

Seeking God

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[0 : 0 0] and 19 and verse 10, where we read these words, I seek you with my whole heart, let me not stray from your commands. I seek you with my whole heart, let me not stray from your commands.

In Matthew 7 and verse 7, Jesus said, ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find knock and it will be opened to you. Again in Jeremiah chapter 29, 13, God says, you will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with your whole heart.

The Christian life is one of seeking God from beginning to end, seeking, finding and seeking again. The Christian who stops seeking is the Christian who's given up on all joy in his life.

But the more the Christian seeks after God, the more he becomes aware of a contrary tendency in his heart, the propensity to wander away from him.

The more seriously a Christian takes the pursuit of God, the more guarded he or she is about her own wandering tendencies. And so she turns her concerns into prayer, that her single-minded pursuit of God may not, may never be distracted.

[1 : 3 4] Even though she knows that her motives may be good, she isn't confident of her own ability to stay to the end of the course. And so she prays, let me never stray from your commands.

With great sadness, I've known far too many Christians who in their early years appear to be far more enthusiastic in the faith than I ever was. But over time, they strayed from grace and now are nowhere.

We pray for them, do we not? And we claim the promises of the covenant on their behalf. But more than that, I see the same tendencies within my own heart, the same propensity toward straying, and I'm sure you see it within yourself also.

And so this has to be our prayer, does it not? I seek you with my whole heart, let me not stray from your commands. As does Paul in Romans 7, we recognize this struggle within us.

We want to seek God, we want to pursue a deeper experience of his grace, but at the very same time, we're aware of a contrary tendency in our hearts. And so we pray, and we pray again, Lord, let me never stray from your commands.

[3 : 0 0] Now this evening, for a short while, I want us to see two things from this verse, Psalm 119, verse 10. A life of seeking and a prayer against straying.

Now perhaps you can't relate to anything I'm saying tonight, but you know, I suspect that the more you grow in your faith, the better you'll understand.

First of all, a life of seeking. A life of seeking. The Puritan Thomas Manton wrote these words, God's children are a generation of seekers.

God's children are a generation of seekers. If you're a Christian this evening, then by definition, you are a seeker. Manton continues, It's not that they're seeking him in the sense that they haven't found him.

God never plays hide and seek with us. Rather, they're seeking him in the sense that they want more of him. They're seeking, let me remind you, a more ample and full communion with him.

[4 : 19] In the Beatitudes, Jesus says, Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness. A hungering and thirsting and seeking. They're very similar ideas.

The psalmist says, With my whole heart, I seek you. Many have accused the writer of Psalm 119 of being more in love with the Bible than with God himself.

But verses like this give a lie to that accusation. The reason the psalmist loves the Bible is because it's in and through the Bible he meets with, finds and enjoys God.

You'll notice that the psalmist is really very direct indeed. With my whole heart, I seek you. It's not so much that the psalmist is seeking after the gifts of God, the gifts of peace and security and so on.

Rather, the psalmist is seeking after the God who gives the gifts. We have a cat and we have a dog. Obi the cat loves us because of what we can give him.

[5 : 28] Lucy the dog loves us whether we give her anything or not. Obi the cat only ever shows us affection when he wants something.

Lucy the dog shows us affection just because of who we are. The psalmist is seeking God not for what he can get from God, but just for the joy of knowing God himself.

Thomas Manton at this stage introduces a Latin quote, which I think means this. Jesus Christ is scarce loved for Jesus' sake.

Jesus Christ is scarce loved for Jesus' sake. Manton points to the words of Jesus in John chapter 6. When having fed the 5,000, the crowds were seeking him.

And to them, Jesus said, Truly, truly, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of loaves.

[6 : 34] Jesus Christ is scarce loved for Jesus' sake. Such a salutary and damning indictment of our all-too-often discipleship that we should be like my cat who seeks Christ only for what Christ can give us rather than my dog who just wants us.

The apostle Paul had the right attitude in Philippians 3 when he said, I want to know Christ. I want to learn more about Christ. I'm happy to know about Christ.

And I'm happy to know things about Christ. But I'm happiest knowing Christ himself. You know, I wonder to what extent sometimes that evangelism is hindered by our somewhat mercenary approach to Christ.

Namely, that we only ever pray when we need something. Like success in evangelism. Rather than praying because, well, we just want to enjoy the presence of Christ with us.

Then you'll notice that the psalmist speaks of seeking after God with my whole heart. My whole heart. For the Hebrew, the heart was the center of a man.

[7 : 58] It was, shall we say, everything that made him tick. For us, we talk about the heart in terms of pure emotion. But for the Hebrew, the heart was the center of everything.

Intellect. Emotion. Will. And what the psalmist is saying is that everything about him is seeking after God. We've got this really nasty tendency in Western culture to divide the public from the private.

That who I am in private is not necessarily reflected by who I am in public. I can be a beast in private. But at the same time, I can be a really nice guy in public.

But if we're seeking God with my whole heart, such a dichotomy is not allowable. You're seeking God in the sacred and in the secular.

You're seeking God in the workplace and in the church and at home, in public and in private. You're seeking him intellectually, realizing that the feet of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom.

[9 : 07] That as the North American theologian B.B. Warfield was very fond of saying, theology is the queen of sciences. That there is no more satisfying intellectual pursuit than that of understanding and knowing God.

You're seeking him emotionally, realizing that, as the words of the hymn tell us, all that thrills my soul is Jesus.

That he satisfies every heart desire we may ever have. That the greatest love of the universe is his love for us. You're seeking him volitionally, realizing that unless your will is involved, all you're seeking will be nothing more than a chasing after the wind.

And that there is no greater vocation in life than to know and serve Jesus. That his grace is sufficient for you.

And so the more I think about it, the more I realize that Thomas Manton is right when he says, God's children are a generation of seekers. Their great business is to be seeking after God.

[10 : 23] More ample and full communion with him. We sometimes call those who are interested in the gospel seekers. But really and truly, aren't we all seekers?

Secondly, in this verse, we have a prayer against straying. A prayer against straying. The more you grow as a Christian and the more you know God, the more you realize, as I said at the beginning, an opposite, a contrary desire at work within us.

So we're straining to get to know Christ better. But there's a tendency within us that wants to stray. We're like sheep which went astray.

And Jesus sought us and he found us and he brought us to himself. But still we are like sheep who go astray. The great North African theologian, St. Augustine, once wrote, I can go astray of myself, but I cannot come back of myself.

I can go astray of myself, but I cannot come back of myself. If there is one thing every Christian is good at, it is straying.

[11 : 46] Finding the one hole in the fence through which to escape. Jumping over the pen. Running away from the faith. And that's where there's just so much regret in our lives.

For we've all known people who in their early years of faith seem to have way more enthusiasm than we ever did. But as time went on, they began to stray. At first, we knew nothing about it.

It was an entirely private matter to them. But as time went on, we noticed that they weren't in church quite as often. They became harder to contact.

And finally, they disappeared completely. And speaking to them afterwards, their straying began in seemingly small ways.

It wasn't a huge crisis that caused them to walk away from the faith. But death by a thousand self-inflicted cuts. We're so thankful, are we not, for the reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

[12 : 52] God has a grip on those who are his. And that even though they might fall away for a time, he knows those who are his. And he will bring them back.

Nevertheless, our contrary tendency, our propensity to stray, must be for us a matter of earnest and pleading prayer.

It's no coincidence that the previous verse, verse 9, we know it so well, don't we? How can a young man keep his way pure by guarding it according to your word?

And the following verse, verse 10, is a prayer for God to keep us from straying from his commands. In other words, verse 10 is verse 9 turned into a prayer.

That God would help us to guard our ways according to his word and keep us from straying. Remember what St Augustine said?

[13 : 52] Lord, I can go astray of myself, but I cannot come back of myself. The word straying can also be translated as wandering, wandering.

The idea is that of someone who is walking about with no purpose and no destination in view. They're just wandering. Chances are, if you do not have as your primary purpose seeking after God with your whole heart, you will lack purpose and destination.

And eventually you will find yourself succumbing more and more to the small things, which eventually will lead to you straying from the faith altogether. There has to be forward movement toward the destination of the Christian life, as Paul says in Philippians 3.

Forward movement toward Jesus and the gospel. Forward movement toward knowing Christ better. If you should read that Christian masterpiece, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, you'll know that it's when Pilgrim is dawdling or not paying full attention to the road that he ends up getting himself into trouble.

How subtly and how quickly and how privately this straying can begin. A tiny chip in the windscreen can spread rapidly across the whole windscreen.

[15 : 22] A tiny fracture in a crystal can cause the whole crystal to break. A tiny malfunction in a space shuttle can regrettably cause it to explode. And the longer we go on in our Christian lives, the more we realize how dangerous even slight strain from God can be.

That may not be big in and of itself. It may seem quite innocent to ourselves and maybe even to others. But eventually, if left unattended, it grows until finally the sheep have gone astray.

That's why we have to pray every day for God's sustaining grace to keep us from straying. I really like what the 19th century Anglican commentator Charles Bridges says about this verse.

Daily progress in the heavenly walk is not nurtured by yesterday's grace. Daily progress in the heavenly walk is not nurtured by yesterday's grace.

In other words, we need to pray this or a very similar prayer every day, remembering what St. Augustine said, that we may go astray of ourselves, but we can't come back of ourselves.

[16 : 52] Jesus said, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.

And so we close by asking in the light of Psalm 119 verse 10, what are we asking God for? For what are we seeking?

And what are we knocking for?