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## CHAPTER 1

### How Close Can We Get

When Elijah vanished in a whirlwind, Elisha posed a loaded question packed with urgency. Instead of seeking his missing mentor, Elisha demanded, “*Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?*”<sup>1</sup> Deep down, everyone wants the answer to this question—especially when grieving a loss or facing a crisis. We insist beyond curiosity to know the truth about God and we long to encounter His presence. Job cried in desperation, “*Oh that I knew where I might find Him!*”<sup>2</sup> He lamented with a systematic focus, “*I go forward but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; When He acts on the left, I cannot behold Him; He turns to the right, I cannot see Him.*”<sup>3</sup>



When God seems to be missing, we are tempted to assign blame. Sometimes we blame the church or ourselves. Contending with doubt we make excuses, devise substitutes, or adopt idols. Occasionally frustration gets the best of us, and we venture to blame God.

#### Where is God?

Striving to raise two little boys, Rob and Erin came to their wit’s end. Frankie and Jonny were compulsive troublemakers; they instigated mischief wherever they went. Since Reverend Stearns specialized in life-changing discipline, the weary parents enlisted his help.



This seasoned man of God agreed to speak with the boys beginning with the naughty nine-year-old. Sitting in an empty sanctuary the

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 2:14 NAS

<sup>2</sup> Job 23:3 NAS

<sup>3</sup> Job 23:8-9 NAS

Reverend asked, “Child where is God?” When Frankie offered no response. Stearns quietly repeated the question. Again, the boy did not attempt to answer, so the minister elevated his voice in a thundering crescendo, “WHERE IS GOD!” At that, the frightened boy bolted from the room sprinting straight to his parents. His younger brother followed stammering, “Wha-wha-what happened?” Frankie panted, “We’re in BIG trouble this time, God is MISSING—and they think WE did it!”<sup>4</sup>

From our vantage point, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit often seem too far away. We cannot see them with our eyes, hear them with our ears, or touch them with our hands. Nonetheless, assigning blame misses the point. God wants to be found—in all three cohesive persons. As a sacred priority, He intends on saving us by fully restoring our relationship as He intended it to be.

Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus to establish a new normal in our relationship with Him. Made in His image, we share an intimate bond with divine reality based on His amazing grace and magnificent mercy. After rising from the dead and ascended into heaven, Jesus asked His Father to send “*the Spirit of Truth*” to live within us.<sup>5</sup> As redeemed believers, God’s presence literally dwells inside of us. We are His chosen sanctuary. In reference to His ascension, Jesus assured His disciples saying:

*So when that day comes, you will know that I am living in the Father and that you are one with me, for **I will be living in you.*** (John 14:20 TPT)

*Jesus replied, “Loving me empowers you to obey my word. And my Father will love you so deeply that **we will come to you and make you our dwelling place.*** (John 14:23 TPT)

## **Our Greatest Need**

The Holy Spirit has a way of focusing our attention on that which is most important. Our greatest need is not self-preservation; it is not to improve our image or acquire more stuff; nor is it to perform better or accomplish significant feats. Understanding the complex nuances of life may provide answers but we need more than answers. Connecting with God goes beyond connecting dots of information.

Our greatest need compels us to connect personally with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Affiliating with a religious organization may offer guidance and support but membership and attendance will not suffice. Our heart yearns for an authentic

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<sup>4</sup> Reworded rendition from original, author unknown

<sup>5</sup> John 14:17

union with our awesome creator. He designed each person for an ongoing relationship based on intimate reality and everlasting love.

By embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior, we activate a vital connection with our Heavenly Father. Faith in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection enables us to get closer and stay closer. That is where we belong as we live-out priorities based on what is truly important; especially when the harsh realities of life become too serious, painful, and frightening.

The solution to our connection crisis does not come from a step-by-step manual. Connecting with God requires time and patience—it takes dedication and perseverance. Jeremiah prophesied, *"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with **all your heart.**"*<sup>6</sup> David sang, *"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my **whole being longs for you.**"*<sup>7</sup>



Most seekers begin their quest by thinking about God: where did I come from, where am I going, and what am I doing here. Thoughts alone, albeit perceptive, will not bridge our connection gap. Reading the Bible and studying theology offer steps in the right direction but they fall short of the relational bond that we crave. When God seems too far away, ordinary people pursuing an extraordinary connection go beyond pondering theology and performing liturgies. In and of themselves, saying and doing religion are not enough to satisfy our desire for intimate communion. Our Heavenly Father urges us to connect on His terms with the wisdom He provides and the reverence He deserves.

Connecting with God for a strong finish involves seeking Him with *"all your heart"* because our *"whole being longs"* for what He designed us to contain and experience. Notwithstanding, wholehearted seeking does not mean striving in our strength with performance-based efforts. Becoming acquainted with God's provision and our potential, allows us to pace our pursuit through each season of life. Jesus has personally invited us to follow the Holy Spirit on a life-transforming journey—informed by inspired words, activated by personal encounters, and sustained by sincere communication. As we *"Seek [both] the Lord and His strength"*, we learn to commune [literally to share] with all that He offers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 29:13 NAS

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 63:1 NIV

<sup>8</sup> 1 Chronicles 16:11 repeated in Psalms 105:4

An effective wholehearted pursuit typically means slowing down until faith, hope, and love converge to anchor our priorities where they belong. As we cultivate faith, embrace hope, and exchange love, God immerses us in perfect peace and rejoices over us with exuberant pleasure.<sup>9</sup> To begin this seeking process—

Take a long deep breath  
Pause and listen up  
Reflect carefully  
Stop striving  
Dial down  
Believe  
Linger  
Hope  
Wait  
Rest

Wait for your heart to catch up with your mind in a vital repose of being rather than doing. Wait for your spirit, soul, and body to operate as one harmonious dwelling place. Make time, take time, and protect time exclusively for waiting on the Lord. Fully catch your breath. Then take a much deeper breath of spiritual reality. Exhale emotional distractions and intellectual delusions. Expel social toxins that poison your purpose. Blow out every trace of bitterness, strife, resentment, animosity, and contention. Wait for your core passion to align with God's perfect will. Wait for your inclinations to agree with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Deliberately secure priority time waiting with confidence, anticipating His transforming presence.

*Wait [Qavah] for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! (Psa 27:14 ESV)*

Qavah (pronounced kaw-vaw') a Hebrew verb meaning to wait, look for, hope, or expect. In Psalm 27:14, qavah appears as an intensive root where it means to look eagerly for the Lord as we lie in wait for Him. Waiting for the Lord involves pausing expectantly to collect our self and then bind together with Him.<sup>10</sup>

Intervals between connecting points account for an important part of this waiting process. Linger expectantly provides a venue with enough space for the Holy

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<sup>9</sup> *The LORD your God is in your midst..., He will be quiet [or renew you] in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. (Zephaniah 3:17 NAS)*

<sup>10</sup> Genenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures, Baker Book House, 1979

Spirit to communicate “*life*” more abundantly. As we quiet our soul, He addresses “*the truth*” with clarity and He reveals “*the way*” with distinction.

## God has something to Say

As competing voices vie for influence in our life, the language of the Holy Spirit reverberates with unique authority and deliberate purpose.

*“But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their **strengthening, encouraging and comfort**. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies [oikodomeo (Gr), builds up or promotes growth; translated strengthening in verse 3]<sup>11</sup> the church”. (1 Cor 14:3-4 NIV)*

Connecting with God’s voice provides indispensable strength; it also offers encouragement and comfort. Encouragement means to foster hope or activate courage. It inspires confidence with a motivation for steady progress.<sup>12</sup> Comfort comes from an Old French word, *conforter*, which means to comfort, help, or strengthen. It has roots in a Late Latin word, *confortare*, which means, “to strengthen much” (used in the Vulgate) and from the Latin *comfortis*, which means “with strength”.<sup>13</sup> According to Thorndike and Barnhart, comfort means, “to ease the grief or sorrow of another by making that person more cheerful, more hopeful, or stronger.”<sup>14</sup>

The Holy Spirit inspires prophetic prayers, proclamations, and conversations today because God wants us to know the truth about Him and the truth about us. When God speaks with prophetic insight, good things happen. Weak people become stronger, discouragement dissolves, and comfort abounds. In addition, the church matures through practical wisdom and perceptive edification. We need all of these benefits. Whether God speaks to us directly or indirectly, a stronger outcome is bound to emerge.

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Eph 6:10 NIV)*

Next Chapter: God-Speaks-our-Love-Language

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<sup>11</sup> <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons> (accessed 1-6-06).

<sup>12</sup> Encarta Online Dictionary, 2005 (accessed 1-6-06)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com> (accessed 1-6-06)

<sup>14</sup> *The Advanced Dictionary*, EL Thorndike and CL Barnhart, (Glenview, IL Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1988).