

Chapter 4

Secret Number Three:

SEEK GOD DILIGENTLY

How easy it is to find someone who is equally looking for you!

“... he who comes to God must believe that He is... a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”.

—Hebrews 11:6.

Did you know that God wants you to seek Him as you would gasp for air if it were to be held out of your reach?

God Is Seeking Those Who Are Seeking Him

In chapter 3, I established that God is seeking worshippers. The Bible also tells us that God is asking people to seek Him. Proverbs 8:17 personifies wisdom stating, “I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.” Anyone who makes it appoint to seek God will ‘find’ Him.

What we see here is that God wants the seeking to be mutual, that is, it doesn’t help if God is seeking us and instead of us equally seeking Him, we ‘run away’. God gave us a gift of free will—and

He will never withdraw it. This means that when He seeks us, it doesn't mean He wants to impose Himself on us. We must be willing to respond—and respond indeed—to Him for the relationship to benefit us.

In Isaiah 65:1-2, the Bible says,

“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I’. All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations”.

If God in His unfathomable grace and mercy can reach out and avail Himself to people who do not seek Him, how much more would He be available to those who have made it a priority to seek Him?

However much God reveals Himself to people who don't seek Him, they will ignore Him and go about their business—pursuing their own imaginations. Though God says that He was ‘found’ by people who didn't seek Him, it is plain that these people ‘found’ God but they just passed by. This is why Isaiah 65:10 declares that it is only those who seek God who will inherit Sharon as a pasture for their flock and the valley of Achor as a resting place for herds. It is clear that though God availed Himself, it only helped those who sought Him.

Seeking God shouldn't be just haphazard endeavour. We are expected to seek Him diligently and systematically. This is why the Bible says, “But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with *all your heart* and with *all your soul*” (Deut. 4:29—italics for emphasis).

The more we seek God, the more He will reveal and avail Himself to us and the more He reveals and avails Himself to us, the more we need to seek Him.

In Isaiah 45:19, God Himself declares that we are not going to seek Him in vain:

“I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right” (KJV).

In Jeremiah 29:13, God assured the exiled Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me *with all your heart*” (italics for emphasis). This is what fails many people. God sees the heart. It isn’t a big assignment for Him to establish who is seeking Him with all his heart and who isn’t. This is an area we can’t play games in. Many people convince themselves that they are seeking God enough to ‘find’ Him when God could see that what weighs heavily in their hearts is something else. God has a way of testing our devotion to Him.

In 2 Chronicles 15:2, when the Spirit of God came upon Azariah, this is what he told King Asa of Judah:

Listen to me, Asa and all Juda and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. *If you seek him, he will be found by you*, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.
—Italics for emphasis.

In the New Testament, the apostle James resounds this principle of seeking God, “Come near to God and he will come near to you...” (Jam. 4:8a).

What does it mean to seek God—not hiding but running towards Him? Think of Adam and Eve hiding from God. If instead they run around seeking God who was also seeking them, they would see God just emerging from behind a tree, and they would come into the open, running towards Him shouting, ‘Father we are

here, we are here!’ What could have happened even with the sin they had? Some people think that it was impossible for them to do this after they sinned. It was very possible. The very freedom that they had and of which they misused to choose to rebel was still there to choose to run back to God and own up what they had done.

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Practically running to God and calling His attention to us is by ‘exposing’ ourselves to Him; calling Him and telling Him,

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and
lead me in the way everlasting.
—Psalm 139:23-24.

Running to God is searching the Scripture and relying on it to align our life; it is allowing our life to be scrutinised by the Scripture; it is permitting the Word of God to expose our life to the light; it is approaching the Word of God with a full knowledge that it can cut like a double-edged sword (Heb. 4:12) yet not shying from it.

When we are spiritually sick, we must know that we may undergo spiritual surgery. This means that our pride, ego, sins, *etc.* may be worked on by the Word of God in a way that would give a temporary pain but a long term healing and wholeness. A life that has been ‘treated’ by the Word of God is a life that would give a meaningful worship.

Just as God wants us to seek Him with all our hearts, so He expects us to love Him. In fact, our diligent seeking after Him is a

direct result of our devoted love for Him. In Deuteronomy 6:5, the Bible says, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”. We love Him therefore we seek Him and we seek Him because we love Him.

In Luke 8:4-10, Jesus told the parable of the sower. In verse 9, His disciples asked Him the meaning of the parable, meaning that they heard but they didn’t understand. In response Jesus said and then quoted prophet Isaiah 6:9,

The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables so that, ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand’.

Because they asked, He explained to them the meaning of the parable. This means that the Lord would only ‘explain’ things to those who have a relationship with Him—those who are seeking and asking. People who stand outside the fellowship with Him would only hear about Him and the things He says but would not understand anything, even when they think they have understood. They would not ‘see’ anything however much they try to look. They may think they have seen something but it wouldn’t be the hope-giving, life-changing experience that is the basic reason for an encounter with the Lord.

I have met people who claim to know Jesus and His teachings but since they have no intimate fellowship with Him, they don’t understand some very basic life-changing teachings of Jesus.

Elsewhere the Bible says,

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.
—Matthew 7:7-8.

The understanding of the importance of a relationship with the Lord Jesus is preserved to those who *ask* for insight; those who *seek* Him and those who *knock* at the door of wisdom.

Why did Jesus speak in parables? He spoke in parables so that people who wouldn't seek diligently may not get much out of His teachings. The Word of God is to be revealed to those who search.

In John 6:66, the Bible tells us about some followers of Christ who walked away from Him for the very reason they ought to have sought His fellowship. In other words, what the Lord Jesus said was the very teaching that if understood ought to have made them hang around Him even more. They heard but didn't understand and never bothered to seek understanding. They walked away 'prematurely'. Even the other disciples who stayed didn't understand everything at the beginning but because they stayed with Him, they came to understand what He was talking about.

Seeking God In His Word

When we completely love God, His Word would be a love letter to us. We would read and read it again and again.

Talking of God's Word being a love letter reminds me of a time I received a letter from the lady that is now my wife. Before leaving my country for further studies abroad, I had identified a sister in Christ whom I believed God would give me for a wife. I shared my intentions and feelings with her. Since we had never courted in any way whatsoever, it was for her 'out of the blues'. I was ready to give her time to contemplate and pray over the matter—and she did take her time.

The time for me to go abroad came before I got her word.

Almost four years after I proposed to her, I was at the verge of giving up and, perhaps, looking elsewhere. Then, 'out of nowhere', I received a letter from her, stating that if I hadn't changed my mind, she was willing to marry me. That was something! It is one of the best things I have read in my life. I was ecstatic with excitement—I

couldn't hide it. Anyone looking at my face would tell that something good had happened to me. What looked like an eternal test of patience was over.

I read the letter again and again, over and over again. I honestly can't remember how many times I read it. In fact, I put it in my school bag during the day and near my bed at night. At school, I would read it during breaks to remind myself that I was in love. At home, I would read it before I go to bed and feel the warmth of love liven my bones as I dozed off. There was nothing in the content that I would miss if asked a question from it. The excitement was more than I could contain. I went about telling everyone that I would soon be a married man.

Something good happened when I went about telling people that I was in love, but that is a story for another day.

If that letter was found by a third party—someone it wasn't meant for—it wouldn't have tickled anything in him, it would have been irrelevant. The person would dismissingly say, 'It is a letter from a certain woman who loves a certain man'.

However much romantic a letter may tend to be, it wouldn't be as meaningful to a third party as it is to the two people who are in love.

That is how it is with the Word of God. For those who have single-mindedly accepted Jesus as their Saviour, the Bible becomes a love letter from Christ. One quickly realises that there is a lot of excitement that the Word of God stirs up in one's life—if you understand it. One would read and read again and again and again. One can appropriate any promise that one comes across and it would count for him. This is not the case with people who have not said yes to the Lord Jesus' proposal for salvation.

The excitement that comes as we read God's Word, with all the beautiful promises therein, have the ability to cheer up our spirit which in turn makes it easy for us to worship Him. The more we read God's Word and appropriate the promises and also identify with Him, the more we would be buoyed in our worship.

Talking about the excitement that the Word of God stirs up in us reminds me of Mzee Oyugi. Tonyino (his nickname) was a man in his late 60's. He could neither read nor write. One day, he called me

to help him write a letter to one of his relatives who was living some distant place. It happened that it was going to be his first ever letter to send to anyone.

I got myself a pen and a paper and sat down to help the ‘old man’. He dictated as I wrote. When we finished writing, I suggested to him that it would be advisable that I read through the letter to counter-check with him if I captured all he said and how he said them. He agreed.

As I read the letter, he got so excited, he couldn’t hold himself. His excitement was eruptive, interrupting my reading. I kept on pausing to allow his excitement ‘cool down’ before I could proceed. I would read a line or two and he would jump up with excitement, exclaiming, “Yes, that’s right! Exactly! Yes, I said that!” I would start reading again and there he would go, “That is exactly what I said, it is true I said that, yes I said it!” It was becoming difficult reading through the letter. It was a mystery to him.

Finally, I finished reading through it and Tonyno couldn’t hide his amusement and satisfaction. As I was leaving, he commented, “I never knew that a paper (the letter) could talk so clearly. This means that my relative will get exactly what I said just like I would be talking with him face-to-face”.

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After I had left, the ‘old man’—as we used to call him for purposes of respect—had a better idea. He started wondering about the mystery of the ‘talking paper’. He thought that since I was there when he was talking, perhaps I could recount what he said from my memory. He thought to himself, ‘What about taking this letter to

someone who wasn't there when we were writing it?' And that is what he did. He crossed to the neighbourhood and took the letter to someone who was not present where we wrote the letter. The person read his words—exactly what he said and how he said them. It was this person who later came and told me how the 'old man' went 'berserk' when he heard his own words from someone who wasn't present where we wrote the letter.

Thank God for the civilisation of writing! The Bible tells us that the Scripture was inspired by God's Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) and people that God ordained for this noble task captured it by writing it down—just as He said it. Thanks to God again! He did not make the Scripture 'too spiritual' to be of any good to us—He never used angels or super-humans to write it. He, instead, used human vessels.

In the Old Testament, some of the writers were writing according to the experience they had with God. Some of the content in the Old Testament, for example the theology of Job's friends shows the limitation of man's understanding. In some portions, the writers would write what God prompted them to write even if it concerned them. If it was not God 'commanding' them to write, by writing, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." (Num. 12:3), he would have been considered the most proud person who ever lived, for example. The interesting thing is that many people read through this portion of the Scripture without noting that it was Moses 'writing' that about himself—he is the one who wrote the book of Numbers.

In the New Testament, most of the writers were 'eye witnesses' to what they wrote,

We did not follow cleverly invented stories
when we told you about the power and
coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we
were eye-witnesses of his majesty...

We ourselves heard this voice that came
from heaven when we were with him on
the sacred mountain...

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

—2 Peter 1:16, 18, 20-21.

The apostle John on his part also put it as follows:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

—1 John 1:1.

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

—John 21:24.

All this writing of the Scripture was not done because people who wrote it did it for a hobby,

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

—John 20:30-31 (italics for emphasis).

Did you know that when you read God's Word or speak it back to Him, He wouldn't disown it saying that He was misquoted? Did you know that anytime you lift God's promises on His face, He would exclaim, 'That is exactly what I said!?' Did you know how

much God gets excited when you read His Word back to Him? Did you know how meaningful it is to worship God in accordance to His Word—His will; His purpose; His Knowledge; His attributes? *etc.*

The excitement of Tonymo when he heard his words being read to him is not just for those who marvel at the mystery of reading and writing because they do not know how to read and write. Even people who know how to read and write get excited when they hear their own words being quoted or read by others. At the college, we were always aware that professors like it when you quote from their books.

Whenever you get an assignment or a test from your teacher, you are likely to score well if you pay tribute to him in the subject. Quoting your teacher shows that you *acknowledge* his authority. It also means that you *pay attention* whenever he is teaching you. But there are ‘rules’ guiding the quotations. For you to get rewarded, you have to ‘quote in context’ and verbatim. That is to say, it has to be relevant and accurate.

When we do our assignment of worship by quoting our Teacher, we show that we not only *acknowledge* His authority but that we also *pay attention* whenever He is teaching us.

Like people who may quote the professor out of context, there are people who are doing what the devil tried to do to Jesus. His quotation of the Scripture was out of place (Matt. 4:5-7). Quoting the Word of God is only valid if we subscribe to its tenets. It doesn’t help however much we can quote it if we don’t subscribe to its rule. This is why the Bible says in Psalm 50:16-17,

But to the wicked, God says:
“What right have you to recite my laws
or take my covenant on your lips?
You hate my instruction
and cast my words behind you...”.

How much do we get excited with the Word of God, knowing that we are speaking the very words that created the things we see and even the things we do not see? How wonderful it is to carry on our lips the very words that create and sustain.

Boring Stuff In The Love Letter?

After having compared the Bible to a romantic letter, someone would quickly ask about the stuff in the Bible that doesn't seem to excite any enthusiasm.

I don't believe for a moment that some of the stuff in the Bible are there just to fill the pages. Each word, each story and each name, *etc.* didn't get into the pages of the Bible by accident. Everything in the Bible, exciting or 'boring' was written down by a divine appointment. They are there for a purpose—whether we understand it or not.

I don't insist that what I'm about to say is the justification for the 'boring' stuff in some parts of the Scripture. After having said so much good about the Word, it shouldn't be surprising to concede that there are some portions of the Scripture that are not only difficult to understand but also 'uninspiring'—to put it more candidly, 'boring'.

I believe, and it is common knowledge, that the beneficial things in life are not always sugary or delicious. 'Boring' is not necessarily a synonym for 'unimportant'. This is the mistake many people make. Any time they judge something to be boring, they equally classify it as 'unimportant'.

Think of things we eat and drink. Some things have 'boring taste', others tasteless as some are 'bitter'. Nevertheless, some of these boring, tasteless and bitter tastes are very important—often, more important than the sugary and delicious things. The problem is that many of us don't want to look beyond the taste.

I remember one time my little son (at age 5) and I 'disagreed'. After feeling that the boy had had enough soda for the day, I refused to allow him take more of the stuff. I told him that if he still wanted to drink, he would have to drink water. The boy protested, "Papa! Water tastes nothing". Lacking the taste, there was no way to convince him that water was more important than the soda. I only prevailed upon him because, 'Papa knows better'. If it was a question of taste, my son could have 'won' because there was no debate about the fact that water is tasteless.

A good combination and balance of the 'tasty', 'bitter' and

‘tasteless’ is good for the body. I believe that the Word of God is like that. There are points where it effects excitement because of the pleasant promises and inspirations; there are times when it is commonplace and ‘tasteless’, stirring no interest. At times, it is ‘bitter’ and sharp, sharper than any double-edged sword—the Word can painfully rebuke. In some places, it is bogged with plain names without any inspiration. That is what is on the surface and which meets the natural sense. There is much we don’t understand, nevertheless, the fact that we don’t understand something doesn’t mean it is not important.

Whatever the case, God has allowed all the mixture to be in His Word and it is a sign of faith to hold to His Word whether it is ‘cutting’ or enthusing excitement; whether it is dull and ‘uninteresting’. One important secret to embrace is to pledge to God’s goodness and by faith maintain that it is God’s nature to be virtuous in what He is, says and does. Armed with this attitude, we must approach the Bible with the position that there must be ‘something good’ in between those supposedly ‘boring’, ‘bitter’ and ordinary stuff—because there actually is.

Apart from being a love letter, the Bible is also like the natural phenomena. Nature is such that sometimes we have to excavate through hard, stubborn and massive gravel in order to reach gold—for example. The things of value don’t always readily occur on the surface. You have to dig out more ‘waste’ in order to reach a treasure. In other words, if we want to be rich, we must determine to reach gold however deep it may be under the surface. In the same way, if we want to be rich spiritually, we must reach out to the Word of God and dig deep into its pages even if the stuff doesn’t look valuable.

God once put a question to me: ‘Suppose I told you that the whole Bible will look to you as if it is full of irrelevant boring stuff, but equally told you that in between all those pages, I ‘hid’ a word, a sentence or a story that would be so important to you, would you discover it? How much would you turn all the pages as you look for just a word?’ The question wasn’t meant to solicit an answer but to challenge my attitude as I read God’s Word. It is like this: if we are told that so many feet underground lies some amount of gold,

would we dig out all the gravel to reach it? If it is gold, we would certainly dig, yet God's Word has 'something' of much value than gold.

The idea is that if we are looking for something precious hidden in a pile of other things, we will have to search diligently to get it. The smaller it is, the more diligent we'll have to be. That means we would need to put more effort to get "very little".

But here comes the good news: the 'little things' of God can make the difference between life and death; eternal life and eternal damnation. Furthermore, the 'little things' of God have infinite potentiality to grow. Just a word from God is enough to make all the difference. Just a word from God is enough to give life (see Matthew 8:8); gold, however much it is, can't.

... if we want to be rich, we must determine to reach gold however deep it may be under the surface.

Sometimes God literally has one word for us somewhere in the Bible that would carry us through a stormy day or open a door of blessings for us. If this is the case, we'll have to spend more time to identify this compared to the time we would have needed to identify a sentence or a story.

In what seemed uninspiring endless name-dropping of uneventful people, 'hides' the prayer of Jabez (1 Chron. 4:9-10). This is the prayer that has inspired writers and gave hope to the hopeless. It is the prayer that has become a prayer-creed with tangible results for many. Below and above the two verses are 'inconsequential' names, but we have to 'dig' through those names to come to the prayer of Jabez.

For us to get the 'little precious blessing', we would need to leave no stone unturned. Is there a page in the Bible that you haven't opened in search for God's, 'just a word and all will be well'? Have you ever had a one-verse encounter with God? *etc.* If

you haven't, perhaps that tells how much you haven't dug through the Word of God.

We can dispose ourselves to capture our worshipping heritage if we expose ourselves to God's Word. But the question is: how much are we disposed to capture God's intentions for us? Will we capture God's voice if He whispers or we only notice Him when He thunders? Will we capture God's image when He speaks 'just a word' or we can only figure Him out when He captures us with a moving story?

Searching At An Unlikely Place

Ruth hanged on Naomi. The old lady had nothing to offer her. If this wasn't obvious to Ruth, her mother-in-law told her that much. There were neither promises nor bargains here except a devoted love on the part of Ruth. She was so much devoted to her mother-in-law that she was willing to stay with her even when the mother-in-law didn't have any rewards to give or promises to make (Rut. 1:3-19).

It was like Ruth was digging in a place which didn't show any sign of treasure. If what she did would be likened to reading the Word of God, it would be like reading the most 'dry' portion of the Scripture—like those portions with genealogies and endless names of people that don't seem to offer anything besides their names.

Being with her mother-in-law meant so much to Ruth. It was in itself a fulfilling experience. This is the essence of fellowship—being bound in a relationship. In this relationship, the bond is not sustained by material promises. In this relationship, the bond is mutual availability and responsibility—each person saying, 'I'll be there for you as long as I live'. It is saying, 'I don't have anything to give you but myself—whenever you need me, I'll be there'.

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In a fellowship, the relationship in itself counts ahead of any exchanges of rewards or promises—it doesn’t take the exchange of rewards and promises to sustain it. If we desire to have this kind of relationship with God, we will be fulfilled and still be willing to *go with God even when there seems to be nothing promising in the relationship.*

Ruth didn’t expect ‘anything’ from Naomi in the nature that would have attracted her. But the determination to hang around with her mother-in-law brought her to the ‘right’ place to meet the ‘right’ person. Little did she premeditate that her kindness and love to her mother-in-law would make her the great grandmother of king David, and finally getting her place in the human ancestry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A devoted love is something that nothing can rob. This is the attitude that the apostle Paul expressed to the Romans,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:35,38-39.

If these things were irrelevant, Paul wouldn't have talked about them. By talking about them, it means that there are people that will come face to face with different types of hardships, including the sword (death) itself. Nevertheless, their love for God and God's love for them would not be reduced by any manner of trouble.

I included the two subtopics—'boring stuff in the love letter' and 'searching at unlikely place'—in order to balance things out. We need not concentrate on the portions of the Scripture with exciting promises and blessings while disregarding the 'gravels' we may need to dig through in order to reach the promises.

If you read the Bible and it doesn't sound to you like a love letter, then consider it as a rocky surface that you are digging either to put up a foundation for your house or a rocky field underneath of which lies treasure. Disregard not any portion of the Scripture.

The Language Of Worship

When we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we would be in a position to be familiar not only with His will and pleasure but also acquire the 'language of worship'. This is to say, when we fill our spirit with God's Word, we would generally find it 'easy' to flow in worship. I first acquired 'prayer and worship vocabulary' after reading through the book of Psalm. Prior to this, I used to wonder how some people would flow in worship for a whole hour or more—non-stop.

Apart from acquiring 'worship language' and tuning into God's will and pleasure, the Word of God also makes us minister grace to one another in a way that glorifies God. This is why the apostle Paul exhorted the Colossians to let the Word of God dwell in them richly:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and *as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you

do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.
—Colossians 3:16-17 (*italics for emphasis*).

When we seek God by soaking ourselves in His Word, we would acquire wisdom with which to admonish one another; the songs that spring up from our inner man would be spiritual songs, hymns and psalms. A life that is soaked in the Word of God would be an embodiment of worship—whatever we do would be to glorify God (Col. 3:17, 23).

A life that is soaked in the Word of God will radiate joy. This is why king David declared, “The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart...” (Ps. 19:8). A heart that radiates the joy that has been fanned into flame by the precepts of God will ‘effortlessly’ worship Him.

A life that is ‘thoroughly’ informed by God’s Word will not be based on an ‘empty zeal’. A zealous worship without knowledge is as vile as idolatry. The apostle Paul bemoaned the ineffectual zeal of the Jews who desired to worship God but rejected Jesus,

Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their *zeal is not based on knowledge*. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.
—Romans 10:1-3 (*italics for emphasis*).

A true worship must be informed by the Word of God. Worshipping in ignorance can lead to hopeless worship at best and profanity at worst. Good intentions are not the measure of rightness of our worship. We read in the Old Testament what befell Uzzah when it was clear he intended well,

They set the ark of God on a *new* cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the *new cart* with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. *David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.* When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.

—2 Samuel 6:3-7 (italics for emphasis).

The occasion marking the return of the Ark of God was one which could have been a worshipping and celebration's story. King David, in his style, accompanied by the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, singing and playing diverse instruments—until Uzzah reached out to 'help' the Ark.

The music came to an abrupt end. Songs turned into sobs and singing into sighing. If these people were soaked and informed by God's decree, they would have followed the instructions about how to carry the Ark. They needed to remember that an 'act of worship' only counts if the 'pact of worship' is observed. The Ark of God was not supposed to be drawn in a cart—it didn't matter how new the cart was. Furthermore, Uzzah who was not a Levite, was not expected to touch the Ark of God (Num. 1:50-53; Josh. 3:3-4). The music, celebration and the new cart did not 'sway' God to the imaginations of these supposedly worshipping lot.

Today, being uninformed by the Word of God, some people worship through the so-called saints, prophets, angels, martyrs and supposedly godly dead relatives. Our worship can only be

meaningful through Jesus Christ—alone (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:15, 12:24).

The Word Of God Reveals God If Practised

Diligent seeking of God in His Word is only meaningful if we reflect it in our daily life. It serves no purpose to seek God in His Word just for the sake of it.

I was visiting a church one Sunday morning. As we took our seats, I found myself sitting near a lady. As we were listening to a visiting choir, she pulled out a pocket mirror from her handbag. She checked her face against it, took a tissue and organised her face. It didn't look like there was any mess on her face but she all the same took time to check just in case there was a splotch. Even when there seemed to be 'no visible' spot, she still did a good deal of wiping her face. As she put back the mirror and the tissue into her bag, I could perceive feelings of confidence and contentment with her 'presentable countenance'. A small voice spoke to me: 'That was for you!' I got it. I was to pick a lesson from that.

How the above ought to be our attitude when it comes to the Word of God! Carrying it with us everywhere; pulling it out even in "odd places", checking a verse or two; letting it organise our spirit and influence our 'looks'. Even when we don't seem to have any problem with our 'spiritual looks', we would still be wise to take time and check ourselves against the 'Mirror'. As we put it back into the bag, we would display an observable contentment and confidence in our manners and identity.

I like the way ladies usually get keen on their presentability. When a lady takes a mirror, she doesn't just look at her image; she is not indifferent to what she sees. She takes keen interest; takes her time and thoroughly check her looks. She does it in a way that ensures she doesn't miss a mess on her face regardless of how tiny it may be. She picks every little detail and she does something about it. She wipes her face even when the male counterpart is wondering why she is so 'jittery' about what already looks perfect.

It would have been pointless if the lady saw a 'mess' on her face

and instead of removing it, ignores it and puts the mirror back into her handbag. In the same way, it would be ridiculous for the Word of God to show us something that is a ‘mess’ in our life and instead of letting it change our ‘looks’, we put it back and continue with our life as before.

How much do we get interested in our spiritual image? How much do we take time with the Mirror—the Word of God—and let it help us pick every little detail of what may not be good-looking in our presentability?

Equally, we shouldn’t use the Word of God only to ‘see’ others. In the case of the mirror, this means that instead of looking at our own image in it, we angle it to see others. First and foremost, we must appropriate the Word to ‘fix’ ourselves before we attempt to ‘fix’ others with it (Matt. 7:1-5).

Seeking God in His Word shouldn’t be like the story of king Jehoshaphat of Judah and king Ahab of Israel. Jehoshaphat had started well by asking Ahab to seek God’s guidance before going to war against Ramoth Gilead. And even after 400 prophets had ‘authenticated’ God’s position concerning the war, Jehoshaphat’s inner man must have screamed in disapproval. He still insisted that they needed to inquire more. Prophet Micaiah was called in—one against 400. Though he started by the popular prophecy, he deviated from the tracks of prophetic flattery and told the truth when king Ahab insisted that he needed one (2 Chro. 18). But what did it help?

*Good intentions are not the measure of rightness
of our worship.*

Why did he insist to be told the truth? What followed was interesting. These people wanted God’s guidance when they were not ready to be guided by it. They had made up their mind on what they wanted to do and perhaps thought that because they were kings, God would bow to their whims. These people asked for God’s guidance but when He spoke, they didn’t take Him seriously.

When he punished and humiliated prophet Micaiah for having spoken the truth that he ‘forced’ out of him, it was apparent that king Ahab had asked to be told what he was not willing to hear, leave alone influence his premeditated plan of action. The result, expectedly, was disastrous, especially for king Ahab—he was killed in the war.

Unlike king Ahab, this is what the psalmist said in Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

When we seek God’s Word we must be willing to be guided by it even when it is radically against our interests and wishes. Letting God’s Word light our path would also make it easy for us to glorify Him. When we open our mouth to verbally worship Him, we wouldn’t at the same time battle a pricked conscience. Worshipping God while trying to ‘silence’ a screaming conscience is one of the most difficult things to do.

King David made a prayer that shows that seeking God to him was not just for the sake of it but to influence his walk:

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.
—Psalm 86:11-12.

It helps nothing to seek the ways of God and fail to walk in them.

Sponge Soaked In Water

Our attitude should be in this wise: Regard the things of God as water and us as sponge. Whenever we get into contact with water, we would have the property of affinity to water. We would then get ourselves soaked in it. When we have the Spirit of God in us, we shall have an absorbent characteristic for the things of God. But the

question is: Are we selective enough not to corrupt our grace-availed characteristic? Do we soak ourselves in 'water' or allow other things to compete for space in our life?

A sponge soaked in water will always give out water: when you squeeze it (putting it under pressure), it will give out water; when you 'strangle' it, it will ooze water; when you swing it, it will spew water; when you heat it, it will evaporate water; when you put it in fire, it will quench the fire with its water. Whatever you do to a sponge soaked in water, it will always produce water.

That is how our life ought to be. We should get ourselves soaked in the things of God that consciously or unconsciously, it is the things of God that should come out from within us. In this way, whether it is pleasure (swinging) or pressure (squeezing), we would produce the fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,
peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith-
fulness, gentleness and self-control...
—Galatians 5:22-23.

How much would our life glorify God if whenever we are swinging in pleasure or squeezed under pressure what we produce is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? We would be a people that operate in the realm of God's pleasure. Whenever we call upon Him, He will tilt His ears to listen to us. His presence would be manifest in the things we do. What else can be so fulfilling?

The sponge-water relationship can be practicalised in our relationship with the things of God. I have already established the importance of reading and studying the Word of God. That is one way to get ourselves soaked in the things of God.

There are many other means of getting ourselves soaked in our relationship with God so as to produce the fruit of the Spirit but there is one that is so important I need to mention and say something about it.

Feeding Our Soul With ‘Good’ Music

It is advisable that we feed our spirit with ‘good’ Christian music. I am not about to play umpire to what is and what is not ‘good music’. But this is my way which has helped me and I believe can be of help to many others as well who may see the sense in it. For me, ‘good music’ is first and foremost ‘Christian’.

Second, not every music labelled ‘Christian’ is necessarily good. I admit that it is not easy to determine but there are many singers whose songs are more inspired by ‘gold’ other than God. But I must let this stay since it is not my area to play the judge.

There is another group of music that may not meaningfully lift us before the throne of worship. This is the music that I would call ‘rowdy’. The lyrics accompanying the music are like ‘not meant to be understood’. The instruments flare, the voices loud and deafening. People may get ecstatically orgiastic but this may not necessarily mean that they are ‘truly’ praising and worshipping the Almighty God. Though the song may not be in tongues, if you ask any of them what the song is about, he may not be able to tell.

It is important that we don’t allow ‘sight’ to rob us of ‘insight’. Apart from ‘sight’, it has also to be ‘right’. Not everything that looks good is right.

I like dancing to what I understand. If it is a song sang in tongues, it is possible to tell if it is genuine or counterfeit. If it is sung in a foreign language that I don’t understand, I would consider it good music if the lyrics are clear enough. In this way, I would be sure that people who understand the language may be able to explain or translate the lyrics.

In my attempt to search for and establish the ‘good’ music that can help me enter the throne of worship, I have completely and deliberately disregarded the secular music. I have decided to have only ‘good’ Christian music in my collection. This is something

that I strongly recommend. Don't allow secular music to compete for your attention. Don't fill space and use up memory in your 'hard disk' with them.

It doesn't mean that the secular music is not good *per se*. It is rather a question of 'value' and meaning one attaches to 'good'. It is tricky to strictly define 'goodness' by sight—that is, using sensuality as the index and basis to determine what is good.

It is important that we don't allow 'sight' to rob us of 'insight'. Apart from 'sight', it has also to be 'right'. Not everything that looks good is right. The case of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden tells the whole story. If you check the story, you will realise that there was nothing 'wrong' with the fruit. There are only 'good' things said about the fruit. But it was never meant to be eaten (Gen. 3:6).

If we want nothing to come between God and us, we would be careful not to watch anything by virtue of it looking good; we must guard against eating anything because it is pleasing to the eye and delicious in the mouth; we must be careful not to listen to anything because it sounds pleasant, *etc.*

Music has a unique power to penetrate our inner man—our soul. I rarely find myself involuntarily reciting the things that I read but I usually find myself involuntarily singing the songs that I usually listen to. Involuntary or voluntary, I would wish to be exuberant with spiritual songs and music that minister to God and also to my soul. This is more meaningful.

It is the Christian music that will be relevant for me even if I am singing a song that was composed by someone else. When someone sings, 'O how I love Jesus.', I can pick up the song, sing it from my heart and in a very personal way. This is unlike the secular song where if someone sings about a romantic relationship, for example, I may sing the song and it may get into my spirit but it will not directly apply to me.

Instead of singing someone's song, a song that may itself be endorsing illicit relationships or sang by people who mock the true worship of God, *etc.* I will sing and listen to music that is 'pure' and godly; music that ministers to God, to people around me who care to listen and also to my soul.

In Colossians 3:16-17, the Bible says,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you *sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

—Italics for emphasis.

If we allow God's Word to dwell in us *richly*, the songs we sing would be inspired by the Word. Most of the gospel singers get inspired by the Word of God. They, therefore, sing the Scripture. Listening to such songs is one way to acquire God's Word. For this to happen, we must be careful not to subject the things of God in our life to unnecessary competitions.

It is important to guard the 'entry points' into our mind and soul. We do this by being careful what we watch, read, meditate on, drink, listen to, *etc.* We must be cautious with the kinds of emotional attachments to people and things. Most Christians are not even aware that celebrity worship and personality idols are quest-quenchers in regards to true worship. There are many things that the enemy, given a chance, would 'sneak' into our lives with an aim of either averting or distracting our zeal from worshipping God.

At one time, before we became radical and adopted selective watching of TV, my wife and I would feel so empty and drained after watching some programmes on TV. Some of the programmes did not look outrightly 'harmful' but after watching them, the moment we tried to bring ourselves into the mood of prayer before going to bed, it would be a real struggle. We would realise that something had been drained from us.

'Good' music would help us meditate on the laws of God and godly virtues (Josh. 1:8, Ps. 1:1-2, Philipp. 4:8) and memorise the scriptures, *etc.*

If Christian music can help us meditate on the virtues of God, it

is important to give it an exclusive priority. Meditating on the virtues of God is like a ruminant animal that after eating and swallowing the grass would bring it back to the mouth for a proper chewing. In this way, the cud-chewing animals make it possible for the grass to be digested and assimilated into their body. ‘Cud-chewing’ of the virtues of God not only makes it palatable but also ‘digestible’.

The above scripture (Colossians 3:16-17), shows that whatever we do, we should have God and others in focus. Apart from helping me, I must know that the song and music in my soul is meant to help people I come into contact with.

*It is tricky to strictly define ‘goodness’ by sight—
that is, using sensuality as the index and basis to
determine what is good.*

Not In A Hurry To Make Her Request Despite The Urgency

All said and done, seeking God just to worship Him is something that nothing compares with. Many people seek God because of what they want from Him. This is in order since God is also our Father to whom we are called upon to present our requests to, *etc.* (Philipp. 4:6; Matt. 11:28-30). Nevertheless, how would it be like if the primary motive for which we seek God were to worship Him? What if seeking God is an end in itself and not just a means to an end? What if we read the Bible, not because we want to identify the promises that belong to us but because we want to know Christ better and how we can minister to Him in worship?

Let’s look at it this way: You come before God and tell Him, ‘I heard that You were looking for worshippers—those who would worship You in spirit and in truth. I have come to do exactly that’. If you are not sure of the condition of your heart, that perhaps there can be things that may hinder your worship, then you tell God about it the way king David did. You tell God to search your heart for the

hidden sin and to cleanse you (Ps. 139:23-24) so that your worship may be acceptable.

Esther's approach and treatment of king Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus) reads like a manipulative strategy but it wasn't. The reason is that she put her life in danger and it wasn't for her selfish gains. When prompted by her cousin Mordecai to help deflect Haman's plot to annihilate the Israelites, it was obvious how urgent the matter was.

When she broke the rigid Persian and Median laws and appeared before king Xerxes without being invited, the last thing she would have done was to 'waste' time with the urgent plight of her people. The king had held out his golden sceptre to her, a sign that she would get away with her intrusion. Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you" (Esther 5:3). Esther replied, "If it pleases the king, ... let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him" (Esther 5:4).

King Xerxes must have wondered, 'What does it mean that Queen Esther risked her life in order to come and request me to a banquet, and did she hear when I told her that I'm willing to give her up to half the kingdom'?

He must have concluded, 'It looks like attending a banquet she has prepared for me is much more important to her than getting half the kingdom'. This must have made the king even more willing to give Esther 'something'—something really valuable.

Naturally, even if she had risked her life to invite the king to a banquet—and that was already 'insane' enough—ignoring the intervening opportunity of the kind the king had tempted her with must have been unbelievably surprising. Many people would have abandoned their original objective in order to take up what looked more attractive—half the kingdom.

Queen Esther must have wanted to penetrate into the warmest part of king Xerxes' heart before she could make her request. This must be the reason she, for the second time, declined the offer of half the kingdom when the king prodded her to make her petition. She instead told the king to attend another party the following day (Est. 5:6-8).

King Xerxes could tell that Esther had something for which she wanted to make a petition. But even if he didn't, it is natural to wish to give 'something' back to someone who has been good to us. This means that even if Esther didn't have anything in her heart to request from the king, he would still have wanted to honour her. When he kept on tempting Esther with the offer of half the kingdom, it was not because he guessed it was what Esther may have wanted to ask for. It was, instead, a way of telling her that he was willing to give her whatever she wanted. But even if she had nothing in mind, the king had categorically emphasised that there was something for her—something probably better than what she might have thought of.

If king Xerxes could be so bent on 'doing something' to Esther who had honoured him with a banquet, how much more would God be mobilised to bless people whose desire is not basically to get something from Him but to worship Him?

I believe that appearing before God with no other business but to worship Him is much more fulfilling and pleasant to God. Even if we have an urgent and pressing matter, it would mean a lot more to appear before God in worship and not be in a hurry to petition for our own interests. Take time and just honour God.

Seeking God not for what we want but for what He wants is a key that unlocks the warmth of a true 'family relationship'. For people who have opened their heart for God and whom God has also opened their spiritual sight to have just but a little glimpse of WHO God is, identifying with Him is, in itself, a reward. Worshipping Him is a pleasure.

Queen Esther must have wanted to penetrate into the warmest part of King Xerxes' heart before she could make her request.

We live in a world where many people 'worship' celebrities. If they would be asked to pay money in order to get the celebrity's

autograph, they would do so; they would do the much they can to shake his/her hand. Many would even want to ‘cook’ a relationship with such celebrities—even if it means doing so by proxy.

Some people try very hard to insinuate some kind of relationship with a celebrity. You would hear someone say, ‘He/she is a friend of the cousin of my former roommate at the college’. Some may even claim that the celebrity knows them personally when in the actual sense he/she doesn’t. Some may seek the attention of the celebrity just that they may strike a relationship with him/her.

And people who are lucky to take a photo with a celebrity would cherish that photo like an idol. They don’t do this because of what the celebrity is going to give them but just because it feels good to be identified with him/her. If this is the case, how much more would we desire to identify with the Creator of the universe; the Master Designer; the One who puts songs in the birds and designed man’s brain, *etc*? Wouldn’t identifying with Him ‘just for the sake of it’ be gratifying enough?

If only I would be seen walking or posing for a picture with Christ the King of kings, that would be enough reward for me. Even if He walks away afterwards without giving me anything, I would feel like I am on top of the world; I would feel like I am a king in the making. And that is what it is—I know I walk with Him; I pose with Him. In fact, He lives in me—I am His temple. Man! I feel big and flattered. This fills my heart with joy and music of praise.

If only we can have a small glimpse of WHO God is, ‘just’ identifying with Him will be more than a privilege; it will be more than a reward in itself; if only we can claim that He knows us personally—and He does—that would make us walk tall and be grateful to Him for lifting us up.

While we may struggle to seek the attention of a celebrity—a man or a woman, a mere mortal—and fail to succeed, everyone who seeks the attention of God gets it, what a privilege! Anyone who seeks a relationship with the Almighty and knocks at the door of awesomeness will certainly get in, what a favour!

Imagine how it would feel here on earth if the least known person has a direct line to the president of the country or the king or those highly placed in the society. When people finally realise that the

‘least known’ was not inconsequential after all. For such a person just standing by the side of the president will be reward enough. The feelings would be elating. This is something that should excite us—just knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ has chosen to recognise us. For me, that alone motivates me to worship more.

The secret in a nutshell:

One thing that is certain is that when we love God enough to enjoy His precepts even when they seem to be more disciplinary, our worship will be fulfilling enough to drown all the cruel side of life.

We must pay special attention to the Word of God: Reading it; studying it; meditating on it; listening to it; talking about it; memorising it and practising it. Reading through Psalms will especially help us acquire ‘worshipping vocabulary’.

When the Word of God dwells in us, we will know His will; His pleasure; His promises; His training; His attributes, His purpose, His strength, His wisdom, *etc.* We will also know our identity; our security; our calling; our responsibilities, *etc.* We will become knowledgeable and wise. Worshipping God in the context of His Word will grant us a fruitful and fulfilling fellowship not only with God Himself but also with people around us.

If we want to score highly, we will have to show the Professor that we know what He has written. Quoting Him extensively; choosing to major on the subject of His specialisation; researching on the area of His interest (Eph. 5:10); showing Him that we have been attentive in His classes—that we are the opposite of the students in 2 Timothy 3:1-7 of whom the summary reads in verse 7: “... always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth”.

Reflections

1. *Do you have a regular schedule for reading and studying the Word of God? If no, are you going to do something*

about it? When will you do this, TODAY?

2. *Have you ever consistently and systematically read through the Bible?*
 - a) *If 'yes', do you intend to adopt the policy of, 'there is always a room for one more time'?*
 - b) *If 'no', do you intend to do something about it? When will you start—TODAY?*
3. *What is your attitude to the parts of the Bible that do not sound interesting? Do you skip them or read through just to fulfil the feeling that you have read through the Bible?*
4. *If God hid a treasure for you in one of the 'dry' parts of the Bible and didn't tell you about it ahead of time,*
 - c) *what are the chances that you will find it—not counting on an accidental bumping on it?*
 - d) *how long would it take you to find it?*
5. *Have you ever sought God in His Word and when He spoke, you realised that it was not what you had expected?*
 - e) *How is obeying God an act of worship?*
 - f) *What did you learn in the 'unpopular' ways of God?*
6. *If you scrutinise your relationship with people and things, are there people or things that look harmless yet they may pose competition to the things of God or they may quench your quest for Him?*
7. *How much can you quote 'The Professor'?*