, grace, and truth. The artist tells us that grace is conveyed by the curved lines. Truth is suggested by the straight lines, and any artist will tell you that all beauty is comprehended within the range of the curved and the straight lines.

In various patterns they make up the beauty we see in every aspect of God, whether in his creation with the flaming sunset, the mystery of the sea, the glorious vegetation coming to life in spring now, the wobble of the bird, in all the wonder of his creation, all the glory of God, and the handiwork which are before us, whether it's that or whether it's in the wonder of a personality through whom Christ blazes forth in resurrection life. Wherever it is and however it is, we can contemplate the beauty of the Lord, the beauty of the Lord through grace and truth. Not only the beauty of his being, but the beauty of his nature.

The New Testament tells us that the nature of God is spirit, is love, is light. Three times over in the New Testament we're told specifically, briefly, and categorically that God is spirit. God is love.

God is light. God is spirit. Oh, to contemplate the beauty of this concept.

God is spirit, therefore he is eternal. He transcends time. All time commences out of him or is consummated within him.

He is immutable, unchangeable. I am the Lord, I change not. There is no decay, no change in our God who is spirit.

Because he is spirit, he is omnipresent. He is omnipresent. He is everywhere at the same time.

Ten million intelligences can be aware of him at every corner of the earth at one given moment, because it is glorious omnipresence. He is omnipotent, almighty in power. He transcends every conceivable power.

We can pick up a Kushtra, we can pick up a Hitler or a Mussolini, and they'll teach us something of tyrannical power which must crush to have its way. But he is a God who can have all hell laugh in his face, and God still be conqueror and sovereign, for he's omnipotent. He is omniscient.

The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, and at every moment he's cognizant of everything that's happening in every heart of every soul and intelligent intelligent being that was ever created. He is omniscient. Oh, to contemplate the greatness of our God, the mighty spirit.

He is love. God is love. And from that fountain of love flow the glorious graces of infinite grace, and mercy, and goodness, and long-suffering, and gentleness, and everything else that makes up love.

God is the fount of love. Indeed, the very text here in the Hebrew reads, that I may behold, that I may behold the loveliness of the Lord. When we turn away from the cruelty, when we turn away from the death stories and gangster stories of our radios, and televisions, and the newspaper, and the wars and rumors of wars, and contemplate the God of love.

Oh, how that pure love cleanses our souls and makes us love again, as he does love. He is like the straight lines of truth, and integrity, and holiness, and majesty, and justice. And when everybody's warped in their judgment, when integrity has taken flight from the world, when faithfulness is a rare quality to find, when holiness is non-existent, how wonderful to contemplate the God who sits upon the throne of holiness.

The cultivation of the presence of God. The contemplation of the person of God. Young people, older ones, may I exhort you to take your Bibles into the place of solitude and quietness, even today.

And having shut the door behind you, open up this psalm, oh one like it. Kneel down before God and spend in silence, not so much in petition, not so much in intercessional supplication, but spend time in silence in contemplation, in silent wonder of your God, in the beauty of his being, the beauty of his nature, yes, and in the beauty of his doings, his mighty acts. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

There's the mighty act of creation. Go out into this springtime world of ours and see something of the mighty acts of creation. He is the God of preservation.

By him all things consist and subsist. He upholdeth all things by the word of his power. He is the God of history.

And what is history but his story, and as we trace his sovereign acts amongst the children of men, our souls worship and adore. Ultimately he is the God of redemption, this mighty God of redemption. In Jesus Christ has visited us in the fullness of time, through Jesus Christ, who was born of a woman under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.

He's going to consummate that mighty act of redemption in a day when he himself in Christ will break through from the sky to rapture his waiting church. Hallelujah for the day of final victory. This is our God.

This is our God. Contemplate him. Contemplate him.

Oh, one thing have I desired and that which I will I seek after, says David, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold with sustained gaze the beauty of the Lord. The beauty of the Lord. David has one other thought with which we conclude this morning.

Not only is the pursuit of God, the cultivation of the presence of God, the contemplation of the person of God, but the pursuit of God involves the consummation of the purpose of God. To behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. To inquire in his temple.

And I understand that the Lexican translation of the word inquire is the very same word that's found in John chapter 6, where Jesus says, search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have life. They are they which testify of me. The consummation of the purpose of God in my life only comes when, one, I find God's will, inquire in his temple, and secondly, fulfill God's will.

First of all, find God's will. Why do I practice the presence of God? Why do I contemplate his person? In order that I may learn his will for my life. Inquire in his temple, if by any means I might find what is his will for my life.

Jesus said, Jesus said, search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have life. They are they which testify of me. Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

David says himself in this psalm, teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. But not only the finding of that will, but the fulfilling of it. The fulfilling of it.

Living it out in terms of daily experience, in order that I might know what verses five and six say. First of all, the security, the security which God provides for my life. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion, and the pavilion was that big tent within the center of the army, surrounded by God's absolute security.

And if I want to live a life of security in the sense that I'm always in the center of God's will, then having sought his will, I must fulfill it. The secret of his tabernacle speaks of serenity, the life of serenity, the place of absolute quietness, and the holy of holies, and in the midst of all the bustle and noise of a great city, I can know not only security, but serenity in my heart. This is the fruit of practicing the presence of God.

And not only that supremacy, for I shall be set up upon a rock, the place of elevation, high above my enemies, I can lift up my head above all my enemies and hold it high in absolute supremacy and victory. This flows from the pursuit of God, and ultimately, and I love this thought, I shall know a life not only of

security, not only of serenity within the tabernacle, not only of supremacy upon the rock, but a life of absolute sufficiency, and out of the fullness of that sufficiency, I will pour out the sacrifice of joy. The word in the margin here, I shall pour out the sacrifice of shouting.

Why? Because I'm living a life of absolute sufficiency. And out of that fullness and overflow, everybody who touches me, and everybody I touch, will feel something of the outflowing of the resurrection life of Jesus. Out of the innermost deep shall flow the ripples of living water.

What a life! The pursuit of God. Will you resolve with me on this Sunday morning, this Communion Sunday, to pursue God by the cultivation of his presence, by the contemplation of his person, by the confirmation of his purpose in your life and mine. Let us pray.

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