

Seek God

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Many people have a vague idea that perhaps God does exist, but are not sure. Others are confident God exists, but their ideas about God are confused, and misinformed. Throughout history, only a few have known the real God. Most, if they've worshiped any god at all, have worshiped idols, false gods, the work of men's hands and figments of the human imagination.

Would you like to not only know that God does in fact exist, but understand as few others in history have what he is really like? Would you like to have an intimate relationship with the true God who created the universe, and in whose power is the destiny of nations?

If you already have some acquaintance with the true God, are you making progress spiritually? Are you growing in spiritual knowledge and understanding? Is your faith stronger than it was a year or two years ago? Do you know for certain that God hears your prayers, or do you often feel like your prayers are unheard, unanswered, ineffectual?

If you are in a spiritual fog, or feel spiritually isolated, weak or that you're not making progress, you need to more diligently seek God, and do it in the right way. Not uncommonly individuals blame God for their own lack of faith and spiritual progress, implying that they've done everything necessary, but God has let them down. Some have had the truth freely available to them for years, yet allege God has not called them, because they are not willing to really seek God and personally commit themselves to him.

God repeatedly called the entire nation of Israel in ancient times (Deuteronomy 5:1; Isaiah 48:12; Jeremiah 7:13, 23-28). But most failed to respond to their calling in a constructive way, and were unfruitful (Jeremiah 11:7-8; 35:17; Hosea 11:1-5). Now God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). If you are reading this, God has given you access to the truth that many have never yet had. But you must also actively seek God, and keep on seeking him as long as you live, or what you have may slip right through your fingers.

Seek God and He Will Be Found

Rehoboam, son of Solomon and king of Judah, failed spiritually and did evil because he did not seek God (2 Chronicles 12:14).

On the other hand, "Now the Lord was with Jehoshaphat [a later king of Judah], because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel" (2 Chronicles 17:3-4). During Jehoshaphat's reign a

great army came up from the south to invade the kingdom. Jehoshaphat was moved with fear to seek God even more in the crisis, in fasting and prayer, as was the whole nation. God heard them, and they were saved (2 Chronicles 20:3-4, 30).

God does not tell us to seek him in vain (Isaiah 45:19). God promises that if you genuinely seek him he will be found (2 Chronicles 15:1-2, 12-15).

The idea that some are “predestined” to salvation and others are not is false. We read in Psalm 7:11, “God is a just judge.” And we’re assured in Psalm 136:1 that God is good, “For His mercy endures forever.” Would a just and merciful God create billions of human beings, and “predestine” most of them to failure, and, as many believe, eternal torture in “hell”? (See *The Truth About Hell*).

No. Quite the opposite. The ultimate destiny or purpose for which God created mankind is that humans might be changed fully into his likeness, as sons in his eternal kingdom (John 1:12; Ephesians 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 21:7). The word translated “predestined” or similar terms in various English translations of the New Testament is from *prohorízō* (προορίζω) or cognate words. The Greek word *pro* (πρό) commonly means before or prior (see *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* and *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*). The word *horízō* (ὁρίζω) is a geographical term which means properly to mark out a boundary (*ibid.*; also Clarke's *Commentary* on Ephesians 1:5, 11).

God purposed to give the seed of Abraham through Jacob (Israel) an inheritance in the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8; 48:4). In that sense the Israelites, delivered from bondage in Egypt hundreds of years later, were “predestined” to inherit the land God had promised at the time of Abraham and of Jacob. But, although that was the “destiny” God had in mind for them, many failed to fulfill it, because they lacked faith (Hebrews 3:18-19; 4:2).

In a similar way, God has “predestined” mankind to salvation. That is, his purpose and will for mankind is salvation in his kingdom (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Note in Ephesians 1:11 (quoted below) how Paul connects redemption with the idea of having obtained (or, as the Greek allows, been “assigned by lot,” or by God's will, as the Israelites in Canaan; Joshua 13:6) an inheritance, that was “predestined,” or marked out ahead of time, for those who were to receive it:

“In Him also we have obtained [or obtain] an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). But is this inheritance limited to the relatively small number who are among those who have first (or before others to follow) trusted in Christ (Ephesians 1:12)? No!

In the first place, Paul speaks of himself and others as those who had “first trusted in Christ,” before the Ephesian converts he was writing to. Then later, the Ephesian converts (Gentiles and Jews) *also* trusted, after they had heard the

gospel, and believed it (Ephesians 1:13).

Moreover, Paul explains, God's purpose is that "in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1:9-10). "All things" includes all mankind, Israelites and Gentiles (Jeremiah 3:17-19; 4:1-2; Isaiah 49:6; Romans 11:26).

That is the purpose God is working out over the course of time, much of it to be accomplished in the future. But God's will for us can be rejected if we choose that course, just as many of the Israelites did, and do. To fulfill the purpose of God for us, the destiny for which he created us, we must seek him, and repent, and do his will (Mark 3:35; Luke 7:30; Acts 17:26-28, 31; 1 John 2:17).

The idea that one has no control over his own destiny has often been prominent in heathen false religion but is the opposite of the truth. "Destiny," in the sense we are using it, is not the same as "fate," commonly viewed as inevitable and uncontrollable. "Destiny," as the term is used here, is the outcome God desires for you, and makes possible, but you have a choice in the matter (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Heathen Greek and Roman poets often represented the decrees of the goddess(es) of fate as immutable, implacable and irrevocable. Often one's fate was seen as having been determined at birth. Although some ancient writers viewed one's fate as being influenced also by his own behavior, for good or ill, humans were often viewed as having little or no control over their own destiny (e.g., Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Fall of Troy* 9.415 ff; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 8.7, trans. Conybeare; Homer, *Odyssey* 7.193 ff, trans. Shewring).

Superstitious belief in fate, or luck, expressed through astrology and other means, was widespread in the Middle Ages. False ideas about predestination were further developed by early Protestant leaders. Martin Luther, for example, promoted the idea that, "...who should, and who should not, have faith; who should conquer sin, and who should not be able to do so...is a matter...taken out of our hands, and is solely at God's disposal..." (*Martin Luther*, ed. John Dillenberger, p. 32). John Calvin also taught that some are predestined to faith and salvation and some to damnation and men are powerless to affect the destiny God has decreed.

But as we've seen, the truth according to God's word is far different. God wants -- indeed commands -- all to repent (2 Peter 3:9; Acts 17:26-30).

God told the people of Israel that if they turned from his laws and rebelled he would send upon them "tribulation," and allow their enemies to overrun them and take them captive (Deuteronomy 4:25-31). Note that this prophecy was not just for ancient times, but was also to be fulfilled in "the latter days" (Deuteronomy 4:30). Because of sins and a refusal to genuinely seek God a tribulation lies in store for the modern nations largely made up of peoples descended from Israel,

including the United States and Great Britain, among others.

The reason for such tribulation is to bring the people of Israel to the point where they are genuinely willing to seek God. God said to Israel, "... from there [in captivity] you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul," and, "turn to the Lord your God and obey his voice" (Deuteronomy 4:29-30; cf. 1 Chronicles 28:7-9; 2 Chronicles 31:21). Before the end of this age the whole world will be engulfed in cataclysms unprecedented in human history, for similar reasons (Revelation 9:18-20).

But you don't have to wait for disaster to come upon you before you decide to seek God. For many, it will then be too late to seek God, in this age, for their lives will be over. The vast majority of mankind will come out of their graves in the general resurrection, after the millennium, and will have a chance to know God at that time (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Revelation 20:5, 12-13).

But those who seek God now and serve him in this age will take part in a better resurrection, and will serve with Christ throughout the millennium (1 Corinthians 15:23; Hebrews 11:35, 40; Revelation 20:6). "Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Genuinely seeking God is the essence of faith in action, for to please God one "must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

How May One Seek God?

Seeking and finding God is within your capability. But it does take diligent and persistent effort and an exercise of your own will.

There are specific tools you can use to effectively seek God. They include genuine, heartfelt prayer, regular and focused Bible study, fasting to humble yourself before God, repentance, and obedience to God's commandments.

To have a meaningful relationship with God one must whole-heartedly seek God (Jeremiah 29:11-14). Note that God says he will hear when "you will seek Me..., when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:12-13). Seeking God must be the number one priority in our lives. Jesus said, "... seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

God is not pleased with the superficial and self-serving religious posturing so common in the world. God requires of us genuine humility before him, and commitment to yielding to his word (Isaiah 66:2).

Daniel is an example of one who sought God in prayer whole-heartedly, “with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes,” implying an attitude of genuine humility on his part (Daniel 9:3; NKJV “make request” is *baqash* -- usually translated seek, also request, seek out, inquire, etc.). Daniel made a habit of daily prayer, customarily kneeling before God and praying three times a day (Daniel 6:10). David also prayed regularly three times a day (Psalm 55:17). Paul admonished us to be “praying always” (Ephesians 6:18; “at all seasons,” as the Greek could be rendered, as noted in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Robertson). Our prayers are to be persistent and outgoing, with thanksgiving, focused not just on ourselves, but toward God and the needs of others, and for God's work (Ephesians 6:18-19; cf. Luke 18:10-14; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Fasting is another important tool to be used in seeking God. Fasting in the Bible is not the watered-down, so-called fast common in some circles, such as eating only one full meal in a day supplemented by snacks, or giving up soda-pop, or certain kinds of meats, for a day. A real fast for spiritual purposes as described in the Bible involves going without food and water for an extended period of time, often a full twenty-four hour day, or sometimes several days (Exodus 34:28; 2 Samuel 3:35; Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Jonah 3:4-9).

Such fasting for persons of generally good health usually presents no serious health problems, and in fact intermittent fasting may be not only beneficial from a spiritual standpoint, but is also known to promote physical health (cf, How Intermittent Fasting Stacks Up Among Obesity-Related Myths, Assumptions, and Evidence-Backed Facts). However, if you have serious health problems, such as hypoglycemia, diabetes, or other health conditions that may be exacerbated by fasting, you should exercise caution and follow the advice of a competent health care professional. Even though Jesus, Elijah and Moses each fasted (nothing to eat) for a period of forty days (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 18; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2), these were special circumstances, and I do not recommend you try this, unless you want to die, which has happened to some who have tried such of their own accord (Leviticus 18:5; Luke 6:9).

As discussed earlier, when the righteous king Jehoshaphat heard of armies coming against his nation he “feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (2 Chronicles 20:3). God heard their plea, and delivered them (2 Chronicles 20:4, 27-30). As Ezra was leading a group of people out of Babylon back to their homeland, he proclaimed a fast, “that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, 'The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.' So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer” (Ezra

8:21-23).

Fasting should be directed at preparing your heart to hear God, rather than being used as leverage to oblige God to hear you (Isaiah 58:2-4). Note that in his fasting Ezra sought from God “the right way” (Ezra 8:21).

Essential to seeking God is also diligent Bible study. “And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:19-20).

How well do you know the Bible? How often do you study it, asking God to give you understanding (Proverbs 2:1-10)? Do you just assume what you're told about the Bible by those who claim to represent Christ is true? Or are you searching out the truth by daily Bible study (Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:14-15; Acts 17:11; 2 Peter 2:1-2)? Bible study should not consist only of reading articles someone wrote about what the Bible supposedly says, or means. Much of what men have taught about the Bible is false. You should study and read the Bible itself, carefully and prayerfully, so you can know first hand what it really says.

God's laws are to be in our minds and hearts (Deuteronomy 5:29; 32:46; Psalm 119:10; Hebrews 8:10). They will only be there if we study and meditate on them (Psalm 1:1-2).

“... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). If you want to strengthen your faith, ask for it (Mark 9:24; Luke 17:5), but also, spend more time studying the word of God.

Repentance and obedience are necessary if you are to have a meaningful relationship with God. God reveals himself to those who abide in his word, that is, faithfully keep it (John 14:21-23). Seeking God includes seeking out his requirements, as revealed in his word, and keeping them (Psalm 119:2, 155; 1 Peter 3:10-12). Seeking God means turning from sin to obedience to God's commandments (2 Chronicles 7:14-22; 2 Chronicles 31:20-21; Isaiah 55:6-7; Zephaniah 2:3).

Falsely claiming to seek God, while rejecting his word, as many do, is futile and will lead to disaster (Proverbs 1:28-33).

If you want to find a relationship with God, if you want to make spiritual progress, if you want to overcome your weaknesses and sins, if you want to be in God's Kingdom, seek God in the right way, with all your heart. Seek him daily, and never cease to seek him. If you do, you'll find him, and your salvation will be assured.

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