

We Are Fully Known

Day 11 – Monday, March 1, 2010

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. Psalm 139:1-4 NIV

We were created for worship, to be in an intimate relationship with God and to know Him even as we are known by Him. Because of our sin, our awareness of Him has become clouded, while He is fully aware of all that is in us. He knows everything we think, say, and do. To God we are an “open book.”

And yet, even knowing this, we still make futile attempts to hide ourselves from God. In those times when we do not believe in His love for us, or trust in His goodness and faithfulness, we allow distance to creep in to our relationship. But the distance is all on our side—God always knows us fully.

God’s desire is that we willingly allow Him into our deepest thoughts, come to him in all honesty and sincerity, and allow ourselves to be known by Him. And He is faithful; He will never leave us or forsake us due to anything we could do, but rather is completely gracious and longsuffering. He desires intimacy with us.

Heart questions:

1. How often do I realize that God knows my every thought, even before I have it?
2. How does knowing that make me feel? What light does it shed on my daily life, my choices, and my plans?
3. What steps can I take to more fully be aware of His presence, and to open my heart to Him?

Prayer: Dear God, as the psalmist says, You know me intimately. There is nothing I can hide from You. Lord, please draw me to Yourself and lead me to willingly open my heart to You more each day. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Sin, the Enemy of Worship

Day 12 – Tuesday, March 2, 2010

The LORD accepted Abel and his offering, but he did not accept Cain and his offering. This made Cain very angry and dejected. “Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked him. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it.” Genesis 4:4a-7 NLT

In the beginning man was created to worship God and have unhindered fellowship with Him. But when sin entered the world, it broke the relationship with God. And it impaired man’s opportunity to worship. Sin is the enemy of worship.

When Cain approached God, God’s response was not the one for which Cain had hoped. As a result, he grew angry, and withdrew himself from God. God, in His love and care for Cain, offered him the opportunity to restore fellowship and communion, warning that sin was nearby, threatening to take control of Cain.

In those times when God seems far away, or somehow unloving or disapproving of our worship, sin is waiting to attack and destroy us. It is important that we recognize the danger of broken fellowship with God, and choose to “respond in the right way” by drawing near to Him in obedience. It is our choice to worship or to withdraw.

Heart questions:

1. Have I felt distance from God, and withdrawn myself from Him?
2. When that has happened, how did I feel? What did I do as a result?
3. Do I truly believe that God will always welcome me in worship, even in those times when I feel distant from Him?

Prayer: Dear Father, I do not always come to You in worship, but at times I allow distance to come between us and threaten our intimacy. Lord, protect me from the sin of separation and allow me to worship You more fully. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

In the Presence of God's Holiness

Day 13 – Wednesday, March 3, 2010

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Isaiah 6:1a,5 NASB

The prophet Isaiah saw a holy God in all His glory, surrounded by angels who called out "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." And in this one instant Isaiah became painfully aware of his own sin, and the sin of his nation Israel. He saw himself as "a man of unclean lips."

At times we can see ourselves as more righteous and holy than we actually are. We can "go through all the motions" of living the Christian life, praying to God, confessing our faith in Him, and striving to obey Him in all things. But at certain times God allows us a larger glimpse of His holiness and majesty; it is then, in those moments of spiritual clarity, that we will see ourselves in a more revealing light.

True, authentic worship in the presence of a holy God can make us uncomfortable; it can call us to honesty concerning our true nature and our tendency toward self-destruction. But in God's presence we also find love, forgiveness and healing. In our honest worship God restores us, and fits us for the kingdom work He has created us to do.

Heart questions:

1. Have I ever had an "Isaiah 6" moment where I felt God's penetrating holiness and saw my own sin clearly?
2. How did I respond?
3. Am I willing to worship a holy God, knowing that I may not like what God's light of holiness shows me about myself?

Prayer: Dear Holy God, I desire to be in Your presence. But Your radiant light can cause me to see myself for who I truly am. Lord, I desire to grow in my worship; please move my heart to seek You fully and completely, allowing You to heal me and cause me to grow. In the holy name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

God Seeks True Worshipers

Day 14 – Thursday, March 4, 2010

Jesus replied, "Believe me, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father here or in Jerusalem...the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:21-23,24 NLT

This story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well is rich in references to authentic worship. In a brief meeting He engages the woman in conversation, showing His knowledge of her life. Feeling perhaps a bit vulnerable, she sidesteps His questions and instead engages Him in a theological discussion about worship practices. But Jesus, cutting through the superficial and delving to the heart of the matter, tells her that God seeks those who will worship Him *in spirit and truth*.

This story can resonate with us in many ways. First (as in the Isaiah 6 passage) we see that being in God's presence forces an honest look at ourselves. We can also admit our tendency to engage in discussions about the mechanics of worship (where, when, by what means). Most significantly we learn that God seeks truth-loving worshipers who honestly desire to know Him for who He is, and are willing to leave behind their preconceived notions about worship.

Unlike Cain in our Genesis passage, the Samaritan woman did chose to worship, and began to spread the good news about Jesus.

Heart questions:

1. Do I allow myself to get caught up in the details of worship practice, while missing the Savior standing before me?
2. Am I willing to allow God to know me fully? Or do I try to change the subject to avoid transparency with Him?
3. What does it mean to worship "in spirit and truth"?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, please keep me from being caught up in the details of religious practice; allow me to seek You honestly, and to worship You in spirit and in truth. In Your great name I pray, Amen.

Better Than Others?

Day 15 – Friday, March 5, 2010

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.”
Luke 18:10-14 NIV

Two men enter the temple: one, an acknowledged sinner, the other a teacher of the Law of God, a “righteous” man, who parades before the Lord his good works, then thanks God that he is not like other men (particularly the sinner next to Him). By contrast, the sinner doesn’t feel worthy even to look upward, but asks only for God’s mercy. Jesus tells His followers that it will be the sinner, not the righteous man, who will be justified by God. Jesus continues by saying that “he who exalts himself will be humbled.”

Comparisons are dangerous, and we must avoid at all costs the temptation to look down on those who do not appear as spiritual as ourselves. God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). And as we approach God in authentic worship, we must be honest about the relative value of our good works before God: we are brought near to Him by His mercy and forgiveness, not our own works.

An authentic worshiper will not compare himself to others, but will look only to Jesus for mercy and redemption; this too is worshiping in spirit and truth.

Heart questions:

1. Do I compare myself spiritually to others?
2. Do I do make such comparisons even while worshiping?
3. Do I confuse my own “good works” with God’s grace and forgiveness?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray that You will keep me humble, and not allow spiritual pride to creep into my life—and especially into my worship. May I seek You from a humble heart. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Authentic Worship Speaks

Day 16 – Saturday, March 6, 2010

But if some unbelieving outsiders walk in on a service where people are speaking out God’s truth, the plain words will bring them up against the truth and probe their hearts. Before you know it, they’re going to be on their faces before God, recognizing that God is among you. 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 The Message

True worship of God is authentic. When we worship God in spirit and truth, we come to Him in all honesty about ourselves and our sinfulness, and recognize His holiness and majesty. And when we do, God lifts us and restores us.

But authentic worship can speak to outside observers as well. The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian believers that their authentic, truthful worship would have an effect on those unbelievers in their midst. In various translations of verse 24 they will be “convicted and called to account,” “convinced by all that they are a sinner,” and “condemned by what you say.” What great responsibility is laid upon our corporate, public expressions of worship!

Worship can be a powerful force of evangelism, used by God to move the heart of the unrepentant sinner toward conviction and reconciliation in Christ. Though worship is directed at God alone, it can also have a profound effect on us, and on those around us, and call them closer to the Savior.

Heart questions:

1. Do I take seriously the call God’s Word places upon our times of corporate worship?
2. Do I fully realize the profound effect that authentic worship can have on an unbelieving observer?
3. Do we strive to “speak out God’s truth” in all aspects of our expressions of corporate worship?

Prayer: Dear God, I realize that my worship with others does not go unwatched by the surrounding world, and that You can use worship to move the hearts of those You are seeking. Please deepen our expressions of worship to greater honesty and truth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.