

## Prayer and Seeking God

**Hebrews 11:6**

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In last week's sermon, I continued to expound Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 6. I want to read that again to us.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

I have been expounding this, especially in regard to that last phrase about seeking Him. All of us, I think, want to be rewarded by God. There is no doubt at all about that. We want very much to be rewarded by God, but my question to all of us is: are we willing to make the effort, that is, to pay the price? That is inherent in that statement that is made here. That last phrase means to seek out or search with the connotation of earnestness, diligence. It means to seek with a sincere desire to obtain favor. The word *diligence* here is a very strong word and in a different context it has the sense of requiring or even demanding. The word shows a great deal of persistence.

In addition to that, in the sermon we found that there is a direct linkage between faith, seeing our need, desire, fervency in prayer, and seeking God. All of these are linked together: faith, seeing our need, then desire, fervency in prayer and then seeking God. They are linked in a chain one to the other. And if one is there then there is a possibility, maybe even a very strong likelihood that the next one is going to be there, and then the next one and the next one.

Turn with me back to the book of Revelation because I want to emphasize again here at the beginning why this is of such concern to us. Revelation 3 and beginning in verse 15 in the message to the Laodicean church:

Revelation 3:15-16 I know thy works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would that you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.

That doesn't sound like much of a reward, does it? It ought to be pretty obvious that whoever these Laodiceans are they are not pleasing God at all. Is it because they are not seeking Him? I think you are going to be seeing that there is a direct connection between being spewed out and the fact that these people are not seeking God, at least not diligently seeking Him.

Revelation 3:16-17 "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not

know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-

You see, there is no need. These people don't see one. I should say, there is great need but they don't see it!

Revelation 3:18-19 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."

Do you think that zeal has anything to do with diligently seeking God?

Revelation 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

We are, to a great measure, victims of an age which is certainly not apathetic to seeking its own pleasure but *is* apathetic about having a true relationship with God. I asked this question in last week's sermon: Do you know of anybody who would tell you in all honesty that he wouldn't care to eat or to have fellowship with Jesus Christ? Look at that verse 20. He is standing at the door and knocking. He says, if they will open up He will come in and dine with them.

I think that many would like to eat with Christ and fellowship with Him just to say that they had a novel experience. But the ironic thing here is that God is seeking His people and the implication is that they are too uncaring to even rouse themselves to answer the door. The problem, the implication from the other verses in the message to this church, is that they are so far from Him that they are not aware of any need. No awareness of need, no desire. No desire, no prayer. No prayer, no relationship. No relationship, no awareness of need. It goes in a vicious cycle, like a chain that has no links broken in it.

God is hoping that He can stir us up enough to repent and to break out of the cycle by rekindling. He says, "Repent. Be zealous." Zealousness indicates heat, passion, and feeling. So He is hoping to break us out of this circle by rekindling an awareness of need.

An awareness of need is in us because we are close enough to Him to enable us to clearly see how holy, gracious, kind, merciful and good He is that we then will want to be like He is. In other words, just rephrasing it, is that we would admire Him so much and respect His personality and His qualities so much that we would *want* to be near Him—right across the table from Him. Not just to be near Him to have a novel experience but to be near Him so that we can exalt Him and seek to honor Him by being like Him. Isn't imitation the sincerest form of praise? Sure it is.

This is what happens when two people are in love. Two people in love almost desperately seek each other. There is an interesting verse in the book of Jeremiah 2:2. It is a remark by God

about His relationship with Israel. He says

Jeremiah 2:2 "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown."

Let me give you one of those phrases from the *Revised Standard Version*. This is in the middle of verse two. He says, "I remember your early devotion, the love of your bridal days." This is why God uses the bridegroom and bride analogies. It is because it pictures the kind of fervent relationship He desires with us. Fervency is warmth of spirit. It is an attitude.

Do you really desire a relationship with somebody who shows no interest in you? There is a possibility that something like that might occur because you are attracted to them in some way but they aren't paying any attention to you. So, it is very likely that unless you make a move to build a relationship this other person is never going to notice you. So you begin to seek them out.

Now put God into this. He doesn't need us in any way. And we are not holy like He is. We don't have the mind He has. We don't have the character He has. We don't even know anything about Him at the time He makes the effort to begin to have a relationship with us. He would like to have one with us, because He can see where it can go.

But what kind of reaction is He going to get from us? He wants the kind of reaction of two people in love. Look at this from God's point of view in terms of the end of the relationship. If you were God, would you desire to have a relationship with somebody who is not showing any interest in you? I don't think you would want to marry anybody that didn't have as much interest in you as you have in them—because marriage should be made on the basis of equal fervent interest in one another. It should be made on a desire to be together... a desire to do things together... a desire to accomplish things together... a desire to build a family together... even a desire, we might say, to mature and grow old together.

That is the kind of relationship that God wants. He specifically says in several places, "I remember what it was like in our bridal days" because there was heat there. And each was really and truly seeking each other out.

Let's go back to the New Testament once again, this time to the book of John the second chapter. We begin to see the kind of heat that our Elder Brother, our God, has in Him. John 2:17.

What happened here is that Jesus saw the way the Temple was being desecrated and He got upset. This is when He went in and turned over the moneychanger's table and chased the oxen out of there. And then verse 17...

John 2:17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

Here is another one of those Biblical patterns. It is an example that God wants us to follow. The

example of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, and the zeal, the heat, the passion that He felt for God and God's way. His relationship with God was not platonic. It wasn't cold. He felt insulted if God was insulted, profaned, or blasphemed, or any of the holy things of God were profaned in any way. Christ felt it as though it was being done to Him, because Their relationship was that close. There was a real fervency and warmth of Spirit.

It is very easy for us to look at the so-called "Christianity's" picture of a sallow complexion and cow-eyed Christ and listen to many of the songs they have written of Him and come up with a characterization of Him that is indulgent and weakly good-natured. It is true that there is in Him an almost unbelievable patience and lack of exasperation with impossible people: the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees for example. But it would be a serious mistake to characterize Him as being without fire in His temperament as well.

There are quite a number of examples that Christ got hot about things. In Mark 3:5, it says He turned around and looked at these people with anger. There must have been something flashing out of His eyes, and His face must have been twisted in such a way that it affected Mark or Peter, whomever the author of that was, that he remembered that flashing from Christ. He was angry at what was going on. There was nothing gentle when Christ said of Herod, "Tell that fox..." How about the rebuke of Peter in Matthew 16, "Get you behind me Satan!" How would you like Him to say that to you? That would be hard to take.

This came right after Christ asked him, "Who do people say that I am?" And He then asked him, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And then Christ said not long after, "Get you behind me." I tell you, that must have been painful for Peter to take.

I don't think that the Pharisees found Him gentle, meek and mild when He gave them that stinging series of rebukes. In Matthew the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter, He called them fools, hypocrites, blind guides, lawless, whited tombs, snakes and brood of vipers. And He felt so strongly about this that rather than making peace with them, He chose to go to His death. Jesus Christ had very strong and heated opinions. And those opinions, in His case, were right.

You are probably all familiar with places in the Scriptures where it talks about the wrath of the Lamb. Ordinarily, you don't think of a little lamb having wrath. But this Lamb has the capability of very great wrath. Brethren, there is HEAT in our God in regard to things that are right. Here in John the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter He is righteously indignant at the irreverence and disrespect and lack of fear of God as shown by their misuse of holy things. And in this case, the holy thing was the Temple of God.

Remember that the Temple is a symbol of the Church. It is the place of fellowship with God and the place that is central to the fellowship of God's people. In that Temple, that is in that Body, God expects that there is going to be a place of affectionate family warmth and concern.

We are going to take this another step further. We are going to look in the Old Testament as to where this "zeal for Your house has eaten me up" is taken from. That quote comes from Psalm 69. Let's go back there and look at it—verses 6-13.

Psalm 69:6 Let not those who wait for You, O Lord GOD of hosts, be

ashamed because of me...

Listen to what the author is saying here. The author may have been David. It may have been somebody else. It is a prayer attributed to David, and maybe absolutely for sure it was David. He said:

Psalm 69:6-7 ...let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel. Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face.

Listen to why he was going through this persecution. ...shame has covered his face, he has borne reproach because of his attitude toward God.

Psalm 69:8-12 I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children; Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach. I also made sackcloth my garment; I became a byword to them. Those who sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song [or you might say the subject of songs] of the drunkards.

David became the butt of jokes of sarcasm even bitterness because he was zealous for God. David put his whole heart into obedience for God, into talking about God, into trying to get people to turn to God, setting a right example for God. So instead of winning people over, they told sarcastic and dirty stories about David. Because of his zeal for God, He became a reproach.

I bring this up because, believe it or not, this will happen right *in* the church, right in the fellowship of God's people. I can almost guarantee that if you display more than usual enthusiasm for God, study a lot, talk a lot about God and His word that *even members* will avoid you and probably you will offend some of them.

Have you ever had somebody say to you, "Come on. Loosen up a little bit, sin." My wife and I have had that said to us by church members. "Come on, sin a little bit, Ritenbaugh." They were offended.

That will happen right in the Church and it was happening to David. Israel, at the time, was God's church. It was His congregation. And people were reproaching him because of his zeal for God.

We are going to take this just a little bit further back, in Deuteronomy 4 and in verse 21. It is an interesting statement here again about our God. We want to look at what He is like because He is what we want to become like. *He* is the one that we want to emulate.

I am trying to help you all to see that God expects us to be fervent about Him. It is part of diligently seeking Him. And He wants the kind of fervency that He describes as being like a bride, preparing herself for marriage.

Deuteronomy 4:21-24 "Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, [Does God have heat? He was angry with Moses for the sake of God's people.] and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you shall cross over and possess that good land. Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

There is heat in God's relationship with His people. Right in the Ten Commandments, in the second commandment, He says, "For the LORD your God is a jealous God." Do you know what jealousy is? Look it up in the dictionary. It is a passionate intolerance, even a hostility, against a rival. It is also defined as being vigilant in guarding a possession.

Here God is having a passionate reaction against a rival. That rival is idolatry. And God will not permit idolatry without reacting because idolatry promotes divided loyalties. We are His, and He does not choose to share us with anybody or anything else.

In Exodus 34 and in verses 12-16,

Exodus 34:12-16 "Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images 'for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), [I tell you, that is going pretty far. God calls Himself what He is, and He is jealous.] lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, [Remember in the New Testament about eating things offered to idols?] and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods."

Do you see what is happening? Do you see the way God describes idolatry? He described it as being harlotry, playing around with somebody else's wife. It is a case of divided loyalties. God gets hot. He gets angry. He is jealous.

In fact, as we saw there in Deuteronomy 4, He gets so hot that He describes Himself as being a consuming fire. Fire symbolizes God's radiant glory as an aspect of His holiness.

Now get this. Jealousy and zeal are opposite sides of the same coin. Both of them are passion

driven. One of them is positive; the other is negative. One is for; one is against. Zeal is passionately for something or somebody. Jealousy is passionately against something or somebody. In like manner, fire is hot and it is both positive and negative. It symbolizes both refining and purifying, on the one hand, and death and destruction on the other.

The pattern is right there in the way God portrays His feelings toward us. He is a consuming fire. He will either purify or He will destroy with His passion. He is either for something with a great deal of heat or He is against something with a great deal of heat.

You know the difference. He is for those who are with Him, and He is loyal to the *n*th degree to those. But He is against sin. He is against disloyalty. And He is against it with just as much heat as He is for those who love Him and diligently seek Him. His attitude is not cool in any way, shape or form, but it is hot. And He wants us to respond in like manner.

In what manner, in what way, are you seeking God? Is it diligently? Is it earnestly? Is it sincerely? Is it with warmth and ardor and affection? Is your seeking the ardent pursuit of one in love—one who wants to be around this personality and really desires to know Him—because we are, after all, going to marry Him and spend all eternity with Him? Or is it a kind of a take-it-or-leave-it, distant academic coolness because we don't want to make a fool of ourselves or offend others with our zeal. Think about it.

While you are thinking, let's turn to Jeremiah once again. This time to Jeremiah the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter beginning in verse 10. The subject here is the seventy weeks prophecy. God is working out a plan, a purpose, and He is telling Jeremiah and the people that they are going to be in the captivity for seventy years. Let's pick it up in verse 10.

Jeremiah 29:10-14 For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place [back to their homeland]. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you [God has loving thoughts toward them and He is concerned about them.], says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

"When you search for Me with all your heart!" There is a condition! Does this tie into Hebrews 11 verse 6 that (says) God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? ...that God desires children around Him who really want to be with Him, who aren't caught up in the coolness of this age that we live in but have a warmth, a real desire, and an ardor to be with God?

God is indicating here that we should seek as if we are finding or looking for something that is a vital necessity to us. If we lost a valuable piece of jewelry, we would turn the house upside

down in an effort to recover it. We would be wholehearted. We would be zealous about it! This principle that we are talking about here doesn't just apply to religion. It applies to many other areas of life as well.

Think about your experience at beginning a new hobby, a new game or a job. You will remember giving it your all in an effort to intimately know every nuance. You pursued whatever it was with zeal.

Revelation 2 instructs us regarding the Ephesian Church which began with a great deal of heated love in their relationship with Christ. Their ardor degenerated into a rather tepid relationship to such an extent that He had to tell them to repent and to go back and do the first works.

What happens to any fire that you don't tend? By the very nature of it, it goes out. It begins to cool. Our relationship with God is no different. There is something required of us in order to keep the relationship hot. It is not going to stay hot on its own, even if God Himself desires a very warm and ardent relationship with us. But He can only do so much. There has to be a response on our part. He wants us to respond because we see in Him something worth responding to.

That is why II Timothy 1 says to stir up the spirit that is within you. Even though the heat is there, it is inherent within it, it has to be kept going by the response that we make. The Ephesian Church is a witness for all time that this has to be done—that a whole body of people can lose their heat.

The Laodicean Church is a witness for all times of a people who went apathetic because they allowed themselves to become distracted by the world around them. All of their heat went to the ardent pursuit of wealth, of entertainment, and of self-satisfaction in materialism. It didn't go to building a relationship with God. It degenerated so far that Christ is standing at the door, outside, and asking if He can come in.

Guess where else this statement that appears in Jeremiah 29 verse 13 also appears? This was not the first time that it appeared in the Bible. It appears in that chapter that we were in before in Deuteronomy 4. Let's go back there, Deuteronomy 4 once again. Remember that God said a little bit earlier here, that He is a consuming fire. Let's pick it up again in verse 27. He is again warning the people that if they forget...

Deuteronomy 4:27-31 "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there 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.

Very interesting isn't it. Is God going to respond to a cold fish of a relationship? I am not going to answer that. I am just going to leave that hanging out there. Because He might out of mercy, but it becomes very evident in His word what He really wants. You know what? He wants the

same kind of relationship with you and me that you want from your mate, that you want from your children, and that you want from your parents. One with warmth, kindness, affection, good-heartedness, (and that is) wholeheartedly open.

Where do you think we got these feelings? We got them from our God. And now He wants them returned in an affectionate and loving relationship. He is telling us that if we respond to Him in this way, He is going to be much more inclined to answer our prayer.

Isn't that the way it is parents? Are you inclined to respond favorably to a child who is cold and distant and disobedient to you? Aren't you much more inclined to respond to a child who loves you and submits to you and honors you? Sure. Where did we get that? That is the way God is.

Let's look at three things that appear here between verses 27 and 30. Number one, God can be sought wherever one is — even in captivity. This is very important because what it means, as we are going to see later on, is that God doesn't care where you are, you can obey Him.

Joseph obeyed Him in jail. Jeremiah obeyed Him in a deep pit, stuck down in the mire. Daniel obeyed God right in Nebuchadnezzar's court! With all of that political intrigue around and all of the influence of his peers there in the court to submit to the idolatry of Nebuchadnezzar and his gang. He held fast to God because Daniel was seeking God.

There was a passionate feeling flowing from Daniel to God because he really loved God. And Daniel was willing to lose his life on a couple of different occasions because he felt so strongly in that love for God.

The second thing is that it must be done with all of our heart, all of our soul. That is, all of our being, all of our life. And, three, this is intended for the latter days. We must turn and obey His voice.

I want to turn our attention at this point to look at the mention of repentance and obedience in regard to diligently seeking God. Let' go back to the book of Amos chapter 5. A brilliant chapter here by Amos involving seeking God.

Amos 5:4-5 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel [This is written to us in the latter days.]: "Seek Me and live..."

I want you to think about what is coming on the United States and British Commonwealth. I don't know how far off the destruction that is coming is. Prophecy lets us know that there are going to be an awful lot of people who are going to die in the period that is in our immediate future—whether it be from natural disaster or from warfare. An awful lot of people are going to be dying. God says, "Seek Me and live!"

Amos 5:5-6 But do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the LORD and live [He is talking here about literally living through the destruction and captivity that is coming.], lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no

one to quench it in Bethel—

Let's drop down to verse 14

Amos 5:14-15 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

I want to establish the background of verse 5 so that we will understand. In order to do that, hold your finger there, and let's go back to the book of Genesis. Genesis 28:12. The main character here is Jacob, and he had an experience with God.

Genesis 28:12-17 Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

Jacob got into this encounter with God as a result of getting the birthright away from his brother Esau and then getting the blessing away from his brother Esau through deceitful chicanery. Esau was indignant to the point—he had so much heat in him—that he let it out that there was a contract on Jacob's life. He was going to kill him.

So Jacob did what anybody would do in that kind of situation, he fled. He decided he was going to go to his mother's relatives' and go to Laban's place up in Syria. On the way, he stopped at this place. It was here that he had this encounter with God.

Seeing the ladder in a dream stretching into heaven, with angels ascending and descending, not men, angels. Verse 13 is very important: "And Behold the Eternal stood above it and said..." That is as far as I need to go.

"The Eternal stood above it." I believe that is mistranslated. The *Revised Standard Version*, the *Revised English Bible*, and the *New International Version* all translate that God was standing beside him. In other words, He was at the foot of the ladder not above it. He was at the foot of

the ladder standing beside him. Not only do those Bibles translate it that way or have a marginal reference translating it that way, or referring to it in that way, other Bibles do as well. Standing beside him...

In other words, God came down the ladder. He revealed Himself as being there. And that is why Jacob said, "God is in this place," and why he named it Bethel which means "this is God's house." Not that God is in heaven, but that Jacob's God was *right there*—that was His house.

Bethel became a shrine in later years, because of that and because of what happened to Jacob there. It was not that Jacob merely had an encounter with Him, but something happened to Jacob.

What happened to Jacob is that he arrived there a man with a price on his head and with a past, a man who was guilty of all kinds of deceitful tricks. He was guilty of stealing. And in one sense of the word, he was indeed guilty of a sin or a crime that was worthy of death. God in no way condoned that. God, though, had chosen Jacob even before—while both of them were still in the womb.

What happened here is that God confirmed that He had chosen Jacob and that He was going to follow through with Jacob nonetheless. Jacob arrived a man with a price on his head, with no future. He was transformed in a way so that he now had a future and he had a hope that he could live with. He was so encouraged by it that he promised then that he would tithe to him all of his days.

That is not the only thing that happened there. Several chapters later, we won't turn to it, but in chapter 35, Jacob was now on his way back to his homeland, to his family area. He was just about ready to meet Esau and he passed through Bethel once again.

What happened the second time was even more significant in regard to transformation than what happened the first time. Because the second time through, Jacob wrestled with Christ. They wrestled all night. In the morning Jacob was hanging onto Christ tenaciously even though his hip had been put out of joint. He was undoubtedly in a great deal of pain. He was showing Christ that he was a man that was going to persistently hang on and seek a blessing from Him even if he had to go through a great deal of pain. He was going to diligently seek God in hanging on for dear life.

So Christ gave him a blessing. He changed his name from Jacob to Israel. Biblically what this seems to indicate is that Jacob arrived there an unconverted man. He left converted. His life was transformed in an encounter with God.

Now hundreds of years have gone by, upwards of a thousand years have gone by. The people of Israel remember this, what has occurred to one of the fathers of their nation. In the mean time, Bethel has become a religious shrine. People go there to keep the Feast, to keep their holy days. And they go there with the understanding that the story goes with the place. They go there with the idea of transformation.

What Amos is doing here, as we go back to the book of Amos once again in chapter 5, is that he is making a comparison. He is making a comparison and giving advice at the same time.

These people were making the pilgrimage to Bethel but they were not being transformed by it. They were seeking Bethel by actually travelling there, but no change, no transformation was taking place in their lives.

He illustrates this by giving evidence that he sees on the streets, that he sees in business, that he sees in the courts of *in*-justice. Those things are given between verses 7 and 13. His advise then is that they should seek God and not Bethel.

I want you to notice something very interesting about the Bible's use of the word "seek." The people were seeking Bethel, weren't they. Now, quick, what does the word "seek" mean to you? Doesn't it mean that you are searching in hopes of finding something?

Wait a minute! Were these people trying to find Bethel? Amos said they were seeking Bethel. They knew where Bethel was! If they did not know where it was, they never would have known where to go. They knew where Bethel was.

Seeking in the Bible means something altogether different from trying to find something. You need to think about this in relation to God—because with you and me God has done the same thing that He did to Jacob. He came down the ladder and He revealed Himself to us. We did not find Him. We would not even know what to look for in the God of the Bible.

He came down the ladder and He stood beside us and He revealed Himself to us. We do not have to find Him anymore. Seeking God means something altogether different from searching for the purpose of finding Him.

What is it that they were supposed to be seeking at Bethel? Transformation. Change. But the fact is that they went and returned home unchanged, un-transformed. There was nothing wrong with Bethel at all, it was just a place, that is all. Just like San Antonio is a place where we keep the Feast of Tabernacles. It is just a place.

There was nothing at all wrong with Bethel. There was nothing at all wrong with the God of Bethel. The God of Bethel is the same God that we are worshiping. And He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is everywhere all at once. But there was something wrong with the people, something that was willfully hard-hearted about them.

Do you know what they did? They went there to Bethel and they participated in the services. They sang the songs. They fellowshiped while they were there. They ate meals together. But they did not come changed. They were not there seeking God with all of their hearts; they were there performing religious duty. Their pilgrimage to Bethel was nothing more than a vacation.

What is the evidence that a person has really had God revealed to him, has had an encounter, we might call it, with the transforming God? Because that is what happened to Jacob. When he met God, he began to be transformed.

First his mind was changed from one of fear to one of hope. He was transformed from a man fleeing for his life to a man who was looking forward to the future. The second time his heart underwent a transformation and he became converted. This time he was so close to God he was wrestling with Him.

That ought to teach you something about the kind of people who impress God—they wrestle

with Him. There is heat in wrestling. All of these pictures are all through the Bible of the kind of relationship that God wants to have with His people. They have to be willing to wrestle with Him, all night long if need be, in order to get that blessing, to be persistent and not give up.

If we come in contact with God, something is going to happen. That is, if we really do and we really are seeking Him. What Amos is saying is this. That because of these things he saw out on the street, because of these things he saw in business, because of these things he saw in the courts of injustice, he had to conclude that the people were seeking Bethel, but they were not seeking the God of Bethel.

If they were, and they were doing it with all their heart, they would have found that God and their lives would have changed. There would have been changes on the street. There would have been changes in the family. There would have been changes in business. There would have been changes in their lives all over the place.

You know that God is like this because II Corinthians 3:18 tells us that eventually we are going to be transformed into what He is. That is the end of the process of transformation.

Now get this: Seeking God in the Biblical sense means—Seek My way of life. Seek transformation. Seek, in the Biblical sense, means turn to Me, repent—not "search out." By the time a person really begins to seek the true God, he already knows who He is and where to go because God has revealed Himself to them.

We are going to look at some of these evidences of transformation that occur because a person really has sought God with all of his heart. What I am going to give here in no way exhausts the changes that may occur—the changes that are given right in this one little chapter. So we ought to be able to see that if we are seeking God, transformations are going to occur.

The way Amos does this is by showing what they were still doing after returning from Bethel. Let's look first at verse 10. Remember these are the people returning from Bethel. These are the evidences he is seeing in their lives.

Amos 5:10 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate [Remember David, in Psalm 69? What happened to him because he was zealous for God?], and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.

You do right, and people will begin to persecute you. As I indicated it may, very sadly, even happen right inside the church.

Amos is saying that the first thing that occurs if we really have a transformation, an encounter with God, is that the evidence will be that the person will turn to God's truth. His attitude will change toward God's truth.

Do you remember what the author said in Psalm 119:97? "O, how I love Your law!" He was in love with it. It was so good to him to be able to look into God's word. And if a person is in love with something, what does he want to do with it? Talk about it! Share it with other people.

Isn't that what happens? Sure it is. You can almost gage a person's conversion by how he loves the word of God. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." These things are so

succinctly stated by Amos. All you have to do is turn around backwards the thing that he says.

If we really do seek God, we are going to love His word. We are going to hang on everything that comes out of His mouth—because we are going to see it for what it is. The most valuable thing a person can possess is the word of God.

These people showed every evidence in their life of a refusal to be governed by truth.

The second area is in verse 11.

Amos 5:11 Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them.

Mostly I am concerned here about the first half of that verse because Amos says that the next change will be in the area of relationships with people. In the church, we call this fellowship. Basically, Amos says that the untransformed attitude toward people is that people are to be used to promote one's own interests. People are objects to be used by the unconverted.

Hold your finger there in the book of Amos. Let's go back to the book of Luke, in Luke 22 verses 24-27. You are very familiar with this.

Luke 22:24-27 But there was also a rivalry (Here we have heat, feeling.), as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you (Here comes the example. Here comes the pattern.) as the One who serves.

There is a strong tendency in us to apply these verses to those in authority. But it applies to everybody regardless of status. The carnal-minded take advantage of every opportunity to promote themselves and their interest. The carnal will lie, scheme, steal, twist the truth, deceive, slander people, dishonor their parents and even murder to get their own way, to come out on top, to win, to look good, to get acclaim, or to get rich.

We have clichés like: "Winning is the only thing." "If you've got it, flaunt it." Those are extremes, but that is the direction and attitude of the carnal mind. The unconverted use people and situations for one's own advantage.

A converted person, one who has been transformed by God, will not do that. He will put himself, humbly and willingly as Christ did, in the position of the servant. He will not use others. He will allow himself to be used, an evidence, you see, of transformation.

This attitude, again, that is out in the world, is especially important to those of us reared under the pervasive influence of American capitalism. This attitude of intense competition is the driver, the motivation, behind almost everything going on in this country. So what we witness then, generally, out in the public is an excess of virtually everything except of true love.

It is a major reason why divorce is so prevalent today. Vanity and pride are driving husband and wife to compete rather than cooperate. Truly coming into contact with God is a humbling experience. Because now we can see ourselves as we should see ourselves. And what happens is transformation and true fellowship begins when we seek Him.

Jesus brought this up for at least three reasons. One is to show what God is like in His attitude toward His creation. Two, to show us what we should try to emulate. Three, to help us see evidence in ourselves of conversion.

Back in Amos 5 again, the third evidence that Amos offers that a person is really seeking God, is a change of attitude toward law. It comes in verse 12.

Amos 5:12 For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins. You afflict the just and take bribes; You divert the poor from justice at the gate.

Amos is saying that these people went to Bethel bearing abundant rebellions on their consciences but they returned with them still there. Outwardly they sinned because there was a heart of rebellion. There was not any real concern about the rebellion in them.

If they had really sought God, they would begin to do something about these sins, about the rebellion. A person who is really seeking God is so concerned about having God's approval that they will pay any price, make any sacrifice necessary to stop sinning, and thus have His approval. These people did not care. They went right on sinning.

He shows these people returning from Bethel, not concerned with what people were (whether they were just or whatever), but they were concerned about what these people had got and what they were prepared to pay as a bribe. That is what it means when it says, "You afflict the just and you take bribes." The poor person who was telling the truth had no chance in court unless he was also willing to pay a bribe to those who were judging him.

It is just a way of showing that these people were not concerned with morals, with ethics, but how much money, influence, and status they and others had so that they could use one another to get ahead. This feeds right into the fourth one here, and that is in verse 13.

Amos 5:13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time.

The evidence that Amos gives in verse 13 is that these people feared to openly protest the injustices in their society. Why? Why would people be afraid of pointing the finger at somebody who is doing wrong? Because they knew that if they did point the finger that would be the end of their advancement in society and at work. So they did not want to pull the rug out from

under anybody else because they would get the reputation of being a troublemaker...and there went their future.

The word prudent here indicates anyone who wants to get on. Ever heard of getting on? Sure you have—anyone who wants to succeed. "You would not want to spoil your prospects with this company would you?" "Just look the other way. Keep your eyes shut. Sure, we are stealing a little bit. Sure, this isn't quite legal. Sure, the government does not know about this shipment or that shipment. Sure, we are getting these things into the country illegally. But what difference does it make? If you just keep your eyes shut, the company will pay you and you will get ahead." And so those who wanted to succeed just kept their mouths shut. The evil went on.

What this means is the person who has really come in contact with God is so concerned about righteousness that he is going to do everything in his power to create a righteous community. Whether that righteous community is his family, or the community in which he lives, or the church that he is a part of.

In verse 14, Amos says, "Seek good." It does not mean merely to look for good, in hopes of finding it. It means *do good*. Just like seek the Lord, Seek God with all of our heart. It does not mean that we have to find Him. He is already revealed. He means *be like Him*. It means do good. But these people were doing evil. But if we truly seek God, that is do as God does, we have the promise that God will be with us.

What, in an overall sense, is Amos telling us here? It is seeking the true God, brethren, that generates a zeal for Him and His way. Let's go back to verse 4 where it says,

Amos 5:4 Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, "Seek Me and live;"

With that thought in mind, "Seek Me and live," I want you to turn to Ezekiel the 33<sup>rd</sup> chapter and verse 10 and 11.

Ezekiel 33:10-11 "Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say, "If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?"'

That is the question.

"Seek Me and live." Let's put the two of these together. "How can we live?" Ezekiel says. God gives an answer!

Ezekiel 33:11 "Say to them: '*As I live*,' says the Lord GOD

That is the way that sentence needs to be punctuated. ("*As I live!*")

He then goes on to say,

Ezekiel 33:11 ...'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,

"Seek Me and live!" He says.

Ezekiel 33:11 ...I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

Doesn't that make Amos 5: 4 clear? "Seek Me" means repent! ... and live like I do. It does not mean "find Me" but "live as I live."

Let's apply this to this subject of prayer that we are talking about. Going all the way back to the book of James, remembering that seeking the true God is what generates a zeal for Him and His way. Here in the book of James in chapter 5 and verses 16 and 17, it says,

James 5:16-18 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, [The implication is just as earnestly.] and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

I am not talking here about nervous excitability or maudlin sentimentality that we are so familiar with from this world's Christianity; And I am not talking about a practiced performance by an actor, not the whooping and hollering of a Pentecostal. I am talking about honest ardor that arises because of fellowship, but a relationship that has produced an intimate feeling of heart-love to the one being prayed for. God loves that. He responds by giving us our desires.

To seek God does not mean to look for Him but to diligently, earnestly and sincerely strive to live like Him. This brings us to where we really know Him. Jesus said to know Him is to have eternal life. This creates a fervency that motivates God to respond in answer to our prayers.