

**“And this Gospel
shall be preached...”**
Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

Encounter God Through Prayer!

by
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A recent science fiction movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, sent thrills and chills through audiences with tales of humans meeting extraterrestrial beings.

Though the movie is fiction, encounters between humans and extraterrestrial beings can be real. Believe it or not, we are all destined to encounter such a being. We will all encounter God! We need to be encountering Him *now* in prayer, getting to know Him and receiving His mind and character so when we do meet Him in person we will be ready.

Let's look first at an experience which brought one man into a personal relationship with God. The account begins in the book of Job, chapter one.

Righteous Job

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed [avoided] evil” (verse 1). This man was righteous.

But far away, two extraterrestrial beings of great power and might are discussing Job. “And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that fears God and escheweth evil?” (verse 8).

Satan, of course, was convinced that Job

was only a fair-weather servant of God who would turn against God if the blessings stopped coming.

Job's Trial

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand” (verse 12). Satan was allowed to go just so far in his great trial of Job's faith. So Satan took away everything that Job had, everything except his wife.

In the second chapter God permits Satan to afflict Job with boils. “Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die” (verse 9). What a “help-meet” she was! Probably the reason Satan left her alive was so she could pick at and discourage Job. But Satan didn't realize that Job had a certain tenacity or patience to hang on to what he knew was right.

Job replied: “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips” (verse 10). No mistakes up to this point. No sin. But no real encounter with God yet either, which was His great reason for this whole trial on Job.

Then enter Job's three “friends.” They came around to console him but their condolences very soon turn to severe criticism. When they saw how

miserable he was, they sat down and watched him for seven days: Abject misery; silence.

What was going through Job's mind?: "Oh, the sorrow, Oh, the misery. What have I done? I haven't done anything. Why am I suffering this?"

Finally, Job himself, in chapter 3, breaks the silence with a torrent of sorrow and self-pity. He wishes he'd never been born because he doesn't yet understand the purpose of the trial.

Following this, the conversation among these four begins: Straight from the shoulder talk, no punches pulled, rebuking, castigating, accusing. Job's "friends" were positive that he had committed some sin and thought that if only Job would simply repent, acknowledge his sin, then God would forgive him and everything would be all right.

But no, Job maintains his integrity. And the wrong accusations and self-defense goes on and on getting nowhere because both Job and his "friends" were wrong and didn't understand what they were arguing about. This is so often the case with some of us, too!

Then God Himself speaks. Here Job has his close encounter with God, and it was very real. God was right there, thundering in Job's ears.

Job Meets God

"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me" (Job 38:1-3). It wasn't a little still voice, God wasn't defensive, wasn't on the stand to answer Job "why you have mistreated me so." No, God is interrogating Job and asking some awfully difficult questions. Soul-searching questions. Blunt questions. And God never once mentions Job's sufferings. He doesn't say, "Job, I'm really sorry I had to put you through this trial."

Job begins to realize something about God that had never entered his mind before. Job no longer just intellectually knows *about* God, but now *reality* and understanding enters into his mind for the very first time. Job is beginning to "see" and *know* God.

Chapter 42, verses 1-3: "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that thou canst do

every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that, I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." In plain English, Job was saying: "What a windbag I truly was to open my mouth and exalt myself as if I were equal to you, to make myself righteous in your sight, or to only think of you as a God who could bless me if I placated you."

All of us, too, need to encounter God and have a personal relationship with Him. Consequently, sooner or later God is going to see to it that every individual will have that close encounter. For that purpose God may cause or allow us to endure some trials like Job.

God's goal is to qualify us to be His sons by helping us build righteous character. And if He feels we need a trial of suffering or a test, He may say to Satan, "Go ahead, but don't take his life." We have some wonderful promises in the New Testament that we will be able to endure that trial or test if we have faith (I Cor. 10:13).

But isn't there an easier way?

You Can Meet God Too!

There's one fundamental way in which human beings can get involved in bringing about the necessary encounter, and building a relationship with God. That way is through prayer.

Think about that for a second. Do you realize that your salvation depends upon your prayer life? Your most important Christian responsibility is your prayer life, your time of contact with God Almighty.

So I want to share with you four basic ingredients to successful prayer. I hope that by understanding and practicing them your life will pick up, you will be happier, you will be a more understanding person, you'll be a more patient person and above all, you will have more faith in God.

Simple Obedience

Point one involves obedience to God's law, obedience to the ten commandments (not just in the letter but in the spirit as well). Let's read a couple of scriptures because I believe they will help you to understand and comprehend why perhaps your problems aren't being solved, why you

have your frustrations. Perhaps you do not have the obedience you should have.

If you don't think your prayers are going above the ceiling, maybe you haven't repented of some sin. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2).

If you don't know if you have any sins, just get on your knees and ask God to show you your sins. But the result may be pretty tough to take because God sometimes doesn't pull any punches. Be prepared, because He might open your eyes up wide so you can begin to see what kind of a human being you really are.

All humans are subject to faults and mistakes and lusts and sins. But God's goodness—if we seek Him wholeheartedly—leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). God says: "... to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2).

We need to regularly get down on our knees and pray to God with our Bibles in front of us, asking Him to help us understand His Word. How many of us really fear to disobey God's Word? Remember in Isa. 66:2 the Bible says: "... and trembleth at my word." That means fear to disobey His Word, constantly seeking to understand it better.

Faith and Belief

The second point to a good prayer life is FAITH, belief that God will hear.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

You have to go before God in faith, believing that He does hear. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." I'm reminded of the story of Peter walking on the water toward Christ. When Christ bade him to "come" and Peter walked out on that water because at first he didn't doubt, and then he looked around and he saw all the elements—the wind howling and the waves lapping at his shoes—and he began to doubt. He took his mind off Christ and he began to sink. He was wavering like

the waves themselves. "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:6-7).

We must come *boldly* before that throne as He tells us in Hebrews 4:16. You approach that throne knowing that you are human, subject to mistakes, but you approach that throne with the attitude—the humble attitude—"I know God is going to hear me because He has put a lot of work into me. He's trying me and testing me and helping me qualify to be His son, and therefore, I know He's going to listen to my prayers."

The Holy Spirit, the power of God, will help you have faith. It is our means of intercession with God (Rom. 8:27) because sometimes we don't even know how to talk to God. God reads our attitude, our spirit, and on that basis answers our prayers.

He already knows what we need, but He says, "I still want you to ask."

Romans 4:21 is really a definition of the kind of faith we should have when we ask: "... being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform."

We need knowledge of God's will and what he has promised, in order to believe He will perform it.

This brings us to the third point for effective prayer.

According to God's Will

Some of the Christians in the early New Testament Church were not really asking according to God's will.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you?" Sound familiar today? "... come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not." Why? "... because ye ask not. Ye ask, [but you don't receive, and notice the reason why is given here] because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:1-3).

So many times when we pray, we have what I call the "Gimmes." "Lord, gimme this, and Lord, gimme that. Now Lord, provide me with this. More. And Lord, make sure I am blessed that way, too."

I have told people the simplest, quickest way to solve one of your personal problems is to find somebody else—one of your brothers or sisters or a friend—who has a very similar problem and begin to pray for that individual, about their problem, calamity or difficulty. You must ask according to God's will. If you ask for something just to be able to consume it on your own lusts, James says you are not going to receive it.

Pray about others. Pray about the needs of the Work of God. Pray about the bad health that some are experiencing right now. Pray for God's will in all things.

Fervency: The Fourth Point

James 5:16: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual *fervent* prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

The kind of prayers which God hears are ones where He knows you are in real earnest. If you really want a personal relationship with God, of course, you will be in earnest. The only way you are going to be in God's family, the ultimate goal of a Christian, is in a personal relationship that is close to God.

Verses 17-18: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are [he was a human being too], and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Read the example of Elias' life sometime and find out what things he did and how his prayers were answered. His prayers were answered because he was fervent! He really meant what he prayed.

Our Great High Priest

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession" (Heb. 4:14). An integral part of our profession is prayer, though God calls us for other things as well: To give time and energy to His Work, to study His Word, the Bible, etc. Verse 15: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points

tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace . . ." How do you do that? You do that in prayer ". . . that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Consider Christ's own example, Luke 22:39-44: "And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

"And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." Now verse 44 is the key verse here: "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

None of us has had to face the kind of trial that Jesus had to face. And maybe that's why His prayers were so fervent that He actually sweated blood.

But that's the model we have and the example we need to follow.

Encounter

We are going to encounter God in the resurrection. Now is the time to be developing a really personal relationship with God in preparation.

We are God's children. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

That's our goal. Beyond salvation, it means glorification with God. That's what we're fighting for. That's why we suffer—not necessarily because of sin, but because God allows us to suffer in order to teach us lessons and help us see how much we need Him and each other, and how much we all need to be a team.

"For," said Paul, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Finally in verse 28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."