

finding **TRUTH & Hope**

Issue 29

In all their affliction . . . His presence saved them.

Isaiah 63:9 "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and **carried them** . . ."

Gen. 16:11c ". . .because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. "

Gen. 41:52b "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

II Chron. 33:12 "And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his father."

II Chron. 88:9 "Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee."

Job 34:28b ". . .he heareth the cry of the afflicted."

Ps.41:3 "**The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.**"

Ps.106:44 "Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry."

Is.48:10 "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

Jer.16:19 " O Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and **my refuge in the day of affliction.** . . ."

Jonah 2:2 "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me;"

Acts 7:34 "I have seen the affliction of my people . . ."

II Cor. 4:17 ". . .worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. "

II Cor. 8:2 ". . .in a great trial of affliction. "

I Thess. 1:6 ". . .having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost."

I Thess.3:7 "**Comforted . . . in all our affliction** and distress . . ."

James 5:10 ". . .example of suffering affliction, and of patience. "

James 5:13 "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray."

God is in the fire to comfort, encourage and strengthen us.

(Edited excerpts of message by Bro. Michael Smith 8-1-21)

When tested and tried with affliction and personal struggles - know that God is able to deliver me. As in Nebuchadnezzar's day, I hear the sound of the music in our world today. Just because everybody else is doing it doesn't make it right. There's pressure to go along. Everything spiritual is not of God (if it draws on the flesh). Be willing to stand up for righteousness. When you give in one time - exception will be the rule.

"But if not . . ." - I've made up my mind. Rather than to kneel to the images of this world, know that God is able to deliver me! Don't cast away your faith, but have your faith fixed in Jesus Christ himself. If our faith is based on outcomes, you'll not have true peace. I'm in God's hands. My faith is in God himself. "Lord I don't know what the outcome is going to be, but I trust you. It took a few years before I was willing to stay in the furnace for the rest of my life."

There's a long record of God sending His angels when His people have been in distress.

Prevailing Prayer

Submitted by Sis. Charlotte Huskey

Charles Finney tells that he almost became a skeptic when he was seeking God because of a prayer meeting he attended week after week. During this time, he was also studying the Bible and seeking God to reveal His truth. After many months he became convinced that the Christians were under a delusion, that they did not get their prayers answered because they had no right to. They did not comply with the conditions on which God had promised to hear prayer.

The following is a portion of what he wrote about requirements for getting prayer answered.

Faith

Faith in God as the One who answers prayer is one condition, this it is plain, involves the expectation of receiving what we ask for.

Asking according to God's Will

Another declared condition is asking according to the revealed will of God. This plainly implies not only asking for such things as God is willing to grant, but also asking in such a state of mind as God can accept. I fear that it is common for professed Christians to overlook the state of mind in which God requires them to be as a condition of answering their prayers.

Sincerity

It is plain that sincerity is a condition of prevailing with God. Take for example the phrase, "Thy kingdom come," (Matthew 6:10) from the Lord's Prayer. Sincerity in offering this petition implies a whole heart and life devotion of the petitioner to the building up of this kingdom. It implies a sincere and thorough consecration of all that we have and all that we are to this end. To offer this petition in any other state of mind involves hypocrisy and is an abomination.

The same is true with the next petition, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10). God has not promised to hear this petition unless it is sincerely offered. But sincerity implies that state of mind that accepts the whole revealed will of God, so far as we understand it, as it is accepted in heaven. It implies a loving, confiding, universal obedience to the whole known will of God, whether that will is revealed in his word, by his Spirit, or it is in His providence. It implies that we hold ourselves and all that we have and are, as absolute and completely at God's disposal as do the inhabitants of heaven. If we fall short of this, and withhold anything whatsoever from God, we "regard iniquity in our hearts, (Psalm 66:18) and God will not hear us."

Sincerity in offering this petition implies a state of entire and universal consecration to God. Anything short of this is withholding from God what is His due. It is turning away our ears from hearing the law. But what do the Scriptures say? "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Proverbs 20:9). Do professed Christians understand this? What is true of offering these petitions is true of all prayer. Do Christians take this to heart? Do they consider that all professed prayer is an abomination if it is not offered in a state of entire consecration of all that we have and are to God? If we do not offer ourselves and all that we have, as we pray, if we are not in a state of mind that cordially accepts, and so far as we know, perfectly conforms to the whole will of God, our prayers are an abomination. How greatly profaned is the use very often made of the Lord's Prayer, both in public and in private. To hear men and women chatter through the Lord's Prayer, "thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," while their lives are anything but conformed to the known will of God is shocking and revolting. To hear men pray, "Thy kingdom come," while it is most evident that they are making little or no sacrifice or effort to promote this kingdom, forces the conviction of barefaced hypocrisy. Such is not prevailing prayer.

Unselfishness

Unselfishness is a condition of prevailing prayer. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

A Clear Conscience

Another condition of prevailing prayer is a conscience void of offense towards God and man. "For if our

heart condemn us not, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. Beloved if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” (I John 3:20 – 22) Here two things are made plain: first that to prevail with God, we must keep the conscience void of offense; second, we must keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

A Pure Heart

A pure heart is also a condition of prevailing prayer. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18).

Confession and Restitution

All due confession and restitution to God and man is another condition of prevailing prayer. “He that covereth his sin shall not prosper: but whosoever confesses and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

Clean Hands

Clean hands are another condition, “I will wash my hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar O Lord.” (Psalms 26:6). “I will therefore that men pray every where lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.” (I Timothy 2:8).

Reconciliation among Believers

The settling of disputes and animosities among believers is a condition. “Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:23 - 24).

Humility

Humility is another condition of prevailing prayer, “God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble.” (James 4:6).

Removing Stumbling Blocks

Take away the stumbling blocks is another condition. “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?” (Ezekiel 14:3)

Forgiveness

A forgiving spirit is a condition, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matthews 6:12). “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:15).

A Truthful Spirit

The exercise of a truthful spirit is a condition. “Behold thou desireth truth in the inward parts” (Psalm 51:6). If the heart is not in a truthful state, if it is not entirely sincere and unselfish, we regard iniquity in our heart, therefore the Lord will not hear us.

Praying in Christ Name

Praying in the name of Christ is a condition of prevailing prayer.

The Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is another condition. All truly prevailing prayer is inspired by the Holy Spirit. “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8: 26-27). This is a true spirit of prayer. This is being led by the Spirit in prayer. It is the only really prevailing prayer. Do professed Christians really understand this? Do they believe that unless they live and walk in the Spirit, unless they are taught how to pray by the intercession of the Spirit in them, they cannot prevail with God?

Fervency

Fervency is a condition for a prayer to be prevailing. A prayer must be fervent. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that he may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Perseverance

Perseverance or persistence in prayer is often a condition of prevailing. See the case of Jacob, Daniel, Elijah, of the Syrophenician woman, the parable of the unjust judge and the teachings of the Bible in general.

Travail of soul

Travail of soul is often a condition of prevailing prayer. “As soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children” (Isaiah 66:8). Paul said, “My little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). This implies that he had travail in birth for them before they were converted. Indeed, travail of soul in prayer is the only real revival prayer. If anyone does not know what this is, he does not understand the spirit of prayer. He is not in a revival state. He does not understand the message already quoted --Romans 8:26 -27. Until he understands this agonizing prayer, he does not know the real secret of revival prayer.

The Consistent Use of Means

Another condition of prevailing prayer is a consistent use of means -- resources such as money, energy, and time to obtain the object prayed for. Means should be used if they are within our reach and are known by us to be necessary to obtain the end. To pray for revival and use no other means is to tempt God.

This I could plainly see was the case of those who offered prayer in the prayer meeting of which I've spoken. They continue to offer prayer for revival, but outside of the meeting they were as silent as death on the subject and did not open their mouths to those around them. They continued in this inconsistency until a dominant sinner in the community administered a terrible rebuke to them in my presence. He expressed just what I deeply felt. He arose, and with the utmost solemnity and tearfulness, said, “Christian people, what can you mean? You continue to pray in these meetings for a revival. You often exhort each other here to wake up and use means to promote a revival. You assure each other, and assure us who are unrepentant, that we are on the way to hell, and I believe it. You also insist that if you should wake up and use appropriate means, there would be a revival, and we would be converted. You tell us of our great danger, and that our souls are worth more than all worlds. And yet you keep busy in your comparatively trifling activities and use no such means. We have no revival, and our souls are not saved.”

Here, he broke down and fell sobbing back into his chair. This rebuke fell heavily upon the prayer meeting as I will ever remember. It did them good: for it was not long before the members of the prayer meeting broke down, and we had a revival. I was present in the first meeting in which the revival spirit was evident. Oh, how changed was the tone of their prayers, confessions and supplications. And returning home, I remarked to a friend “What a change has come over these Christians. This must be the beginning of a revival.”

Yes, a wonderful change comes over all the meetings whenever Christian people are revived. Then their confessions mean something, they mean reformation and restitution, they mean work, they mean the use of means. They mean the opening of their pockets, their hearts, and their hands, and the devotion of all their powers to the promotion of the work.

Specifically

Another condition of prevailing prayer is that it is specific. It is offered for a definite object. We cannot prevail for everything at once. In all cases recorded in the Bible in which prayer was answered, it is noteworthy that the petitioner prayed for a definite object.

Speaking from the Heart

Another condition of prevailing prayer is that we mean what we say in prayer--that we make no false

pretenses--in short, that we are entirely childlike and sincere, speaking out of the heart, saying nothing more or less than we mean, feel, and believe.

Believing that God Keeps His Word

Another condition of prevailing prayer is a state of mind that assumes the good faith of God in all His promise.

Watching and Praying in the Holy Spirit

Another condition is "watching unto prayer" (I Peter 4:7) as well as "praying in the Holy Ghost" (Jude 20). By this, I mean guarding against everything that can quench or grieve the Spirit of God in our hearts. Also I mean watching for the answer in a state of mind that will diligently use all necessary means, at any expense, and add entreaty to entreaty.

When the fallow ground is thoroughly broken up in our hearts to Christ, when we have confessed and made restitution -- if the work is thorough and honest, we will naturally and urgently fulfill the conditions and will prevail in prayer. And that it cannot be too distinctly understood that none that we commonly hear in prayer and conference meetings is prevailing prayer. Who has witnessed real revival of religion has not been struck with the change that comes over the whole spirit and manner of the prayers of real Christians? I do not think I ever could have been converted if I had not discovered the solution to the question.

Why is it that so much that we called prayer is not answered?

God's 5 minutes

It was foolish of those of Noah's generation to think that because tomorrow has always been as yesterday, there will never come a tomorrow that is quite unlike any that has been before.

Our world today is surely careening down a course which risks, once again, to press the hand of God to establish Himself as the righteous end of all human experience. The promise of the rainbow is against flooding, but let's not forget what Noah did not know -- **that it will be burned!! We are wise to regard the splash of color against the rain-drenched cloudy skies, not only as a token of God's promise against the flood - but also as a sure harbinger of his ultimate dealing with human evil.**

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Guthrie, OK Assembly Meeting Dec. 25 - Jan. 2
Pacoima, CA Assembly Meeting Dec. 29 - Jan. 2

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JUST IN TIME

I was spending the afternoon distributing tracts among a number of miners. The men were enjoying the pure air and sunlight after working all the week in the dark, unwholesome, atmosphere of the mine. I was crossing the last field that separated me from my own garden gate, when I met two young miners coming slowly towards me. I was stopped as we were about to pass each other, and selecting two little books from the few that remained in my hand, I held out one to each. Each took the book and thanked me; and one, a fine, strong, healthy, and handsome young man of about twenty-five, stood still and read out the title of his, 'JUST IN TIME'.

A deep feeling of solemnity crept over my soul, and looking up to his frank, open countenance, I said: "Yes, my friend, and may God grant you may be just in time for Heaven."

Going home I prayed, "Lord, save him."

Tuesday night, I had retired to my room, when a loud knocking at the door made me throw open my window.

"Who is there?" I asked.

"Sir, are you the gentleman who gave a young man a booklet on Sunday afternoon?"

"Yes, I am."

"Please come at once," he said.

Hastily I dressed and went out into the summer's night, guided by my companion. On our way he told me that his mate had gone down the shaft that afternoon as usual, and had jumped out of the bucket ere it reached the bottom and was caught and crushed. His breast bones were broken in, and he was lying there, his friend said, in terrible agony, unable to speak, and just gasping for breath, while his life seemed ebbing fast away.

By the time the young man had finished his story we reached the cottage: There lay the fine strong man, whom I had seen only two days before in the full vigor of health and youth, now absolutely helpless. He looked fixedly at me as I entered, and tried to speak; it was useless.

"Shall I read with you and pray for you?"

He made a low hissing sound, the only approach to "Yes" he could make.

I read to him "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; and I spoke to him of the love of God in desiring his salvation; of the efficacy of the blood of Christ to save him. I told him he was lost and ruined by nature, but that Jesus came to seek and save the lost; that Jesus had been seeking him, wanted him; that having done the work by which sin could be put away out of God's sight, He could now give the knowledge of the forgiveness of all his sins through His precious blood.

I read to him the story of the father and the prodigal (Luke 15) and also the brief prayers of the Pharisee and the publican in Chapter 18 and repeated this verse, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

His face changed; hope lighted it up, despair had fled. He signed for a drink, and his wife held a glass of water to his lips. He drank a little, and then to the amazement of all, he who had been unable to utter a sound beyond the low hissing, said in a clear voice, and with eyes lifted up as though he saw the one to whom he was speaking: - "Just in time! God be merciful to me a sinner, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen!"

He had scarcely uttered the last word when his head fell back on the pillow, a little shivering sigh escaped him, and we were in the presence of the dead.

Never shall I forget the scene. To many a one present it was a warning word from the brink of eternity, and God used it for a blessing. "There is but a step between me and death."

"The Lord is not willing that any should perish" - 2nd Peter 3:9.

"Behold, now is the accepted time" - 2nd Corinthians.

"Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" - Hebrews 3:15.

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" - Proverbs 27:1.

-from an old tract

Stir up the Gift of God

www.churchofgodpreaching.com #7600 Bro. Phillip Gellenbeck 2021-08-29

(Adapted excerpts of message)

Acts 9:36 "Dorcas . . . full of good works." **You know this woman put a little spice in the congregation where she was.** She made a real contribution.

John 15:15 "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: **but I have called you friends.**"

Make yourself available to the Lord. The best way it can be, is the Lord's way.

Spiritual gifts take prayer and maintenance. **Life has a way that things that are hot will get cold.**

The best garden there is will start to grow weeds. Fire, unless you stir it, tend to it, goes out. Rekindle: a live thing; to stir up the fire. If not frequently stirred up, it will go out. I want to think about stirring up what God has given us. Stir up the gift of God that is in you. Don't just let it be. **Be rekindled.** Don't let it just cool off till there isn't any fire left. You know what he called that - "Thou wicked servant".

A cake without a little sweetness in it wouldn't be . . . Sometimes we allow ourselves to just be there.

The Lord wants us to have color, life and passion. It happens with a purpose! If we don't . . . we all will do what nature does, just cool off! It's truly amazing to watch a fire burn! Your gift, stir it up! Don't let fear hinder you from offering your life to the Lord. (II Tim. 1:6) Take the reproach of the gospel and Stir It Up! But be thou a partaker of afflictions. Timothy, be diligent about these things! Don't neglect (be careless of) it.

He is the gardener and wants us to make Him look good. He wants to use our lives in some way. It doesn't have to be a big way. Sometimes a little taste in a cake, and we don't even know what it is, makes all the difference.

(Matt. 13:3 Parable of Sower) That's what happens to some people's gift. They don't understand it and it just withers away. The Lord never requires us to produce the same amount as others. What an amazing thing God did here! What should the person have done? The seed fell there, and they knew it! When roots never go down very far - there's something hard under there. Let's get rid of those hard places and thorns. The Lord is looking for fruit - stuff to come out of our lives. Whether we minister in preaching, or singing, or writing, or the financial affairs, or the groundskeeping, or sending of cards, entertaining, or giving, all of those things, or many others, that we don't become lax. I want to encourage us that we stay in step with the Lord and His work through us and produce fruit that's a real blessing to the cause, to bring glory to His name, and that something good to come forth. **We're all to bring forth according to what the gardener gave us.** I want to encourage us that we don't become lax. Let the gardener produce fruit that's a real blessing. **Let's seek to be a blessing.** Is that okay?

I had to learn to be hospitable. **Offer your gift and you'll be surprised what it gives and what comes back to you.** How spiritual is that? Very spiritual!! It affects what we do here. If you give it to people, you'll be disappointed. **Let your gift be given to the Lord.** God gives us gifts in part, to lift us beyond our spiritual battles and trials; to ensure we make it to Heaven, all the way through! Young folks, make sure it happens! **It changes who we are when we make ourselves useful in the Lord's kingdom!** His pay is so rewarding. He blesses us for a life time. Stir up the gift - give of yourself. Don't say, "I don't feel inspired anymore." Get inspired! Each and every one of the congregation all have a place. We can be a blessing. Take the talent, the one that He gave you. I pray the Lord increase us. He doesn't have one negative thing to say about the one who brought forth 30 fold. That one talent -- that's just fine!. **But we're all to bring forth according to what the gardener gave us.**

LIFE LESSONS FROM THE EDGE

Edited excerpts of message by Bro. Michael Smith www.churchofgodpreaching.com #7578 2021-09-12

Accidents, we think it won't happen to me. But that's what an accident is - you didn't plan to have a life with many dangers and risks. Just get in the center of God's will.

On the edge - you're just that much closer to the world - to the sin you were saved from.

Eph.5:14 It's a very sleepy, drowsy time spiritually. Let's awake and recognize where we are this morning. Our decisions, the choices we've been making, or have you been seeing how much you can do and still be saved? Let's be earnestly seeking God in every decision. Let's ask that God's will be accomplished when it comes to our job choices, where we're going to live, choices in our spending, in our time. There is a center of His will. There is an area around the center of His will. **Too many are living out there at the edges.** Some, I can say, are in the center of God's will. Others, when I look at them, I don't know if they're saved or not. **To start talking like the world and looking like the world is a dangerous place. Living in the center of God's will is a place for greater blessing.** The blessings in your home will not come by getting closer to the world - what we listen to, look at, the way we conduct ourselves, and where we go. Lay aside the things you have justified in your life. **We want to get as far away from the world as we can.** And I'm not talking about building "Saintsville."

It takes some time to get back from the edges. Satan comes and sows his seeds. Where are the pressure points in your life this morning? Would it be better to get away from the edge? **When you get closer to the Lord, it's going to put distance between you and the world.** It's a better place. If you've been settling real close to the world, it's a dangerous place. Remember Lot's wife. Remember where Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. The more he looked at it, the more he became acclimated to it. It became 'norm' in his life. You may think you can stay safe but **you're putting your family at greater risk.** We want to put that stamp of Holiness on our lives.

What about some of the controversial issues that may arise among God's people? Some say "I can do that and it's fine," and others say, "no you shouldn't." Some say "it is sin."

What are some of the "hot button" issues?

Entertainment, food and drink, what you wear. Can you tell me it's sin? Can I go to the ball games? What about trimming the hair? What about skirt length? What's tight and what's not? What about sleeve length? What about what you watch? What about the music we listen to? What is trusting in God for my physical health? What's okay and what's not? What's the in-between, and the list goes on. Everything is not black and white and spelled out in the scriptures. We need to be big enough and spiritual enough to acknowledge that. Because if we make a list of rules on the board - that's going to start turning into a creed for us. And we're going to teach you how to do this or you can't do that. The things that are not spelled out, the things that we could debate about - I have no interest in debating it. Are we living close? Are we living on the edge? There are things that are not spelled out in the Bible. Many things we can talk about are not sin. But it takes a lot of **honest assessment in our lives** to examine **why** am I doing what I'm doing? What is motivating my decision? Can I wear tank tops? Is it alright? Is it modest or is it not modest.? The scripture teaches modesty - that is black and white - because **the Bible teaches modesty!**

At what point does modesty become immodesty? How far can we go? Immodesty is sin, correct? Because it's a violation of scripture.

Who's supposed to be drawing the Line? The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in your life. The thing is this, if I'm always living on the edge - **does it dull our senses?** I want to be in a safe place. **I don't want to live on the edge** - how I dress, where I go, what I listen to, what I look at. I want to get in close to God as I can and live in a safe place. I'm not interested in the argument. I'm interested in getting close to God. What is humility and what's pride? There's a scale. Pride is there and humility is here. Lord help me to get off the edge! Who are you spending time with? Where are you feeding? Social

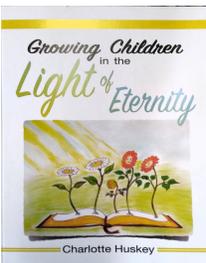
media! I'm wondering are they good for you. There's too much **feeding on the things of the world**. It's a detriment. There are too many people bringing the world into our homes. Our children get enough out there stimulating their senses! Disney has an agenda in their children productions - to get ahold of their minds while they are pliable - feeding them with stuff on the edge.

If you don't agree with anything I've said, get close to Jesus! God placed you in their lives to make that decision for them. We don't want to see our children floating face down in a pool. What about the lions and the cheetahs. They prey on the animals on the edge! We wonder what is happening in our society. Too many are living on the edge. The next generation is just flat over the line and it's not that much difference from what Mom and Dad were doing. I want to get as close to the center of God's will as I can so our children can say "I can see the Lord is blessing right here". The Lord wants us to be example setters; not to have our own little creeds going on, but to get as close to God as we can and live in a safe place. **How we dress, what we look at, the places we go, and the attitudes that we have; the Holy Spirit can help you to draw the line.**

All human beings are unique and special!

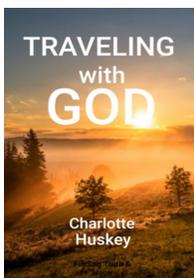
You may have heard that we're a lot like chimps, like 98% similar. That is not even true! When that was calculated, it was done in a crude fashion and they were strictly looking at codes to proteins. There's so much difference we haven't yet got a firm handle on how much difference there is!

We are orders of magnitude different from chimps in many ways: poetry, language or music. They don't study themselves or other animals. They just live. When I think of the differences between us and chimps, I think of the great works of art, Michelangelo sculptures, paintings by the Dutch masters, impressionist painters, or of quantum physics. No chimp has ever developed an equation to describe even throwing a ball across the room. Science **supports** rather than undermines **human exceptionalism**. Selected - Dr. Ann Gauger



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Traveling With God
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And they shall call his name *Emmanuel*,
which being interpreted is,
God with us. Matthew 1:23

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Encountering God

“We sometimes meet with God,” wrote the Bible commentator Matthew Henry, “where we little thought of meeting Him.”

It is customary to think only of meeting God in a building set apart for the purpose of worship. We all know people who will not frequent a “house of worship” because the thought of being in God’s presence makes them uncomfortable. We are rightly taught to reverence what we call “the house of the Lord,” and we strive to act in a respectful and restrained manner while inside our church buildings. A popular “praise and worship” chorus of our time illustrates this idea: We are standing on holy ground / and I know that there are angels all around / Let us praise Jesus now / We are standing in His presence on holy ground.

We speak of that part of our world where Jesus lived and walked as The Holy Land. It must be a thrilling experience to really be in a place where the Savior once was in the flesh. To realize you are viewing a hillside where He had taught, or following the road He literally followed as He went to the cross, would be very moving and thought-provoking, maybe even awe-inspiring. But can those places really be considered holy anymore? Must we go there to say we are on holy ground? Or to have an encounter with God? That land today is full of upheaval and strife. In fact, it was that way at the time Jesus walked through it. His footprints, could we actually trace them, would not possess any sanctifying virtue. His presence is not lingering or dwelling there.

We know God Himself set in order the system of worship for His people in the beginning through Moses, who received direct and implicit instructions from the Lord and wrote them out. The tabernacle and later the temple were designated and consecrated to be “holy” places, places where God could be found. God promised Moses that His presence would abide in The Most Holy place, and yet, when Solomon prayed at the dedication of the first temple, he confessed, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” We know that the Lord accepted Solomon’s prayers because He appeared to him and said, “I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there...Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually” (1 Kings 9).

The first Christian martyr, Stephen, was falsely accused of saying blasphemous words against the temple in Jerusalem and was called before the Sanhedrin to defend himself. In his defense, Stephen systematically rehearsed the history of the Jewish religion and ended up referring back to Solomon’s confession, and also to the prophet Isaiah’s utterance, “Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath Mine hand made.” It can be said that Stephen rebuked the Council, who prided themselves in the Temple, as if there were no other place to have communion with God except there. He reminded them that in the beginning when God first appeared to Moses, it was in a remote, obscure spot. The presence of God was actually never confined to one place. **Whether we are in the city or in the desert, in the house or in the field, in the shop or in the street, we may encounter the presence of God.**

The Lord Jesus explained to the woman at the well in Samaria that “the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain (Mt. Gerizim) nor yet at Jerusalem (Mt. Zion) worship the Father...the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:20-24). That Samaritan woman had been going about her daily business, not expecting the Divine Son to be seeking relief from the heat of the day at Jacob’s Well. When she came to draw water at noontime, she unexpectedly encountered the Messiah.

Speaking of Jacob, he too had an unexpected encounter with God. Jacob deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing that should have gone to his twin brother, Esau. The boys’ mother, Rebekah, connived to send Jacob away from Esau’s revenge by persuading Isaac to send Jacob away from Canaan to find a wife for himself from her family that were living in Syria. On his journey, Jacob spent the night under the stars, using a stone for a pillow as he slept. He had a remarkable dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven with angels of God ascending and descending on it! In the dream, God spoke to him from the top of the ladder and promised to give him the land where he lay and to be with him wherever he went. God further told Jacob that through him and his family all the earth would be blessed. When Jacob awoke from sleep he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place! And I knew it not! How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” He set up the stone he had used for a pillow as a monument and named the place Bethel (House of God). This story is from Genesis 27 and 28. Jacob always remembered what had happened at that spot. We, too, always remember our encounters with God, the “holy places” where God reaches out of eternity and makes contact with us as we are going about our business of living.

One of the earliest recorded accounts of someone having an unexpected encounter with God is found in Genesis 16. We know the story of Abraham, Sarah, and their Egyptian maid Hagar, who had to run away from her mistress’ “hard dealings.” The Angel of the Lord found Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness, and promised to multiply her children exceedingly. He said He had heard her affliction. Hagar called the name of the Lord that spoke to her, “Thou God Seest Me”. She called the fountain of water, “The Well of Him That Liveth and Seeth”. God was encountered not only in Abraham’s tent and at his altar, but out in the wilderness, where she surely had not known she would meet Him.

Who in this world expected the Christ child to be born in a stable cave? What an unexpected cradle was used for the infant Jesus - a manger, a feed trough! What an unsanitary, “unholy” place for a birthing! Yet since God’s Only Begotten Son was there, surely it was a “holy” place to Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds who came to worship. Which of the adoring shepherds from around Bethlehem had expected a visitation of angels during their midnight watch? The heavenly encounter happened at an ordinary time, as they were tending to “business as usual.” The town of Nazareth where Jesus came to manhood - who expected any good thing to come out of Nazareth? God can manifest Himself to us at any time, and at any place. The whole of the universe is full of His Presence, if our eyes and hearts have been tuned to see Him. The great Psalm 139 that David wrote is a wonderful expression of this reality. “Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?”

I remember being at the Myrtle, Missouri Campmeeting one summer when I was a teenager and hearing Brother Mart Samons preach in an evening service. He said he had been taking a shower and while in the middle of doing this, the Lord began to bring inspiration, scripture and thoughts to his mind for his sermon. I guess that made an impression on my mind because I've never forgotten it. I must have thought, what a place for God to speak! It was certainly not the traditional place and posture for prayer. I have to smile as I report that this has happened to me now, just this year. I too was taking a shower, and my thoughts were going up in prayer to God about a problem in my life. All at once I heard Him say ever so softly, "Trust Me for this." It was so unexpected! even though my mind had been turned His way. We may sometimes think that since we are not down on our knees in a secret place in prayer, our thoughts toward God are not really valid or counting as prayer. But as David said in the aforementioned Psalm, "Thou understandest my thought afar off."

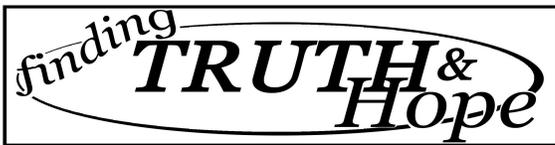
"Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God, but only he who sees takes off his shoes..." Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

A thorny acacia bush on the backside of a desert was the site of Moses' unexpected encounter with God. As he was going about his daily business seeking forage for a flock of sheep, he noticed a bush burning with fire, yet wasting not away. At this unnatural sight, he had to get closer to see what was the cause of such a strange happening. Then the Lord called to him from the middle of the flaming bush, called him by name and said, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God (Exodus 3). When Moses' successor Joshua was preparing for war against the city of Jericho, God again appeared, this time as the Captain of the Lord's Host, with a sword drawn in His hand. Joshua too was told, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy" (Joshua 5:13-15). The pulling off of the shoes could be an emblem of laying aside any pollution contracted by walking in sin. It was a way of showing respect for the Sacred Presence of God, an outward expression of inward reverence and awe (from Adam Clarke's commentary).

The symbolism involved in literally removing the shoes before the presence of God is a great object lesson for us as we realize that the priests in the tabernacle and temple performed their sacred rites barefoot. In the ancient days, when so much travel was done by walking, a person would leave their shoes at the door and have their feet washed of the dust of the road before entering a home or place of worship. In giving Moses the guidelines for the priests, the Lord specifically instructed to make a brass laver to put between the tabernacle and the altar, and to have clean water in it daily. "Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet thereat. When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not. Or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the Lord, so shall they wash their hands and their feet, that they die not. And it shall be a statute for ever to them" (Exodus 30:18-21). "And Moses set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and put water there, to wash withal. And Moses, and Aaron, and his sons, washed their hands and their feet thereat, when they went into the tent of the congregation, and when they came near unto the altar, they washed, as the Lord had commanded Moses" (Exodus 40:30-32).

The first thing the priests met when they entered into the court to minister was the brazen laver, because their hands and feet must be washed before they could perform any part of the holy service. Adam Clarke commented on this passage that a minister of the gospel should take heed that they have a fresh application of the grace and spirit of Christ each time they minister in public. We all are made kings and priest unto God when we are washed in the blood of Christ. (Revelation 1:5-6). As we think about the cleanliness of the feet of the priests, the passage in Romans 10:15 comes to mind, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” **The Lord has forever wanted humanity to “walk” in holiness and purity.** When Abraham had his life-changing encounter with God at the age of 99, he was told, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17). This desire of God is repeated all through the Bible - “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” “An highway shall be there (to walk in) called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it.” “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart (walk away from) iniquity.” Let us all endeavor to walk in holiness, so that when we have an encounter with God, it will result in Him blessing our lives. Practice the presence of God!

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Master Gardener by Jeanie Samons

I'm not a Master gardener. My friend spends a lot of time with her flowers. She knows flowers by name, and she knows what kind of care they need. And I love the results... to walk in her yard is like visiting a park. She's also invested so much in making our Girl's home here beautiful. I'm blessed most every morning when I walk by our flower gardens. People comment on the beauty of our landscaping.

What a lot of people don't know about is the back breaking job of digging, planting, choosing what plants need to go where, and knowing the care needed for each plant. I can help my friend, but I know little about the continuing care... so she has to remind me of the what and when of gardening and give me tips often. Because I see the time and hard work it takes to make a beautiful garden, I have deep appreciation for it.

This morning, I was reminded of the work of digging and planting our inward garden. Every day, I walk by our flower gardens. Often, I see a little weed coming up. The girls at our home do a great job of weeding, but sometimes a week can surprise you with the amount of weeds sprouting. The longer we neglect the weeding, the more work it involves to make it pretty again.

Our hearts can so quickly and easily sprout weeds that clutter our heart and can eventually take over. How easy it is to have seeds of unpleasant memories which cultivate bitterness. Or unconfessed guilt can shut down our spiritual growth. Selfish spending habits, unhealthy reading material. Too much time on social media. Just plain busyness. All these things keep the positive and beautiful things in our life from growing. And it is so easy to know we have some weeds, but we don't take time to pull them out when they are newly sprouted.

When weeds overtake a garden, they choke and hide what the flower garden is all about. Sometimes, when I walk by, I know it looks a little less attractive, but it isn't 'til I look closer that I see that, yes, there's weeds crowding out the flowers. Beauty only flourishes with a lot of weeding, a lot of care and cultivation. We find that a schedule of maintaining is a lot better than just randomly remembering that we need to address the weeding issue.

Sometimes, I have to ask the Master Gardener to come help me weed my Garden. I can't always see the weeds the way He can. It's good to invite Him to take a stroll through and have Him point out the little hidden weeds that I so easily overlook. How good it is to have order and beauty restored to a heart that's been overcrowded with the cares of life!! Scheduling regular walks with the Master sure helps keep the garden cleared out.