

Better Time with Jesus – Seeking His Presence

Psalm 27:4

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I would like to think that every person who is a Christian would want a better relationship with Jesus. I'm thinking about an attitude that says I want to be more like Jesus. It seems to me that every Christian has surrendered everything to Jesus. When I gave my life to Jesus at about fourteen, I gave surrendered to Him. As I grew older I realized other things I still need to surrender. So, it makes sense then that all believers would be seeking to be in the His presence.

The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:1–4 (NIV)

Building a better relationship with Jesus is focused on your priorities. We are living in a multi-choice world of pleasure and knowledge at our finger tips. It is unprecedented the number of choices we have in our world. I can't even begin to describe all the options. It's almost as many as the stars in the sky or sand on the shore. There is a very real possibility of there being even more choices in the future. Everyone of them is only a click away. You're choices are only limited by your absence of technology.

Every choice is an opportunity to avoid pain and suffering, then experiencing pleasure. If you have an ailment there exists a choice that will take it away. If you have a problem there is a some kind of solution if you are willing to look for it. No matter who you are, you can be easily distracted by the search for pleasure, entertainment, or information. Finding what you need is no longer the goal. But the search through the mountains of options has become the target.

Our priorities are easily misaligned. It's no longer eating for sustenance. We eat to experience the flavor, the texture, the aroma. It's no longer breathing that's important. We fill the air with fragrant essential oils. It's not just having clothes to wear. We're giving the option of clothing from any and every athlete and celebrity. We need relaxation from our entertainment and pleasure. We need simpler more efficient ways to work, so we can do more work, or have more hobbies.

Jesus might be anywhere in the list of possible choices. There is the realistic possibility that Jesus slides in and out of our first priority. Something that's not so important, that's not eternal, that's not about heaven can easily replace Jesus as our highest priority.

I often will share my weaknesses and my downfalls as my confession that I'm not perfect. My openness isn't a sign of my inability to lead, but my willingness to say how much I need Jesus. I share who I am so that I can then share what Jesus is continually showing me. Pick any part of my life, I can tell you how Jesus has been intervening to change to me. When I say I am not the person I was

ten or twenty or thirty or forty years ago it's true. I have very little to do with it. My life is about Jesus, because I know I need Jesus.

When I put something in a higher priority than Jesus, He reminds who I am and who He is. In those moments I am humbled and embraced. I recognize my mistake, and I sense the hand of Jesus helping me up. For me the multitude of choices around me comes back to the one basic issue that is true for every breathing person. It's me. Do I pursue, demand, and get what I want? Or do I pursue, demand, and get what Jesus wants for me?

You can see how important it is for Jesus to get my attention. The problem is I'm so busy doing what I want that I don't listen for Him. Sound familiar? We all need to ask ourselves, am I pursuing my own desires or Jesus'?

The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Psalm 27:1–2 (NIV)

We tend to hold onto the fear and doubts instead of having confidence in Jesus. What we know in our spirit is often dramatically different than what we see with our eyes. We know as David the writer of this psalm also knew, we have no reason to be afraid. Our God is both our salvation and our stronghold. We know that God will save us. We know God will protect us.

These are things of the spirit. The Holy Spirit has revealed this to us through faith in Jesus God's salvation. We did nothing to earn or deserve His salvation, but Jesus died and rose from the dead to save us. He saved us from our sins. He saved us from the punishment of our sins. He saved us from the power of sin.

Scripture has demonstrated over and over again God's power to save and protect those who love Him, who follow Him, who trust Him. We've experienced this many, many times in our own lives. The creator of the world, the one who made each one of us to be in a relationship with Him is our Savior and our Stronghold. Therefore, why are we afraid? Why does fear have such a prominent role in our lives?

Well, it's because our eyes see and ears hear terrifying things. You'd have to live in the middle of the ocean, on a mountain top, in a canyon to not see and hear the terrifying things happening in our world. Come to think about it the middle of the ocean can be a scary place when you can't see anything but water all around you. A mountain top covered in snow with howling winds sounds scary. The end of a canyon with wild animals, snakes, and no hunting skills is scary.

Scary is everywhere. We can see the scary in any situation. We lose sight of Jesus. Our first focus becomes the situation and not Jesus. Fear and doubt are the natural reactions of nearly every person. Sociopaths don't experience fear, right? Everyone else has fears. Fear is a good defense mechanism if you're playing with fire, a gun, or going really, really fast. Fear is good when there is a knock on the door at midnight. Fear is good when we don't know the outcome.

Fear doesn't have to remain the driving force. Fear doesn't need to be in control. Fear doesn't need to remain in first place. As David wrote this Psalm he knew what we know. We don't see God, but we trust in Him. We can't always hear God, but we believe in His love. We don't understand what's happening, but we look to God for strength and salvation. Fear is overcome when we start looking for

the Lord. Fear goes to the back of the line, the bottom of the barrel, under our feet, as we seek the Lord. Fear disappears as though it doesn't exist, never existed, as we put Jesus first in our lives.

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. Psalm 27:3 (NIV84)

When Jesus our Savior and Lord is our main focus we are prepared for the battle. Consider David's situation as He shares about his trust in the Lord. Those who are evil are seeking to eat his flesh. Cannibals or not this a scary moment. With certainty he can see that the enemy is coming after Him. It is inevitable that there will be a fight, a battle, war. An army is besieging him. He is surrounded with no way out. He is facing certain defeat and possibly death.

David's response is confidence in the Lord. He proclaims what God will do before God takes action. His trust in the Lord is as certain as though it has already happened. David has no need to cry out to be made strong or to be rescued. That might be our highest priority. His desire is to seek out the Lord. He seeks out the Lord to be in His presence.

When Jesus is our first priority, talking with Him alone in quiet places, we are confident in His presence. I've walked into hospital chapels, church sanctuaries, and majestic outdoor scenes with the expectation that God is present. These places could have been just another space. But with the expectation, the desire to meet with Jesus I have never been disappointed. The Holy Spirit has always made Himself known to me. Nearly always it was a quiet voice, a gentle touch, a new understanding of peace.

These were not moments with bright lights, trumpets, and angels singing. The times that I have sought out the Lord, He has responded. A word of scripture is brought to my mind. On other occasions an affirmation of peace has stirred within me. Sometimes, a gentle poke in the chest reminding me that He is God and I am not.

When I have sought out the Lord, looking for Jesus to be my salvation, my stronghold I have known that He is with me. The crisis can be huge and overwhelming, but Jesus makes Himself known as I look for Him. The moment can be peaceful, with no pressures or burdens and I know that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Somewhere in between these two extremes is daily life. When I have sought out the Lord, He has always been there for me.

Jesus is always present with those who love Him. There are numerous passages in the Bible that assure us that God is always with us, that He is abiding with us, that He will never leave us. Men and women before Jesus and after Jesus have given testimony to the Lord being present as their salvation and their stronghold.

As I look upon these situations I see a desire among the people to know the Lord. In their own ways they wanted to hear from the Lord. In their situations they needed the Lord to be present. As they experienced life there was a crisis and they were ill-equipped to handle the situation. When they sought out God's presence He was there.

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:4 (NIV)

Make your number one priority to seek the Lord, Jesus Christ. This is a priority for daily life, but specifically when you are alone and in a quiet place. You can be in the presence of the Lord. You are in the presence of the Lord. His Holy Spirit has come to dwell within you.

To seek the presence of the Lord is not about Jesus being present, is it? What I'm saying is to seek the presence of the Lord is to cast aside your fear and doubts. It's not where are you Lord, when you pray. It's make yourself known to me, Lord. It's open my eyes to see and my ears to hear. It's remove from me any barrier that keeps me from trusting you. Take away my fears, my doubts, my pride, my selfishness.

To seek the presence of the Lord is believing and trusting that Jesus is present. The God who created all life, who spoke the universe into existence is present. The God who became a person like you and me, died on the cross, and rose from the dead is present. The God who loves, who made you His first priority is present.

To seek the presence of the Lord is to talk with Him. When we place our request with the Lord who is sitting beside us is knowing He will answer. Talk knowing that He is hearing. Share with Him as if you are looking Him in the eyes.

Finally, those who seek the Lord will hear the Lord. Believing that God is present with you, He will make Himself known. He will nudge you. He will give you a craving. He will show you a sign. He will grant you wisdom and knowledge. He will provide you with understanding and discernment. He will give you power.

Is your heart and mind, body and spirit right with the Lord?

Come to Jesus humbly knowing that you are insufficient in every way. Seek out Jesus laying at the foot of the cross every barrier in your life. Confess your weaknesses. Proclaim His power.

Are you seeking the Lord for His glory? Come to Jesus with gratitude, praise and thanks. Seek out Jesus recalling His salvation. Confess to Him that you want His agenda to be your agenda. Proclaim your need for Him.

Are you willing to follow Him wherever He leads you? Jesus will answer your prayers. Jesus will send you. Jesus will meet your every need. Jesus will provide for you His strength.

When you seek out the Lord you must be ready. When you look to the Lord you must be willing. When go to the Lord you must surrender everything to Jesus.