

(Radical Jesus) 37 Radical Pursuit

by Glenn Meldrum

To pursue God, we must humble ourselves, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways, and this requires a deep consciousness of our neediness and dependence on Him.

Duration: 28:18

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 6:33, Romans 2:4, James 4:8, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Radical"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of pursuing a deep and intimate relationship with God. He uses the verse 2 Chronicles 7:14 as a summary of how God's people should seek Him. The verse outlines seven actions, four of which are responsibilities of God's people and three are God's response to them. The speaker highlights the significance of face-to-face fellowship, emphasizing that it cannot be replaced by shallow communication methods like social media. He also clarifies that the pursuit of God is not about salvation by works, but rather about understanding the true nature of God and seeking Him wholeheartedly.

Transcript

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For the last two podcasts, we have been studying the subject of radical pursuit, which is an examination into God's pursuit of man and our pursuit of God. So far, our lesson has covered God's radical pursuit of mankind and man's response to his pursuit. In today's lesson, we will look at man's pursuit of God.

How should man pursue God? What should man's pursuit of God look like in response to his pursuit of us? How we answer that question directly depends upon what we believe about God, Scripture, the general condition of mankind, personal experience, and what we want to do with our lives. The answer to the question on how people should pursue God may offend some people, but there is nothing I can do about that. When the truth speaks, we must give a response to it in one way or another.

Imagine that a single woman is convinced by some friends to go on a blind date. Now, I just want to make a note that I do not advocate such dates, just using it as an example. She is excited to go because she

believes he is a dashing man of 6'6", with the physique of a pro football player in the prime of life that has a Grecian face of a pagan god and is wealthy to boot.

A man walks into the restaurant where the woman is meeting her date and sits down at her table. He is taking the seat that is reserved for the hunk of a man that the woman is expecting, and she is not happy that the stranger is sitting in his place. The man sitting in the chair is 5'5", and is rather rotund, past the prime of life, and from what he is wearing, it is easy to tell that he is not rich and does not even know how to dress well.

The woman is horrified and wants to run out of the restaurant screaming. The problem is not that the man changed, but that the woman had a very wrong view of the man. She actually had a fantasy of a man that did not exist.

So how does this silly little story relate to our subject? Our opinions, emotions, and beliefs about God at times can be nothing more than sheer fantasy. Not just that, our opinions, emotions, and beliefs about God are absolutely irrelevant. What matters here is truth.

If our opinions and beliefs about God are wrong, then we may be in very big trouble because God will not change who He is to suit our fanciful notions. And if our opinions and beliefs about who we are as humans are wrong, then we may find ourselves actually at war with God rather than being His friend. When it comes to serving God, all that matters is what He has to say about it.

Anything else will take us away from Him, not bring us near to Him. For us to understand how we are to pursue God, I think one verse that can do a very good job in summarizing the subject is the covenant promise of revival found in 2 Chronicles 7.14. It reads, Though this verse is directly addressing the subject of revival, I think that the same life that can be a catalyst for revival is the same life that is in hot pursuit of God. There are seven actions that take place in this verse.

These are things that God's people must do, and three have to do with His response to them. The order in each case is very important. We must humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and then turn from our wicked ways.

Then the Lord said that He would hear us, answer our prayers, and heal our land. This covenant promise is conditional, which means that for God to fulfill His part of the covenant, we must first meet the conditions He has established. God will not fulfill His end of the covenant promise until we fulfill ours.

But what will it take for us to fulfill our part of the covenant promise? Either we have to become so sick of our sin that we will do whatever it takes to get free from it, or we must want God enough that we will seek Him no matter the cost. So if we remove this verse from its context, which is all about revival, and just study the conditions and answers, we will get a good idea of what it means to pursue God and how God responds to that kind of pursuit. Only people that are authentic Christians have the potential to fulfill the requirements of this covenant promise and experience God's response.

That is why the verse begins with, IF MY PEOPLE The unsaved have a different starting point because they are not in fellowship with God. Though the saved and unsaved have different starting points, humility is the foundation to them both. Then they both must pray, but one prays as a child of God and the other as a conquered enemy in repentance over his willful anarchy against God.

Where the difference really comes out clearest is when we come to the seeking the face of God. For the lost cannot seek the face of God until they are allowed into His presence, because seeking the face of God is all about intimate fellowship. The lost must first repent before they have the ability to seek God's face.

The saved are called to seek the face of God before they repent. The reason for the difference has to do with the starting point, motive, and ability. The unsaved are outside of the kingdom of God and therefore cannot have fellowship with Him.

They are unholy and selfish and do not have divine grace operating in their lives so that they can be holy or seek the face of God selflessly. When the lost pray, their prayers must begin with repentance, or the Lord will not respond to their prayers because they are not in God's favor. If people are out of favor with God, they cannot enter into His throne room, where He will hear and respond to their petitions.

First they must be allowed to enter His presence, and that only comes about for the unsaved through repentance and the cleansing blood of Christ. The saved are to repent after seeking God because the motive behind their repentance should be out of desire for God, out of wanting to please Him. Now let's take a few minutes and see what it means to humble ourselves before God.

The Hebrew word translated here for humble properly means to bend the knee, which gives the idea of being vanquished or brought down or brought low as in subjection. I think the idea of humility as being conquered by God and so brought low is a very beautiful idea. All sin, no matter what name you give it, are acts of rebellion, defiance, and lawlessness against God.

Humbling ourselves before God has to do with our finally giving up the fight against Him, the yielding or the surrendering of our heart, mind, and will to Him. Humility also has to do with a right understanding of who God is and who we are. At the root of pride is a lie, a really, really big ugly lie.

Pride is the belief in a lie that we are other than what we actually are, that people are other than what they are, and that God is other than who He has really revealed Himself as in Scripture. Pride takes the truth and perverts it, which then turns the whole thing into a lie. And as with all lies, they come about in one way or another from the father of lies, who is the devil.

Though God gave us an authentic free will, we easily believe the lie that we have the right to rule our own lives and live and act as we choose. God did not give us a free will so we could rebel against Him, but so we could freely love and serve Him. We will never have a right understanding of who we are until we have a right understanding of who God is.

Without having a correct understanding of the true nature and person of God, we will not have a correct reference point in which to understand who we are and how we are to live in this present evil world. Remove the Scriptures from our worldview and our worldview will be built upon lies and illusions. When humility breaks into the heart and mind of people, the lies they have been living behind are seen for what they truly are, and they begin to tear down these lies through the truth.

Reject a truth and lies will find a stronghold in the heart and mind that will deceive even the most intelligent of people. Lies are not something that only uneducated or poorly educated people suffer with. Just look at our nation's education system, especially our institutions of higher learning, and you will see they are institutions promoting lies.

Now, I do not say this as one that is against higher learning, for I have a master's degree, but it is the secular higher learning that at times is the most deluded. It is not just that they are deluded, but they can be extremely intolerant of anyone that disagrees with the lies they believe and propagate. One of the reasons why God hates pride is that pride is the product of lies, and God is the author of truth.

When truth collides with lies, lies will lose in the end, but the cost of that loss may be tremendous. Proverbs 8.13 tells us, To fear the Lord is to hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech.

Those that think God does not hate better have another look at the Word of God. Of course His hatred is perfect, holy, and just, which is something we cannot fathom because we are not perfect, holy, and just. Truth and lies cannot coexist with each other because they are at war with each other, and since pride is the byproduct of lies, God is at war with the proud.

Both James and Peter declared God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. The Greek word for opposes here means that God resists or actively fights against the proud. Since the proud defiantly stand against God, God will fight against them, and I guarantee you that God will always win the fight.

Proverbs 16.5 makes the issue with pride very personal. The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this, they will not go unpunished.

Here we find that the Lord not only detests pride, but He detests the proud of heart, in other words, the proud person. The Hebrew word translated in the NIV as detest is a very strong word. It denotes something that is morally disgusting, an abhorrence as in relation to idolatry, and it is an abomination.

It is not just that God hates pride because it is based upon lies, but He hates it because of what it does to us. Pride breeds self-reliance and rebellion, and as a result, it always brings judgment for the unsaved and discipline for the saved. Pride is a wall that keeps God out of a life or out of an area of a person's life.

The Lord stated in Psalms 104, In all his thoughts there is no room for God. I do not think that there is any greater sin than not to seek God, or to refuse to make room for Him in our thoughts and heart. This is the foundation of all sin, the very root from which can be seen the outward expressions of sin.

This verse also gets down to the nitty-gritty of the source and evil of pride. Take a look at who James and Peter were writing this grave warning to, so that we do not miss the point. Were they not writing to the church? The evil of pride is in the church just as well as in the world.

The difference between the pride of the world and that of the church is that the world flaunts its pride as something that is good, and the church cloaks its pride in religion, which makes it all the more dangerous. Roy Hesschen made a disturbing statement, The usual thing with pride is, you are quite unaware of it until the Holy Spirit shows you. Then you see you are full of it.

God is good to show us our pride so that we can humble ourselves before Him and repent. Otherwise we will face His wrath. God will not make us humble.

That is something we can only do. There is an error that comes out in people's prayers and in some worship songs asking God to make us humble. Humility cannot be forced upon people.

It must come out of a free moral choice. The Lord will give us opportunities to humble ourselves, and at times He will even use circumstances to humiliate us. But humility comes only by the choice of the will, whether it is humility that leads us to salvation, or deeper humility that leads us into spiritual maturity.

When you look at the definition of humility, you see that there is something that is deeper, and that deeper is brokenness. Brokenness not only causes us to see the truth of who and what we are, but it brings us to the point that we are broken of those wicked, destructive character traits that cause us so much trouble and keep us from nearness to God. There are things in our characters that cannot be transformed because they must be crucified.

They must be killed. Pride cannot be turned into humility because pride is evil, so it must be crucified. Greed cannot be turned into sacrificial and loving generosity because greed is evil, so it must be crucified.

This is true of all the works of the flesh and every sin that can be named. Sin in all of its various forms are evil, and evil cannot be turned into what is good and righteous. They must be crucified.

One of the most powerful verses on brokenness is Matthew 5, verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. To be poor in spirit is something deeper than humility. It is coming to the place to see our neediness and then growing dependent upon God rather than upon self.

Brokenness is not a negative thing as if it implies we must beat ourselves down, as if self-mutilation or self-abuse was a noble thing. Low self-esteem and high self-esteem are just different sides of the same coin of pride, and neither can meet the true needs of people because they are destitute in nature and can only bring ruin. The Lord does not want our identity to be in self, but to be in Him as the creator and definer of who we are.

So brokenness is founded upon a correct understanding of who we are and of who God is. Brokenness leads us to a deep consciousness of our overwhelming neediness. We do not normally like this emotion of feeling our neediness because it makes us think we are not in control.

Well, guess what? We are not in control no matter what we think. Life can change in a moment whether for good or bad, and at times there is nothing you can do about it. To see our frailty and great need of God puts us in a place where we are not trusting in self but in God.

He knows our tomorrows and is able to make the events of our life turn out for our good if we would but trust Him. Something that is extremely important about this first beatitude is that it is the foundation of all the beatitudes and of the entire Sermon on the Mount. If we do not have brokenness in our lives, then we cannot move on to the next step of mourning, which is deep heartfelt repentance.

Brokenness leads to the fulfilling of all the beatitudes, which then take us into deeper fellowship with God. Smith Wigglesworth made a very brilliant point when he said you must have brokenness to get into the depths of God. Spiritual maturity does not come about because we are proud, but because we are broken of pride and those other character traits that are hostile to God.

The prize of brokenness is fellowship with God, that we can draw near to Him through profound humility coupled with the holy boldness Paul talks about in Hebrews 4. Since pride is hateful to God, it will keep us from the place of nearness to Him where we find the treasure of the Christian life, which is God Himself. Brokenness makes us beautiful to God. Pride makes us very ugly to Him.

It is a simple fact that people begin to pray when they see their neediness, and until they see their neediness, they will not pray, or they will not be much in prayer. This is why 2 Chronicles 7.14 begins with humility, because we will never get to step two until we get a hold of the first step. Prayerless people are people that do not see the depths of their need, because they are not broken.

In their pride, they do not call out to God. They may be suffering all kinds of trials, but when pride is in the heart, there will be no meaningful prayers on their lips. E. M. Bounds correctly stated, little prayer is the characteristic of a backslidden age and of a backslidden church.

When we look at the subject of prayer, we find that there are two expressions of it, prayer for personal needs and intercession. The Lord commanded His people to use both types of prayers. Praying for personal needs is just that, praying for personal needs.

And when it is done correctly, they are prayers that come out of a right understanding of our needs. Greedy, selfish prayers do not come out of a right understanding of our neediness, nor of God's Word. Brokenness brings us to the place where we can pray in accordance with God's will, not in accordance with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life.

If God gave us everything we prayed for, we would probably be rushing to hell, because so many of our prayers can be selfish in nature. So God is good to only answer the prayers that are for our good. He wants us to learn how to pray those kinds of prayers, so that we can see a God of miracles at work in our lives.

The second expression of prayer is intercession, which is all about praying for the needs of others. To be a good intercessor, we must correctly see the needs of others and be willing to spend whatever time is necessary praying for those needs. True intercession is selfless, and when it becomes selfish, it is no longer intercession.

Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers. If we have not learned how to correctly pray for our needs, and to intercede for the needs of others, then we will never be able to move on to the third step in 2 Chronicles 7.14, which is to seek the face of God. People begin to seek the face of God when they want Him.

To seek God's face is the prize of the Christian faith and of human existence. It is what heaven is all about. It is what we were created for.

Face-to-face fellowship is not something we understand today, because we have all kinds of ways of communicating, such as social media, internet, and phones. Most of what we get on social media is extremely shallow. People may find themselves communicating all the time, while never saying anything of substance.

Face-to-face fellowship is all about intimate relationship, where we are real and honest with each other, and that cannot be done to any great extent through social media. It cannot be done well through email and regular mail, because it is not face-to-face, where you can see the emotions as you hear the words. Talking on the phone is close, but you still do not see the facial expressions.

You can only hear the voice expressions, which can tell you a lot, but not everything. Face-to-face fellowship with God is about looking at Him, and letting Him look at us as we communicate with Him. It is letting God get deep into our lives, and it is us striving to get deeper into His life.

Seeking the face of God comes through holy desperation. This is where we want Him enough that we will take much time seeking Him, because we have come to love His presence. We have been given many wonderful promises about this kind of face-to-face fellowship, like James chapter 4, verse 8, The Lord made the way through the work on the cross so that we can draw near to Him.

Now He is waiting for us to want Him enough that we will seek hard after Him. The thought of seeking face-to-face fellowship can be found in many places in the Old Testament, such as Psalms 63, 1 and 2. Here we see the contrast between the barrenness of the world and the fullness that is found in Christ's presence. The psalmist knew the weariness that this world offers, but he also knew the sanctuary, that place of face-to-face fellowship with God, where fullness of joy is found in the divine presence.

I love how A.W. Tozer stated, We have only to prepare Him a habitation in love and faith and humility. We have but to want Him badly enough, and He will come and manifest Himself to us. Do you see the progression thus far? Brokenness leads to prayer that in turn opens the door for face-to-face fellowship with God.

Now we come to the fourth point that we turn from our wicked ways. Repentance always indicates a change in thinking and a new direction in life. What happens when fallen people come face-to-face with a holy God? Since God is holy, and when we have face-to-face fellowship with Him, we will see a holy God, and the light of His presence will shine into the dark areas of our life.

In His presence we will see things deep inside of us that we otherwise would have never seen. But as we taste of the wonder of His presence, we will want greater nearness to Him. So the motive for repentance at this point in a Christian's life is all about wanting God.

The more we taste of His presence, the more we will want to be holy, because we have found this face-to-face fellowship with God the greatest joy of our existence. It is in this place where we even want to get the questionable things out of our lives, because we realize they are not worth any division between us and God. When we have a passion for God, holiness is a joy and not a burden or an act of legalism.

As true believers, we must work to develop the kind of heart that will radically pursue Christ, a heart that loves God more than the world and more than self. To turn from their wicked ways brings us to the second beatitude, blessed are those who mourn. This is where we learn what Paul said in Romans 2, 4, that God's kindness or goodness leads us toward repentance.

It is the love of God that convicts us of sin, because love warns, and it is not love that does not warn. God in His goodness helps us to comprehend the depth of our spiritual poverty so that we can repent and draw near to Him. There may be times we are undone in the holy presence of Jesus, like Isaiah was when he saw the Lord high and exalted, or like Job that was confronted by God after the patriarch claimed he was righteous.

Then he declared, My ears have heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. The best and deepest motive to repent of our sins is a burning desire for intimate fellowship with Jesus.

This is why that the preaching of repentance is the most loving message that could ever be preached. It is what Jesus preached along with John the Baptist, Paul, and the rest of the apostles. Smith Wigglesworth was once preaching in a meeting and declared, Oh, what would happen if everybody in this place would

repent? Talk about the blessings! The glory would fall so that you couldn't get out of this place.

We need to see that God wants us to be blessed, but first He wants us to be ready for the blessing. There is an idea out there that if we are in the river of His presence that we do not need to hear the message of repentance, and that is an outright lie. There will never be a time in this life that a believer will not need repentance.

Jesus taught His disciples an important lesson when He washed their feet. The situation would have been very uncomfortable for those men. You can read the account in John 13.

Jesus comes to Peter and the gruff apostle says, No, you shall never wash my feet. He did not say this out of rebellion, but out of profound respect. The master does not wash the feet of the servant.

It is the servant's job to wash the master's feet. Jesus answered, Unless I wash you, you have no part of me. Peter then replied, Lord, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

Jesus answered, A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet. His whole body is clean. Until we are in heaven, we will get our feet dirty just by walking in this world of sin and rebellion.

As we mature in Christ, we will sin less and less, but we will also become more aware when we do sin, and it will cause us deeper grief. It is the mature follower of Jesus that repents quickly and repents well because they have learned that repentance is a gift of God that leads to face-to-face fellowship. It is the immature and the lost that do not think they need repentance or to hear the message of repentance.

Tied into the idea of repentance is the practice of holiness. If we want face-to-face fellowship with a holy God, then we need to remember what Peter said in 1 Peter 1, verse 15, Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written, Be holy because I am holy. Then we need to remember what Paul said in Hebrews 12, 14, Without holiness no one will see the Lord.

If the pursuit of holiness is legalistic as many claim, then we are in big trouble because holiness is a mandatory prerequisite to getting into heaven. The fact is the more we love Jesus, the more we will love holiness because to love God means we love a holy God, and to love God also means that we will begin to love what He loves and hate what He hates. God's response to humbling ourselves, praying, seeking His face, and turning from our wicked ways is threefold.

He will hear, answer, and heal. Let's look at these in order, beginning with the promise that God will hear. God hears and knows everything because He is omnipresent, which indicates that He is everywhere at once, and He is omniscient, which means He knows everything that there is to know.

The promise to hear does not imply that He was deaf and now can hear, or that He has gone on vacation and has come back. I think we could get a better idea of what is being conveyed here by grabbing hold of the idea that Jesus is the King of kings. For a king to hear the petitions of a person, that person must first be allowed access into the throne room, or he will never be able to make his request known to the king.

For God to hear us means that we are allowed access to Him, and the only way that access is allowed is we must first humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways. Overarching this whole scheme is a desire or desperation to draw near to God. Most Christians are familiar with Jeremiah 29, 13, and 14.

You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all of your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord. The Lord is the greatest of all kings, and He has established a protocol for finding Him, and that is to seek Him with all of our heart.

He is infinitely above all kings, and He deserves the honor, respect, fear, love, and devotion that a king of His infinite worth deserves. Why should He let us into His throne room? Why should He give us the tremendous honor to enter into His presence so that we can make our requests known if we have not first given Him what He demands from us? If we will not do what He demands, then it is arrogant to think that He must give us access to His presence. If we think that He is obligated to do that, then we are greatly deceived, because that's not what the Word of God teaches.

His kingdom is not a democracy. It is not a dictatorship, nor is it a monarchy. It is the only true theocracy that there is.

It is where God rules as absolute sovereign. Jesus made the way that we could have free access to His throne room, but that does not negate or downplay the fact that to enter His throne room, there is a proper protocol that cannot and will not be bypassed. You cannot enter His throne room as you are.

You must be born again, washed in the blood of Christ and sanctified by the Spirit. You must be clothed with proper clothes to enter His throne room, or you cannot meet with Him. So you must be clothed first in righteousness and then wearing the armor of God that He has given you.

You must be a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ, walking in authentic holiness and faithful in your duties to the King, for He will not let traitors or the unfaithful access into His throne room. If you think I am talking about salvation by works, you better think again. Most Americans have such a low view of God that they cannot comprehend the simple ideas I have presented here.

But because people do not comprehend something, does not mean it is not true. Access to the King of kings is always and only by grace. When grace is active in the life, then people will live out these truths.

And if they are not living them out, there is really only one reason for it. Grace is not operating in their lives because they are not in right fellowship with God. So we must return to the conditions that must be met to have the Lord hear us.

They are to humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, then to turn from our wicked ways. The next response the Lord promised if we will fulfill those requirements is that He will answer. Once we have access to the King who sits on the throne, then we can present to Him our petitions.

Before you enter into the throne room of a king, it is very wise to know who the king is, his nature and desires. The King of kings will only answer those petitions that are in keeping with His holy character, divine purpose, and our personal well-being. What a foolish waste of time to enter His throne room with petitions that He will not answer because they are not in keeping with His will.

This is what John was teaching in his first epistle, chapter 5, verse 14. This is the confidence we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. Now we come to the final response that the Lord will give when we fulfill our part of the covenant promise, that He will heal.

The context of 2 Chronicles 7, verse 14 is that He would heal the land, but the Lord is speaking of all that is in the land, which includes people, animals, and crops. Applying this to our present and personal

situation is that God will heal us, body, soul, and spirit, and our relationships if we will do as He has outlined. The Lord wants to heal us and heal our families, but when sin is in the home, He will not bring healing until the family or individual do those things that He requires of them.

The breakdown of marriages is not God's fault. It is the fault of those that will not obey the Lord, so the healing power of God is withheld from that family or individual. The Lord is yearning to bring healing to us, but we must obey what He commands, or it is very foolish to think that God will be our helper when we are in rebellion against Him.

But what wonderful comfort belongs to those that want God enough that they passionately strive through the grace of God to fulfill His just and holy requirements. They can rest assured that they have free access to our Lord's throne so that they can make their petitions known and have confidence that He will answer their petition and send the healing they so desperately need.

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