



After 40 years, do we know God yet? by Joy Dawson

OUR GREATEST NEED IS a far greater revelation of God's character, all the multi-facets of it. To avoid making a study from God's Word on any aspect of God's character will inevitably produce a warped view of Him. If our life's motto is "to know God and to make Him known," the effectiveness of our evangelistic and discipleship efforts will depend upon our knowledge of God's character and ways.

A message on "The Awesome Presence of God" is what God has shown me to study from His Word and bring to you. God's presence is a reflection of His character and ways. Our concept of God's character and ways greatly influences our choices. Our choices are affected by our priorities, and our priorities determine our destinies.

The first thing God shows us about His presence in the Word is that He is omnipresent. He is everywhere. He fills heaven and earth and we cannot escape His presence (Psalm 139:7,8). He is never napping or on vacation.

God Hides Himself

Secondly, God can withdraw from us all sense of His presence because He is hiding Himself from us. Sometimes He does this because of our unrepentant sin (Isaiah 59:2). At other times, it is in order to test us to see whether we are diligent seekers or casual inquirers (Isaiah 8:17). As we repent of our sin and/or persistently seek His face, in time He will restore the sense of His presence to us.

God is Silent

Thirdly, God can show up and we can sense His presence to a degree, but He remains silent. He can test us in this way to see whether we will be impatient or resentful when He doesn't communicate with us in our desired timing. On one occasion, I waited on God for five protracted hours before He gave me a simple answer: "Yes."

It can also be because of God's silent disapproval. In Mark 11:11, we read that Jesus went into the temple in the evening, looked around at everything and never said a word. He then went to Bethany with the 12 disciples. The next morning, when He returned to the temple, Jesus drove out those who bought and sold in the temple, overturned the tables of the moneychangers and strongly rebuked them for not making His Father's house a house of prayer for all nations.

What does this teach us? We must never be deceived into thinking that because we haven't experienced God's judgement on our sins of disobedience, that we've gotten away with it. We haven't. God's judgement inevitably falls in His timing (Psalm 75:2).



God Shows Up

Fourthly, we are to take God's awesome presence very seriously. God calls us to tremble as we have revelation of His power to do the impossible at a time of desperate need. "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters" (Psalm 114:7,8). Only God can create a way where there is no way.

God also calls us to tremble at His power. He makes mountains to melt like wax in His presence. The mountains quake, the hills melt, the earth heaves at His presence (Psalm 97:5, Nahum 1:5). He looks on the earth and it trembles (Psalm 104:32). We're talking about raw God power when He shows up.

Our Responses

We can react by thinking, "So what? Nothing's new. I've heard all that before." Or we can run away from God's awesome display of power because we don't want to be taken out of our comfort zones. Besides, if we get too close to Him, He may tell us to do something that would make us look foolish. That was Jonah's choice.

When Job thought about God's sovereign power to do His thing in our lives—which had produced painful and perplexing circumstances—he said he was terrified at God's presence (Job 23:15-17). When God showed up with a display of the fire of His glory on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel said to Moses, "You speak with us and we will hear, but let not God speak with us lest we die" (Exodus 20:19). Perhaps we, like them, shrink from this degree of God's intensity.

God wants us to come to the place where we draw near to Him, just as He is, because we're desperate for Him. This was Moses' reaction at the foot of Mount Sinai. Hebrews 12:21 says, "And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.'" At the same time, Moses said to the Israelites (as his teeth chattered), "Do not be afraid, for God has come to test you and that His fear may be before you so that you may not sin." And here's the major point. "The people stood afar off, but Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."

How desperate are you for God? Are you constantly having secondhand revelation of truth, where you only hear God through others? Or will you pay any price for God to reveal Himself to you, for an understanding of His character and ways to be given to you personally, directly? God waits for an answer.

I'd rather experience God's approving presence and have His close friendship in the thick darkness of painful, perplexing and frightening circumstances if necessary, than have a lesser experience of intimacy with Him because I'm lacking a passion to pursue Him, to know Him.



God's Presence in Judgement

Fifthly, God's presence comes in judgement, first upon His people (I Peter 4:17). God tells us that we are foolish when we don't understand the judgement of God (Jer. 5:4). Conversely, God says that the spiritually mature do understand God's judgement (Jer. 5:5). How mature are we? Have we ever studied His judgements and His wrath?

We need to keep asking God if we are under His approving presence. We shouldn't want to live a minute without it. We're always accepted and unconditionally loved by God, but not necessarily under His approving presence.

Undealt with sin makes the difference. Repentance is the cure.

How long is it since we spent quality time alone with God asking Him to show us anything that hinders the fullness of His approving presence in our lives? I have observed that deeper levels of unity, through deeper levels of collective humility, produce the deepest levels of God's approving presence.

In the Old Testament, the ark of the Lord represented the presence of God. Whenever the ark showed up among God's enemies, God broke out in severe judgement upon the people (I Sam 5). We can readily accept that. But do we understand that when the ark was returned to God's people, God's judgement broke out among them in equal proportions? (I Sam 5:19-20.)

Only deep repentance and humbling before God (in this case with fasting) caused God's presence in deliverance to come from their enemies. They were desperate like David, when he prayed, "Cast me not away from your presence" (Psalm 51:11). They also recognized their great need for the prophet Samuel's warnings, exhortations and intercession on their behalf.

The Terror of God's Presence In Judgement

Sixthly, God's intention and longing is to manifest His presence in blessing upon the creatures he created, but if they reject His rulership and choose their own way, they'll inevitably experience the terror of God's presence (Jer. 4:23-26, Ezek. 38:18-23, II Thes. 1:7-9).

We cannot think we know God if we avoid studying this facet of His character. God's judgement and wrath are part of His pristine purity and absolute justice (Isaiah 5:16). A. W. Tozer says, "God's wrath is His utter intolerance of whatever degrades and destroys.... To preserve His creation, God must destroy whatever would destroy it. Every wrathful judgement of God in the history of the world has been a holy act of preservation. In His love and mercy, God tells us to flee from the wrath to come."

One of the reasons why many Christians have so little concern for the lost could be because so few have studied the wrath of God from His Word. Many don't really think about the horror of God's



judgement, and live as though it isn't a reality. The revelation of the terror of God's judgement, combined with love for God Himself, greatly increases the love and burden for lost souls.

We will only be fulfilled in intimate friendship with God when we take the time to study every aspect of His fascinating character. And the more time we spend in His presence, desperate for Him to manifest Himself in whichever way that brings the most glory to His wonderful name, the more obnoxious it becomes for the glory to be given to anyone else.

Fulfillment is not obtained through the pursuit of ministry visions. It is found in the pursuit of the knowledge of God as He really is, in order to truly make Him known.

How Well Do You Know God?

Ask yourself Joy's 14 questions:

1. Have you ever done a serious Biblical study of any aspect of the character of God (not just listen to messages on the subject)?
2. If so, name the characteristics.
3. Have you ever studied either the judgement of God or the wrath of God from His Word?
4. Do you understand that to fully know anyone, we need to know all their characteristics, not just some?
5. How do we get to personally know people's characteristics and the way they operate?
6. On the basis of that answer and the above questions, how much do you know and understand about God's character and ways? You either write "very little," "some," or "a lot."
7. Is it possible that in all honesty you may have to conclude that without having personally studied all aspects of God's character, you still have a somewhat distorted view of Him?
8. Why do you think we seldom hear messages or read articles about God's judgement and wrath when the Bible has a tremendous amount to say about them?
9. Do you see the connection between the need to know and understand God's character more in relation to the effectiveness of making Him known in evangelism and discipling?
10. Can you explain the judgement and wrath of God to the unconverted, especially in the light of God's love?
11. Do you know experientially what it means to tremble in spirit and possibly physically before God's holy presence?
12. Do you think that generally speaking we are too casual about the implications of God's awesome presence?
13. Do you need to spend more time as a way of life asking God to reveal anything in your life that would hinder His approving presence?
14. What do you intend to do with what God has shown you today?

Joy Dawson is a Bible teacher and author who has been teaching internationally since 1970. Originally from New Zealand, she now lives in Los Angeles.

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