

## **Drawing Closer to God (1)**

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I do believe that we are entering the next season, a new season, a season that is meant to bring us closer to God, a season when we will see amazing things happening in our church and in our personal lives.

Today I want to share with you 7 things that you can do to draw closer to the Holy Spirit. Because of time constraints, I will only share the first 3 today.

Some of these keys that I am about to give you will simply be reminders for some of you. There will be things that you know you should be doing already, but there will also be encouragement to cause you to take hold of what God has for you. Some of the things that I mention may be things that you have never considered before, but as we move towards these various keys, I want you to commit to applying these biblical truths to your life and as you do, you will notice that you will develop a closer friendship with the Holy Spirit.

### **1. Commit to Daily Bible Reading.**

#### **2 Timothy 3:16 -17**

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us to know how to ascertain what is true and what is false, and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives. Scripture will correct us when we are wrong and teach us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work. But in order for this to happen, we need to hear the Word of God daily.

The word of God is breathed upon by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired people to write the scriptures so as you begin to know the word of God, you begin to cultivate and strengthen that friendship with the Holy Spirit because every word was inspired by him and you can ask the Holy Spirit to teach you as you go through the word. The prerequisite is that you have to make a commitment to become a daily reader of the Bible.

This may be something that you are already doing, or this may be something that you know you should do. Maybe you have had some false starts, or maybe there have been inconsistencies in your commitment to daily Scripture reading. It is important that you implement this spiritual discipline because the word of God is the foundation upon which we build that friendship with the Holy Spirit. In fact, the word of God is the means by which the Holy Spirit creates the character of Christ in you.

If you are serious about drawing closer to the Holy Spirit, then you need to get serious about the word of God. If you are serious about hearing from the Holy Spirit, you will need to get

serious about the word of God. This can be challenging sometimes because there are many different distractions in our lives. After all, the flesh craves entertainment. The flesh always desires something else, something new and exciting, and because of that, we are easily pulled away from the Lord. As such, we have to learn to subject the flesh under His lordship, we need to say no to the flesh, and instead stay focused on the things of God. Even now, maybe your flesh desires to think about something you are going to do later, but that something is not necessarily edifying. Maybe now you are being distracted by some responsibilities or some worries that aren't necessary to be addressed right at this moment. So, I encourage you to say no to the flesh, and yes to the Holy Spirit.

Start today with the strong determination that you are going to make a commitment to receive from what is written in the God-breathed, spirit-inspired Scriptures. This is more than just reading a scripture of the day verse. This is more than just reading a post on Instagram, Facebook or other social media platforms. This has to do with daily devotion.

You need to be truly giving yourself over to the word, not just a superficial commitment to the word of God, but a true and deep commitment to the word of God, one that will bring forth the ability to truly understand the riches and depth found in Scripture. We all need to understand the Bible, from start to finish, and not just skip around reading little bits here and there and then being satisfied with a mere understanding of what these few verses mean to you or during this season. Rather, we need to really dig into the scripture and to ask ourselves what is the Holy Spirit saying through these verses and chapters. We need to find out what were His intentions when He inspired the people to write these particular words. That's the question that we have to ask ourselves as we read the word and as we do this, we lean more on what the Holy Spirit actually said as opposed to what we want Him to have said.

Sometimes we come to the word of God with preconceived notions: These may be things that we want to believe or teachings that we have been told. Some of these preconceived notions may be things that we have heard repeatedly in church. Because of that, we try to take that framework or that perspective and force scripture to conform into that framework. That is not the approach that we should take. Instead, we should come to scripture and ask what the Holy Spirit is communicating and how does the lessons learned apply to yourself today.

You have to make that commitment to become a daily Bible reader. If you don't know where to start, start with the book, like the Book of John or the Book of James. In fact, the book of John was where I began my journey of scripture reading and devotion when I was born-again, when I became a believer at the age of 13. The book of John helped me to understand truths about the Lord and aided me in building love towards, and relationship with God.

You can speak to the Holy Spirit anytime, anywhere, and the Holy Spirit speaks to you, but the clearest way that the Holy Spirit will speak to you is through His written word. So, do you want to draw closer to the person of the Holy Spirit? If you do, then spend time reading God's word.

Assuming that you have to made a commitment to the daily Bible reading, what do you do next? Well, start somewhere, and you may say, well, how many chapters do I have to read? How many books do I have to read? Just read until the Holy Spirit speaks something through it, and then your commitment can grow. Of course, if you are already further along and you

have been committed to reading the word of God daily, obviously you would want to increase your capacity and add more and more chapters of the word of God to your everyday reading. If you are just starting, start simply and just ask God to speak to you daily. Receive something from the word, make that connection, and then, of course, begin to develop upon that.

## **2. Make a Schedule For Daily Prayer.**

As you are going into this new season you might be saying, OK, I want to become someone who is more like Christ, I want to get more serious about my walk with the Lord, I want to draw closer to the Holy Spirit. My suggestion is that you make a schedule that involves daily prayer. There's an old saying, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. If you just wake up each day with no intent action, with no direction, with no structure, with no organisation, you cannot expect to scramble and put everything together at the last minute. There has to be some degree of structure and discipline that is implemented in your everyday life.

As to prayer, the Holy Spirit will give you the desire to pray but it is up to you to implement the discipline to pray.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

What is being communicated here in verse 17 is that prayer should be a lifestyle. This of course involves both spontaneous prayer and scheduled prayer. You can pray throughout your day, but also make sure that you have set aside sections of the day where you are totally focused on God, not distracted by anything, not doing anything else. Yes, it is OK to pray while you work or pray while you drive or pray when you are amongst friends and intentionally fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit, and constantly being aware of his presence, but you also need a scheduled time for prayer during which there are no distractions, it is just you and the Lord.

When we go for a day without prayer it is like we are saying to the Holy Spirit; "I can go through today without you. When we go a week without prayer we are saying to the Holy Spirit, I don't need you this week. Eventually, this neglect turns into a lifestyle without prayer, and we end up saying to the Holy Spirit, I can live in my own strength, power and ability.

Prayer is how we involve the Holy Spirit in our daily activities. Prayer is how we commune with Him consistently. Prayer is how we get to know the mind of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for our everyday needs. You have to make that schedule, and if your schedule doesn't allow for prayer, then rework your day so that there is time set aside for prayer. Begin with some prioritisation here and make a list of things in the order that deserves your time as the highest priority. Start with that list and go from there. Get practical with the way you engage in the discipline of prayer.

Everything spiritual is to be done in partnership with God and when I say partnership with God, I do not mean that God needs us, but I mean that God has made it so that movement is

required on our part. For instance, God will save us, for that is His work, and what He asks is that we believe in His son Jesus and surrender our lives under His lordship. God is happy to connect with us, what He asks for is we have faith in Him. The Lord is willing to perform miracles in our lives, all he asks is that we believe that He can do so. There are some simple but important acts to need be done on your part.

For example, consider the area of spiritual gifts. God gives us these gifts, but we need to use them to bless the body and to build His church. God will heal the sick, but you have to go and lay hands on them by faith. God may have given you a gift of prophecy, so for you to prophecy, you have to choose to respond to what you believe the Holy Spirit is saying and then open your mouth and speak. Everything that we do that is spiritual requires our participation, and prayer is no different. So, if we are to see prayer become part of our everyday lives, we have to get practical with it too. Those practical structures and practical implementation are actually what helps us to develop a very deep spiritual connection with the Holy Spirit. So, you may be saying, well, what do I do then? Well, it is quite simple. In order to pray more, you have to choose to pray more. In order to pray consistently, you have to choose to pray consistently. It comes down to choice.

The Holy Spirit gives you the desire, but you must make the decision and implement the discipline. Make a schedule that involves daily prayer. As we go into the next season, you need to sit down and look at your calendar. You need to write the vision down, make it plain, you need to get practical, like have prayer time after breakfast or before you leave to work or school or doing house chorse. You can also have it before you go to sleep at night, giving thanks to God for all the things he has done for that day.

When you look into the book of Acts, you can see that they were very practical in the way they implemented ministry. Even Jesus would pray in the morning. Also Jesus would go away in the evenings, and Jesus would isolate Himself so that He could spend time alone with God. Even looking at the lifestyle of Jesus, we see that there were practical implementations that ultimately helped Him to carry out those disciplines of the spirit.

So then we have considered two important areas. Number 1, Commit to daily Bible reading. Number 2 make a schedule that involves daily prayers. So those two of course, we know we ought to be doing and I pray that what I have shared this morning serves as an encouragement or as a reminder that you should make the decision to implement these for the new season.

Number 3 may be something you have not thought of and that is...

### **3. Start Saying No to More.**

#### **Proverbs 21:5**

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

So, as the proverbs here says, you can either live having planned wisely, or you can live in foolishness and haste. You know there are some exceptions to this, so I am not making a sweeping generalisation, but for the most part, if you have to hurry and worry it is because

you have not planned properly; if you have to hurry and worry, it is because you are carrying things that perhaps you should not be shouldering.

### **Ephesians 5:15-16**

<sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

How do you maximise, and optimise opportunity? You do so by saying no to that which is not for you. There are many good things, but not every good thing is a God thing.

We need to be spirit-led on what we should do and what not to do. Sometime we can develop this Superman complex, where we think it is our responsibility to do everything. Instead, when you recognise that God has given you an assignment, God has given you specific tasks, and God has given you responsibilities in the areas of certain family members, certain friends, and certain connections, then you can begin to say no to that which is not of God.

If you have trouble saying no, you are going to have a major distraction in your life, eventually, that will disrupt your fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

I will go off on a bit of a tangent, but I think it is necessary to explain this.

The Holy Spirit does not leave the born-again believers, and we do not earn the Holy Spirit by the level of holiness in which we are walking. In fact, we cannot even be holy without the presence of the Holy Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit does not leave the born-again believer, although the Holy Spirit grieves within the born-again believer when they are walking in disobedience. This is why disobedient Christians are probably the most miserable group that I know. Because of the conviction that becomes overwhelmingly intense, they cannot even focus on anything else.

I am not saying that the Holy Spirit leaves you or abandons you when you make a mistake. What I am saying is that your focus on that fellowship, your ability to receive from that fellowship, and your ability to hear his voice can often become negatively affected when your life is filled with distractions. You do not have to say yes to every invite. You do not have to say yes to every activity. You do not have to say yes to every obligation. You do not have to say yes to every project. You do not have to say yes to every hangout, every time somebody goes to fellowship. Some Christians have the fear of missing out, it is called FOMO. They think that if they miss that one outing or that one thing, it is just going to be the end of the world for them. In fact, many are under financial stress because of that kind of thinking, they feel they need to buy this and that so they would not miss out. When you begin to say no to what is not of God for you, then you begin to become focused. In order to become dynamic, you must first become specific and focused.

I will use myself as an example because this has been my experience, I used to say yes to people's requests because I did not want to hurt their feelings, but I had so much pressure

that the ministry became a burden to me, so much so that it even affected my relationship with my wife.

This just means you would need to know what is not for you and you have to be willing to even offend some people if you are going to stay focused.

I have changed the way I serve God because I have learned to say no to the things that I see will take away my focus on the Lord. By doing this, I am able to carry out my assignments without unnecessary pressure and stress. My marriage is not strained. My relationship with my sons is not strained. My relationship with my friends and family is not strained. The relationships I have with the ministry staff are not strained and we are able to minister peacefully, with excellence, and execute with power and might because we are focused on what God has called us to do. We are able to walk at a slower pace. And that slower intentional pace would actually enables us and you to be more attentive to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life.

So maybe in this next season, you need to say no to more people, invitations or responsibilities. I am not suggesting you become a hermit and go hide up in the mountains somewhere. I am not saying you are to become complacent, passive or laid back, but we might need to cut down and cut out the unnecessary things in life so we can focus on what God want us to do. You have to learn to say no to more things so you can say yes to the right things. Cut out obligations that are not of God, cut out relationships that are not of God. If there is a relationship or connection in your life that's causing you to become distracted from the Lord, that means you are drifting further from God or his purpose for your life because of that relationship, you either need to set down some very serious boundaries, or you need to cut that relationship off completely. We do have to get serious, especially for the days ahead.

### **Ephesians 5:15-17**

<sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

1. Commit to daily Bible reading. 2. Make a schedule that involves daily prayer. 3. Start saying no to more.