

Building *Intimacy* with God

Devotional

W E E K 2



Week 2

BARRIERS TO INTIMACY WITH GOD

Last week, we talked about the fact that God invites us to intimacy with Him. We don't find Him because we don't seek Him. The goal of this devotional series is to help us use this unique time to focus on and develop a hunger for God and a more intimate relationship with Him.

We are going to look at three common barriers to knowing God. First, we need to understand that intimacy with God is always a spiritual battle. Satan doesn't want you to know God. This is true for people who have never trusted in Christ for salvation. Satan wants you to stay lost in your sins. But it is also true for Christians.

As you read last week in John 15, spiritual fruit comes only when we have intimate fellowship with Jesus (abiding in Him.) This means that a Christian who doesn't have intimate fellowship with God is no threat to the kingdom of darkness! God's enemy, Satan, is invested in keeping you from knowing God. Pursuing God is not just a matter of willpower, it's a spiritual battle. (See 2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

1. Religion

The first barrier to knowing God is religion. This can be the greatest obstacle to knowing God because it gives us a false sense of confidence. We can believe that doing things for God is the same as knowing Him. Read Isaiah 29:13. The religious leaders in the New Testament were the living example of this Old Testament warning. They were very religious and thought they were pleasing God, yet they missed the fact that His Son was standing right in front of them! This can happen within modern Christianity. We can be very religious and neglect having a true relationship with God. This is the most dangerous barrier because we don't know we are missing something. Religion is so close to knowing God that we think we have Him.

- What religious activities can give you a false sense of pursuing a real relationship with God?
- How can you tell the difference between religious service and knowing God?

2. Shame

The second barrier is shame. Many Christians feel like they are unworthy of being in the presence of God. The Bible clearly tells us that we are made worthy to be with God if we trust in Jesus (see Ephesians 1:3-14). Shame will keep us hiding from God's presence instead of running to Him. Read Psalm 32. Notice that David went from hiding from God to hiding in God. Satan uses shame to convince us that if we run to the Father, He will condemn us instead of embracing us. We see several women in the gospels (known sinners!) have the faith to believe Jesus would embrace and forgive them. Their faith made them well. Shame is not first and foremost a psychological issue. It is unbelief ... the inability to walk by the truth of what Jesus has spoken. If He has set you free, you are free indeed.

- How does Satan use the weapon of shame to keep you from running to God?

3. Self-reliance/pride.

Most of the time, Christians walk around thinking we are doing ok with the amount of God that we currently have. We might actually be afraid of more of God because He might tear down our self-reliance. Read Jesus's interaction with someone who felt this way in Mark 10:17-27. Can you identify with this man? Have you ever wanted just enough of God to comfort you but not demand anything from you? Notice that Jesus did not negotiate with the man in Mark. He doesn't compromise, but expects that we love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength. Read Matthew 10:37-39.

- What does Jesus say about the attitude of trying to follow Him while holding onto our self-reliance?

So how do we break through these strongholds? Jesus said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." He can give us the faith, desire and spiritual wisdom to pursue Him in spite of such daunting barriers. Our job is simply to believe (John 6:28-29).