



PART 1: Connecting with God

CHAPTER 1

How Close Can We Get

When Elijah departed in a whirlwind, Elisha asked an unusual question. Instead of contemplating his mentor's whereabouts, the prophet



demanded, *"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"*¹

Job cried, *"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat!"*²

He further lamented, *"Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him;*

When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold;

When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see

Him".³ When God seems to be missing, we are tempted to assign blame—or make excuses. Sometimes we blame ourselves, circumstances, or the church. Occasionally we blame God.

Where is God?

Striving to raise two boys, Rob and Erin came to their wit's end. Little Frankie and Jonny were compulsive troublemakers; they created mischief wherever they went. Since Reverend Stearns had a reputation for disciplining children, the desperate parents sought his help.

¹ 2 Kings 2:14 NKJ

² Job 23:3 NKJ

³ Job 23:8-9 NKJ

Stearns agreed to see the boys but asked to speak with them separately. The naughty six-year old went first. Sitting in the sanctuary the minister asked, “Child where is God?” The boy



made no response, so he repeated the question in a firmer tone, “Where is God?”

Again, the boy did not attempt to answer so the minister raised his voice in a crescendo—“WHERE IS GOD!” At that, the boy

bolted from the room sprinting back to the car.

His younger brother followed stammering, “Wha-wha-whaaat happened?” Frankie panted... “We’re in BIG TROUBLE this time. God is missing and they think we did it!”⁴

From our vantage point, Jesus typically seems too far away; we cannot see Him with our eyes or hear Him with our ears. Nonetheless, assigning blame misses the point. God wants to be found—by each of us. Restoring our connection was His idea and it commands His passion. Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus to establish a new normal in our relationship. After ascending into heaven, His Spirit fell upon His disciples and dwelt within them.

Unlike the ancient Levites, we cannot pick God up in a gold covered Ark and haul His presence into our city. God is not like a box of cargo. We must connect on His terms, with the strength He provides and the reverence He deserves. Jeremiah prophesied God’s desire; He said,

*“You will seek Me and find Me
when you search for Me with all your heart.”*
(Jeremiah 29:13 NAS)

Merely thinking about God does not bridge the connection gap. Reading the Bible and studying theology offers a step in the right direction but falls short of the relational bond that we crave. When God

⁴ Reworded rendition from original, author unknown

seems too far away, ordinary people like you and me, pursue a connection that goes beyond pious pondering and theological deliberation. Saying and doing religion is not enough.

Our Greatest Need

God has a way of focusing on the bull's-eye of 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 more. Understanding the complex nuances in life may provide answers but we need more than answers. Connecting with God goes beyond connecting the dots.

Our greatest need is to connect with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Affiliating with a religious organization will not suffice. Our heart longs to embrace a passionate union with our creator. He designed us for an ongoing relationship based on intimate reality.

Connecting with our Heavenly Father is vital if we are to live-out priorities based on what is truly important. We need to get closer and we need to stay closer. That is where we belong, especially when the harsh realities of life become too serious, painful, and frightening.

The solution to our connection problem does not fit in a step-by-step guide book. Connecting with God takes time and patience. Information without experience does not bridge the gap in our relationship. As God's word enlightens our heart, personal encounters reveal the passion behind His presence. They illuminate the truth about us and the truth about Him.



Progressive revelation informs our understanding with spiritual insight. It heightens our awareness with incremental perception. Contemplation, prayer, and focused meditation facilitate this waiting process. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, contemplation means, "To ponder or consider thoughtfully" with deliberate intention

and/or hopeful anticipation. Merriam-Webster adds the notion of concentrating on “spiritual things as a form of private devotion or a state of mystical awareness of God's being”.⁵ Similar to contemplation, meditation incorporates a more thoughtful focus with deliberate reflection.⁶

A Compelling Reason to Grow Stronger

Building our own kingdom requires strength. Breaking through the gates of Satan’s kingdom requires more strength. If we are going to advance God’s Kingdom throughout the world, to the degree He desires, we will need to be strong in the Lord. This world desperately needs to experience the influence of strong believers who are connecting with the truth about God—and the truth about themselves.

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

Connecting with God for a strong finish involves seeking the Lord and His strength. It means slowing down until faith, hope, and love emerge to propel us in the right direction.

“Seek the Lord and His strength...” (1 Chr 16:11 and also Psa 105:4)

Take a long deep breath

Pause and listen Up

Carefully reflect

Stop striving

Dial down

Linger

Hope

Rest

Wait

Wait for your heart to catch up with your mind. Wait for the rhythm of your spirit, soul, and body to operate as one harmonious unit. Take

⁵ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, 1994 by Merriam-Webster, Inc.

⁶ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2006, 2000, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA

time. Make time. Protect time. Fully catch your breath. Then take a much deeper breath of spiritual reality. Blow out distractions and delusions. Expel the pollution that poisons our purpose. Exhale every trace of bitterness, resentment, and animosity. Wait for your core passion to align itself with God's will. Wait for your heart to agree with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Deliberately lock down priority time just for waiting.

Learn to commune progressively with all God has to offer. Develop realistic expectations. Cultivate faith, experience hope, and anticipate love. Immerse yourself in perfect peace and experience exceedingly great joy. Acquaint yourself more fully with the truth about God and then respond accordingly from the truth about yourself.

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') is a Hebrew verb. It means 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 on the Lord involves lingering expectantly as we collect ourselves and then bind ourselves together with Him.⁷

Intervals between connecting points account for an important part of the waiting process. Lingering with anticipation provides a venue for the Holy Spirit to communicate in a personal way. As we quiet our soul in hopeful anticipation, 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 evident authority.

⁷ Genenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures, Baker Book House, 1979

*“Everyone who prophesies speaks to men [anthropos (Gr), a human being, whether male or female]⁸ for their **strengthening, encouragement and comfort**. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but he who prophesies edifies [oikodomeo (Gr), builds up or promotes growth; translated strengthening in verse 3]⁹ the church”. (1 Cor 14:3-4 NIV)*

Connecting with God for strength also promotes courage and comfort. Encouragement means to foster hope or activate courage. It inspires confidence with motivation for steady progress.¹⁰ 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 *com-fortis*, which means “with strength”.¹¹ 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.”¹²

The Holy Spirit inspires prophetic conversation today because God wants us to know the truth about Him and the truth about us. When God speaks, good things happen. Weak people get stronger, discouragement fades, and comfort soothes. In addition, the church matures in practical wisdom and function. We need all four of these benefits. Whether God speaks directly or indirectly, a stronger outcome is bound to emerge.



⁸ <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons> (accessed 1-6-06).

⁹ <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons> (accessed 1-6-06).

¹⁰ Encarta Online Dictionary, 2005 (accessed 1-6-06)

¹¹ <http://www.etymonline.com> (accessed 1-6-06)

¹² *The Advanced Dictionary*, EL Thorndike and CL Barnhart, (Glenview, IL Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1988).