

Where Are The Men Who Know God

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon by Fred Tomlinson emphasizes the importance of truly knowing God on a personal and intimate level, beyond just having knowledge about Him. Using the example of Moses, the speaker highlights the need for preparation, separation, and presentation of oneself before God as essential steps in deepening one's relationship with Him. The sermon challenges listeners to consider the cost of truly knowing God and encourages them to surrender every aspect of their being to Him for spiritual worship.

Scripture: Exodus 3:1, Philippians 3:8, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 4:10, Galatians 2:20, Psalm 139:23, Joshua 3:5, 1 Corinthians 7:1, Exodus 34:1

Topics: "Intimacy with God", "Surrendering to God"

Description

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Transcript

Well, hello, my name is Fred Tomlinson, and I am based here in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. And this is a pleasure to have this opportunity to talk to you in this way, but I have to confess at the same time that a pleasure on one hand, but an incredibly difficult challenge on the other hand. There will be many men who will be able to do this very naturally and very easily.

But for me, without a congregation around me, and to be sitting in my study here looking at a camera and talking to people I will probably never meet, although it would be very interesting if I could meet you all. But having said all of that, I thank God for this opportunity, and I pray that in spite of the challenge it is to me, that God will be able to somehow minister through me something of his word and his heart to you as you listen. I'd like to say something first of all about my own background.

I was raised in a Plymouth Brethren background. Some of you listening will not have a clue what I'm talking about, that doesn't matter. Others will recognize that particular church grouping.

But I thank God for it. I keep saying it's a wonderful background to come from. God used it greatly in my own life.

During those years I attended what must have been thousands of meetings. It was just what we did. And I listened to many men praying in those meetings, men that I knew, elders that were good men and good friends to us as young people.

But you know, when I reached age 25, I was in a room. There was a particular setting. My mother had been recently widowed and I was married, and we wanted to go on a holiday.

But before we went away, we decided that my wife and I would just stop over at my mother's house and check on her, make sure she was okay. When we got there, there was a man there. I had met him once before, briefly.

On this occasion, he was actually a carpenter. He was repairing the floor in my mother's house where she had something going on in the corner, some rot I think. He was there.

And so we chatted just for a few minutes and my mother seemed fine. So we decided it was time for us to go. But before we left, this man said, Fred, let's just pray before you leave.

And that's fine. But when that man opened his mouth and opened his heart up to God, it was an amazing experience. He prayed in a manner that I had never heard anyone pray before.

It wasn't just his style or some particular words or cliches or phrases. It was none of those things. As I listened to him and glanced at him during that time he prayed, I knew with certainty that I was in the presence of a man who knew his God.

And the impression that he made upon me and indeed upon my wife was so great that it triggered off a whole series of events which resulted in God finding an opportunity to radically alter and transform my life and that of my wife also. And it was as though we just pivoted off in a completely different direction and we praised God for that. It was a very significant moment in our lives.

But the particular point that I want to make, having told you that little story, is that you know, knowing about something or knowing about something concerning someone it could be, for example, and actually knowing the person directly and having knowledge of that person, there's just a world of difference. And you know, in this western side of the world there's a lot of information out there in spite of the fact that there's a real turning away from the things of God that we're witnessing. And God is being rejected on multiple levels, I could probably say every level of our culture.

But in spite of that there's a great deal of knowledge out there about God and certainly within the churches there's a lot of knowledge about God. And yet in spite of that I dare to say that men of the ilk that I have just described in that man in my mother's home are very, very rare and in very, very short supply. Men and women who truly know their God are not common.

You know, in spite of the knowledge about, the information about, they don't have that personal direct engagement with the living God that is growing and developing continually. And that, I will say at the outset, that is the normal Christian experience. It may not be, and is not, I'm sure average, but it is most certainly the normal Christian life that God intends for his people.

So biblical information is crucial, of course it is, and I'm thanking God for the background I had where there was such an emphasis placed upon the need to read and study and indeed memorize the words of scripture. But that information is useless to me unless it leads me to an actual knowledge of God himself.

And if it fails to do that, or insofar as it's failed to do that in my life or in your life, then scripture has actually not yet fulfilled its purpose.

It was Jesus who once said in John chapter 6, he said, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but these are they that testify about me. And he went on to say, and you are not willing to come to me that you might have life. The scriptures have value insofar as they are able to direct men and women to the God of scripture in a very personal and very real manner.

Another godly man I knew many years ago once said this, many learn the words, but few learn the song. And there's a huge difference between knowing about and having firsthand and intimate knowledge. You know, before proceeding any further with what I want to share, let me be very clear.

In speaking about the knowledge of God, I'm not speaking about knowing as a person may know other family members or know their neighbors or know someone at work. The knowledge of God is such that we can only know God insofar as he chooses to reveal himself. God, the God of scripture is indeed a self-revealing God.

Had he not chosen to reveal himself at all, we would have zero knowledge of him. And so we're completely dependent on him revealing himself. And he reveals himself through the words of scripture.

And that is baseline for us, absolutely. But those scriptures that we have, the written word must be handled by the spirit of God and quickened by the spirit of truth and applied to each open and receptive heart. And as we then turn into scripture, we are very clear about the fact that the scriptures are well provided with examples of men and women who fit into this category that I'm emphasizing.

They truly knew their God. Amen. In this session, what I want to do is spotlight one man.

I want to spotlight Moses. We could choose so many other people. I'm choosing Moses because the Lord has laid this on my heart to share with you.

And I want to then, with Moses, just simply zero in in this brief time I have on two particular events in his life. And I believe that both of these events may have an application in the principles that are involved, an application to all men and women everywhere who crave for a true and intimate and ever deepening knowledge of the Holy God. Amen.

So the first little segment, the first event that I'm zeroing in on, that took place during the night in the desert. And many of you listening to me will immediately know which section of scripture I'm turning to. But you know, on that occasion, Moses, he was 80 years of age and 40 years earlier, he had engaged in what may very well be described as a reckless act in Egypt.

And as a result of that act, his life pivoted. And as a result of that, the outworking of that, he fled from Egypt. And his life was, would be changed forever.

He landed in another area altogether. And he married and he had family, he was busy. His main work at the time that we're looking at that we're aware of was looking after his father-in-law's sheep.

And during those years, the 40 years that he spent away from Egypt following that act, he must have had so much to think about. And sometimes, you know, when moments like these, when we're looking at persons in the scripture and the events and circumstances of their lives, we can't help but allow our own

imagination to kick in. And, you know, my imagination kicks in here.

I can't help but believe as he compares the first 40 years of his life, being tutored very lightly for a future leadership role in Egypt. Through adoption, he was the grandson of the pharaoh. And you know that story.

But as a result of that act he engaged in, his life now was a life which must have appeared to him as being a life of waste, a life of failure. There would be happy times, there would be great times, but no doubt as he compared the first 40 years with the second 40-year period, well, there was no comparison. And I think he very lightly felt that all hope of any meaningful purpose for his life, such as he may have hoped to have had all those earlier years ago, were gone.

And it may be, I don't know, but it may be that during those nights, the dark nights, and yet with floodlit by the starry sky, maybe he prayed. I don't know what his relationship was with the Lord. There's no record given to us about that earlier time.

But he knew who his mother had been and what she had taught him and how God had chosen those people that he was a part of and now how they were being treated in Egypt by Pharaoh and Pharaoh's army. And as a result, he engaged himself as we know very well. But there must have been times when he would turn his attention to the Lord and say something like this, Lord, look at me.

I represent such waste. And in some ways that would have been true. But you know, here's a fact.

During all of those years, through the entire 80 years of his life, God had not once taken his eye from him. God knew who he was. God knew exactly what he had him lined up for and what his role would be in the fullness of time.

And while he might have been thinking those thoughts of thoughts about himself, suddenly something happened that was very strange. And that was that a bush somewhere close to him suddenly caught fire. Suddenly it was ablaze and lit up.

And we're told, I have no personal experience of this, that the result of the temperature and the dryness and one thing or another, that wasn't a particularly unusual thing. I don't know if that's true or not. But I do know this, that there was something strange about what was happening this time.

Let me read to you some verses from Exodus chapter 3. Now Moses was pastoring the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness. And he came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush. As he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire. Yet the bush was not consumed.

So Moses said, I must turn aside and see this marvellous sight, why the bush is not burned up. When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here I am.

Then he, that is God, said, Do not come near here. Remove your sandals from your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. Amen.

He wanted to understand the strangeness of this bush that was burning and yet it was not being consumed. Of course, he was made to realise very quickly that this was a visitation from God himself.

Amen.

It took 80 years for Moses to be brought to this position and this time in his life and in his heart where he was ready for God to use him. I wonder, after the event was over, God had spoken to him the things that he would go on to say to him, which were amazing and must have been staggering to him. But I can't help but wonder again what thoughts were going through his mind as he reflected on this incredible and very strange event that had taken place.

I wonder, I wonder if he sensed that the Lord was also saying something to him, not with words specifically because those words are recorded here in the text. But I wonder if he wouldn't have sensed through the way all this had come to pass that perhaps God was saying something else to him deep in his heart. Was the Lord saying to him, Moses, you were so anxious to make things happen but I want you to learn from the bush here.

You know this dry, dark, twisted bush of thorns and sticks which is utterly fruitless. Moses, all your efforts have been like that. All your efforts have produced just about the same thing.

But see that bush tonight, you saw it. It was ablaze with a living flame. That's the difference that my presence and my engagement makes.

And from now on I want you to allow me to work through you. And that was the challenge for him. Of course, as we are able to read this passage in the light of the New Testament and we understand that God introduced a new covenant, that is what we find in the New Testament, which is really what the word New Testament means.

But we know that the New Testament brings whatever things we're finding here to a whole new level, to a far higher level. And so as we think about the way the Spirit of God works in the lives of believers, he works in each and every one of us to impact all that is natural about our lives with the power, the slaying power of his cross. And you know that's exactly what Paul was talking about when he wrote these words in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20.

He said, Paul said, I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I. He said, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. This is what God is seeking to work into our lives. That everything that is merely natural and of our first birth is slain by the power of the cross, ministered to us by the Holy Spirit, with the view that he will then be able to accomplish something in our lives that's very, very wonderful.

I'm turning my pages over to 2 Corinthians and to chapter 4 and verse 10 where I read Paul saying, I always am bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus in order that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in my body. What a tremendous concept. This is the New Testament truth.

This is what God is seeking to accomplish in each one of our lives where he brings to an end the reign of sin and death in our lives and establishes his own holy, pure life within us and causes that life to flourish within us by his Holy Spirit. He sanctifies us increasingly and brings us into an ever deeper knowledge of God by and through his Holy Spirit, resident within us and manifesting the life of Christ through us. What a wonderful thing.

And thinking back to Moses for the parallel, you will have noted that it was entirely God who took the initiative. It wasn't Moses' idea. He didn't dream this up in some way as he sat there during these nights in

the backside of the desert.

But this was God taking the initiative to make himself known to Moses. And that's exactly what took place. And here's the great truth.

When God did that, although it was dramatic in many ways and life transforming in many ways, many, many ways for Moses, what he would never and never have known was that experience of that visitation of God to him that night. It was like the foothills to a much greater experience yet which we could describe as a Mount Everest experience which awaited him in the days ahead. Amen.

Following that event, all kinds of things happened. You'll remember the story. We can't turn through them all, of course, but he was able under God to bring about that great deliverance for the children of Israel and they would find themselves free from their slavery in Egypt.

Then there was that miraculous transit through the Red Sea and seeing the next morning all Pharaoh's armies all dead on the seashore and so on. And then on into the wilderness and the remarkable and sovereign ways in which God protected and provided for his people through that time. And then God spoke again to Moses.

And there's just one phrase that catches my attention I want to just mention in particular. God spoke to him and he said, Moses, and it was as though God was speaking from the top of the mountain, and he said, Moses, come up unto me and be there. What wonderful words.

What an amazing concept. This is the almighty creator God calling Moses and saying, Moses, I want you to come up to me and I want you just to be there. Hallelujah.

You know, I want to tell you, I believe that's exactly what God is wanting to say to you tonight. He wants you to come up to him in a new and fresh way, to a higher level, into a more wonderful, more intimate knowledge of him, to know him there and to be there, to be in communion with him. I have no doubt about that at all.

Now, so far as the second event that I've referred to that I want to spotlight, I'm finding that further on in the book of Exodus and in the 33rd chapter, and I want to just read a verse here or two. I'm reading from verse 12 of chapter 33. Then Moses said to the Lord, see, you say to me, bring up this people, but you yourself have not let me know whom you will send with me.

Moreover, you have said, I have known you by name and you have also found favor in my sight. Now, therefore, I pray you, said Moses, if I have found favor in your sight, let me know your ways that I may know you so that I may find favor in your sight and consider too that this nation is your people. Wonderful.

You know, through all the changes of events in Moses' life, and particularly, I'm thinking of those as the result of, from that moment in the wilderness that night with the bush blazing, Moses would never have forgotten that was God speaking to him. There'd been all these various evidences of God being with him and using him that have led up to this moment. But you know, it's my opinion that all of these interactions that took place, which were all remarkable, each and every one of them, must have quickened in Moses' heart just an intrigue with this God.

Who is he? Who is he? I think that intrigue grew apace within him as time went on. And that brings me to this little section of scripture I've read to you. And in particular, the words that catch my attention is where

he says that I may know you.

Isn't that precisely what the Apostle Paul said? Do you remember him saying that in Philippians chapter 3? Let me just read a few verses here. Paul says, But what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I might win Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I might know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death.

And this wonderful text keeps on and on here, but I must break away from it just now. Moses said, I want to really know you Lord. Someone might say, Moses, of all people, you know him.

He's been dealing with you and speaking to you and directing you and empowering you in so many ways. What do you mean that you may know him? He said, no, all that you've said is true, but I just want to know him more and more intimately. And that's exactly what Paul is saying, because we could say the same thing to Paul.

We could say, Paul, what are you talking about? Look at what happened on the Damascus road and how Jesus himself intercepted you there and spoke with you and chose you for this remarkable ministry and the way he's led and prospered you in your own life and in your ministry. What do you mean that you may know him? He would have said the very same thing. Perhaps he'd say it in different ways, but he would say, you know, perhaps like Charles Wesley, he said on one occasion in one of his hymns, I have, but still I ask for more.

That's what these men were doing. They had, they had been blessed greatly, but it hadn't fully satisfied their longing hearts. They longed to know God ever more deeply in their own hearts.

Amen. Amen. But you know, there's a cost to knowing God.

I was thinking just a little earlier before I engaged in this talk with you, I anticipated someone saying, well, why do you think there's such a lack of men and women who truly know God in this way? And I was thinking this through myself and I thought, well, I think it boils down to two things in particular. We could make a longer list, but in particular, I'm thinking there's such an absence of godly examples. I know the impact that godly men and their lives have had upon me and how important they were in many ways.

They inspired me in many ways. I'm standing on their shoulders. I'm the product of the lives that they lived by the Holy Spirit, using their example in the way that Paul encouraged others to follow him, not making idols out of people, but benefiting from the example of holy lives that are in contact with the Holy God.

That's tremendously inspiring. Not everyone has the privilege of that. And this is miles away from just listening to someone who's a great preacher and a great, you know, expository message or preaching session.

This is something that's on a different level. It's in the Spirit. It's real.

And, you know, in so many ways, it's very tangible and recognizable. And I think that's one reason why many others don't follow, because they've not had and do not have the benefits of that kind of godly example. And the other reason is a reason that's very personal to people.

It's complacency. Complacency. They don't want their lives to be interrupted in any way.

They're happy to add God to what they've got and what they're doing, maybe anyway. But they're not prepared to embrace the challenge of the message that God is bringing. And I think that's the case here.

There's a cost. There's a cost to following God. You know, we're in the Old Testament, of course, looking at Moses here.

And so the principles that we're finding, in a sense, they're tied in with literal situations in the Old Testament. And we're trusting that God, by his Spirit, can quicken them and apply them to our own lives at this point in time. I'd like to look at the cost.

Perhaps I'm going to emphasize three particular areas very briefly in this session. And I'll use just one word headings for each of them, and so on. You see, when I started, the title I'd given to this message was, where are the men who truly know God? But now, as I finish, I want to present another question to you, and it's this.

Are you up to the challenge and the cost to really knowing God truly and authentically? That's the question. So we're looking here. And note carefully, as I mentioned these three points that we'll find here, that were God's word to Moses, that these must not be seen or viewed as events that we experience once in a moment of time.

Each of them, all three of them, must be applied in an unceasing manner for the whole duration of our lives in this world. And so I'm asking you, if you're following me in your Bible, to turn to Exodus chapter 34. And let me just read from verse one.

Now the Lord said to Moses, cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words which were on the former tablets which you shattered. So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain.

Even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of the mountain. So my first category, my first word is preparation. There's a preparation, and I see that here in verse two, when God says, be ready.

Be ready, Moses, be ready in the morning. That reminds me of a word that God brought to Joshua, and that he shared with the people, when he said, sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow I will do wonders among you. There's this preparation.

I read in Psalm 24 that it's those with clean hands and pure hearts that are able to come into that place of fellowship with God. Blameless conduct and right motives are so important to be added into the very fabric of our lives as preparation. Or I could be reading Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians in chapter seven, two Corinthians, chapter one, having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and let us perfect holiness in the fear of God.

I think Paul is talking here about, for the want of a better way of putting it, just a heroic act of abandon to God, a heroic act in which I reject and renounce everything that is the alternative of everything that would enslave me or deter me from knowing God and being told that I'm to put it off and reject it and cleanse my heart of this debris that would so desire to spoil and ruin my life and pollute my heart. Amen. So there's this preparation.

The next word I found is in verse three, where the Lord says, present thyself there in the top of the mount. No man is to come up with you. No one, no other man there.

You've got to come on your own, Moses. You've got to come on your own, Fred. We benefit from the people I've been talking about.

And we thank God for those that he's brought us into fellowship with. We thank God perhaps for our spouses and our children. But, you know, in the final analysis, it's for every man and every woman to go through with God alone.

You know, there's another occasion I could have read about and talked about. As the result of the sin in the camp, Moses took the little tent. It wasn't the big tabernacle.

That wasn't constructed yet. But it was a tent called the tent of meeting. And the text says, if anyone wanted to meet with God, they would go to that tent.

But Moses, on the basis of sin coming into the camp, he knew intuitively, I think, that the presence of God would move out. And he moved the tent outside of the camp. And then the text goes on to say that everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting.

The fascinating thing is you'd think that everyone would want to go out there to that tent, but that didn't happen. In fact, we read that the only two people to go there was Moses and Joshua. And the text is so telling when it says that as Moses walked out, the picture it paints is this, Moses walking down the little tent street, if you will, out exiting the camp to go to that tent.

It said every man stood at his own tent door. In other words, there was a crowd of people who were content to just stand in their own quarters, in their own lives, in their own safe place, and watch another man go through with God. But they weren't prepared to go themselves.

So Moses was familiar with walking alone and going through with God alone. And that was necessary here. But the fact is so little has changed.

As we think about our own day, how few there are that are prepared to separate themselves unto God and go through with God alone. Amen. That's a great challenge, you know, it's as though, you know, we have an expression, play the man, you know, well, this is a word for the woman folk too.

It's really recognizing that there's only one way to go through with God and that's to go through with God alone. We thank God for fellowship and the prayers of those around us and all that we share together with them. But in the final analysis, I must go through with God on my own.

And so must you, my dear friend, whoever you are. Amen. One last category here that I want to note, we've looked at preparation, the preparation of my heart before God, separation, when I go through with God on my own.

And the other is again in verse two, which says, and present yourself there to me, present yourself to me. Amen. That immediately takes my mind to Romans chapter 12 and verse one and two, where Paul is saying, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Amen. When he says your body, and we read the word body, remember our body a little earlier in 2 Corinthians chapter four, when he was talking about the life of Jesus being manifest in our mortal body. Here in Romans 12, he's talking about our bodies.

I think here, he didn't say just in this area, in your spirit or just in your soul. When he says your body, the way I'm interpreting that, he's talking about the sum of everything that I am, body, soul, spirit, hopes, dreams, disappointments, every single part of my personality and my life. Paul says, I plead with you, I beseech you, that you present your bodies like a living sacrifice that's living.

It's you, while you're living, you sacrifice, you give, you surrender your entire being, every fiber of your being to God, which is your reasonable service in the light of the mercies of God, says Paul in that text. Amen. Another rendering of the phrase, which is your reasonable service is taken by one of the other translations, which says, which is your spiritual worship, true worship, true spiritual worship is the surrender of every fiber of your being, every department and area of your body and life to God.

Amen. Amen. Hallelujah.

You know, I wonder, as you listen to me talking here on this occasion, whether there's something of what I'm sharing with you that's resonating in your own heart, I'd like to tell you that if it is, if there is something resonating within your breast, you can take it from me, please do. Be assured that this is the result of God himself by his spirit making himself known to you. He's seeking to quicken you to awake your heart to the fact that God is for you.

And he's not forgotten you through all of the events that have led up until this moment. And they've all been very, very important in bringing you to this moment, where you're listening to the word of God and the spirit of God speaking to your heart. And if God is speaking to you, and you can rest assured that he is intent upon accomplishing in you that which he is quickening within you.

What a wonderful thing that is. You're not on your own. You're not left to try and make yourself a more holy man or try to imagine that you're gaining knowledge of God just because you're getting a lot more information into your notebook from the scriptures.

No, the scriptures are serving us only insofar as they open the heart of God to me. And I am able then to make my response. I encourage you, you know, get alone with God.

Soon, don't put it off. Don't postpone. Don't be a procrastinator.

Do this quickly. Get alone with God. Surrender your whole being to him.

Lay your life before him. Everything that you are. Everything that you hope to be.

All your failures as well. Everything that you are there. And I believe that the Holy Spirit will visit you and accomplish something in your heart that reveals God to you.

In the way that God revealed himself to me when I just listened to someone else praying, God was speaking in my heart. He was awakening me. He stirred up a desire.

He stirred up a thirst and a longing to know God for myself. I trust with all my heart I am able to do that for you right now as you're listening to me. May God bless you.

Amen.

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