

Face to Face

Exodus 33:11 (NKJV) So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

I was 13 years old when I first read this verse. A few weeks prior to this I was in prayer with my family, and the Holy Spirit turned up. I was filled with such an overwhelming sense of God's presence and I burst into a new language I never heard before. I was speaking in tongues. I was praying for this gift since I heard about it some months before this encounter. The experience transformed me. My whole worldview changed. I began to desire spiritual things. I was hungry to know the Scriptures. Then I came across this passage. It was mind boggling that God would speak to a man "as a man speaks to his friend". There was nothing I desired more than to speak to God face to face. I became obsessed with this idea. That was all I could think about, pray about. I got to the point I was sick to my stomach longing for such an encounter.

Years have passed since then and I have had some amazing encounters with God – but I haven't spoken to Him face to face. I haven't had the experience the man Moses had, where God spoke to him "as a man speaks to his friend". Don't get me wrong. I hear God regularly. I hear Him through the Word, through circumstances I like to call God-incidents, through men and women of God and many times just in that silent inner serenity which the Apostle Paul called the "peace of God". Recently this desire that came to me when I first encountered the Holy Spirit returned again. It crept up unexpectedly. As I was reflecting on the past, the only thing I felt a longing for was this desire I had as a young boy. A naïve desire that said, "if Moses could have it, I want it too." So, I looked at some New Testament Scriptures to help stimulate that young boy's dream again. Here are some Scriptures that spoke to me about that face to face experience.

1. Become pure in heart through the cleansing Word of God

Matthew 5:8 (NKJV) Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

In the series of teachings of Jesus which Matthew put together and we now refer to as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of a company of people who will "see God". Jesus teaches us that the ones who get to experience this kind of intimate relationship are those who are "pure in heart". How does one become pure in heart? It isn't a purity that can be attained by human effort. That was my mistake that led to a huge disappointment with God. We cannot attain purity by things we do or not do. You are not rewarded with this experience. You are gifted with this experience. So becoming pure in heart is not something you strive towards. It's something you are transformed into. Only the Lord can undertake such a work and He does it through His word.

John 15:3 (NKJV) You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

God's Word is transformational. Exposing ourselves to Scriptures cleanses us in the inside. Be careful not spend time merely reading the Bible. The cleansing occurs in the process of reading, meditating, listening in order to apply the word in our lives. That consistent daily exposure to the Word of God is like a cleansing stream that keeps purifying our hearts.

Expose yourselves to Scriptures daily as you experience the becoming of a people who are pure in heart.

2. Maintain peaceful relationships and a set-apart life

Hebrews 12:14 (NKJV) Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord

The second passage I want us to look at is in the book of Hebrews. The author of the book of Hebrews speaks of two things that seem to be part of the active response of someone who will see the Lord. A lifestyle of pursuing peaceful relationships with others and keeping ones self holy. The two areas of focus here is the way we present ourselves to others and the way we position ourselves in the world. With regard to our relationships with others we are instructed to pursue (follow after vigorously) peace with all people. It is not always within our power to have peaceful relationships, but we are to make that our life's pursuit. We are to make peace the goal in all our relationships.

The other area of focus is in our attachment to the material world. He speaks of a lifestyle of holiness. Holiness is not based on behaviour. Holiness is to do with being consecrated, set apart. We have limited the concept of holiness to religious actions. The Biblical teaching on holiness is a separation from the world unto God. It is really a worldview, a way of thinking, speaking and doing that differs from the norm. Separated unto God. It is a detachment from the norms of the world and clinging on to the norms of a life in Christ.

The pursuit of peace with all people and the detachment of self from the world unto God are interconnected. Chaos in our relationships with people create a dissonance in our intimacy with God. Likewise the more attached we are to the world, the more difficult it is to pursue peace with all people.

Make this your focus – to pursue peace with all people and to live a separated life unto God.

3. Keep hope alive

1 John 3:2-3 (NKJV) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Discouragement can have a devastating effect on our faith. This world is full of people who are disappointed with God because He has not come through for them. Some keep up the façade of religious acts while others totally abandon the idea of desiring a relationship with God. Disappointment or discouragement is really a symptom of hope(less)ness. The wisdom writer says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.” (Proverbs 13:12, NKJV)

The Apostle John speaks into this desire to see Jesus and be like Him. He alludes to this deep longing within all of us to not only see Jesus fully but also to become like Him. He goes on to say that everyone who hopes for this focuses on purifying himself. This longing and hope to see Jesus and be like Him, fuels the desire to be pure like Him.

Keep hope alive – remind yourselves we will see Jesus, we will be like Him.

4. Serve Him faithfully

Revelation 22:3-4 (NKJV) ... and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

The passage is typically seen as something we will experience one day when the end comes. Biblical ideas around end time events have two parallel themes running through them. The binary “already” and “not yet” ideas around end time events have made us categorise various passages of Scriptures in this dualistic framework. Revelation chapter 22 is one example. We see that event as something in the future and so the entire chapter ends up archived for a time to come. While I do believe that it is for a time to come but I also believe that we are to experience a foretaste of what is spoken about now in the in-between life of the “already” and “not yet”. I believe those who serve the Lord (by this I mean those whose lives are lived for Him), shall see His face in this life, just as I believe His name is already on their foreheads. John says we shall serve Him and we shall see His face. Let’s ensure we keep doing everything that we do unto Him and for His service.

Remain faithful in serving Christ. His servants will see His face.

5. Celebrate the small encounters

1 Corinthians 13:12 (NKJV) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

The Apostle Paul, with all his personal encounters with Jesus, still described his experiences as “dimly” and “in part”. He identifies the main hindrance to intimacy with Christ – spiritual immaturity. He encourages us to put away childish things and be mature in our thinking on spiritual matters. I see childish things as the inability to understand the concept of time and the process of development. The child cannot fathom the concept of waiting till something is ready, distance of travel till we get to the destination, process of growth and development. He or she wants it and wants it NOW. The sign of maturity is the ability to accept that it is a process for us to grow

into a being that can experience this face to face relationship with God. Until then, we celebrate the little things that remind us we are getting there. Landmarks, familiar places, sign posts that reminds us we are getting closer to our destination. Every sighting of God when we look into the mirror, however dim it may be, we celebrate. Rejoice over the “prophesies in part”, the “knowing in part” and the seeing “dimly”. They are instalments of the eventual face to face.

Be grateful and celebrate the glimpses and close encounters with Christ. They are assurances of what is to come.

So let's prioritise these as we seek a life of intimacy with Christ:

- Expose yourself to Scriptures daily as you experience the becoming of someone who is pure in heart.
- Pursue peace with all people and live a separated life from the world unto God.
- Keep hope alive – remind yourselves of the promise that we will see Jesus, we will be like Him.
- Remain faithful in serving Christ. His servants will see His face.
- Be grateful and celebrate the glimpses and close encounters with Christ. They are assurances that there is more to come.