

Session 8 Beholding the Splendor of God

INTRODUCTION

Cooperation with the grace of God—2 Corinthians 3:18. Understanding the tension between what God requires and what God promises to do. Beside it you can write, “A: what God requires from us in terms of devotional discipline,” and, “B: what God promises in terms of releasing divine activity inside us.”

We need to know the division of labor, because God will not do what He requires you to do, and you can’t do what God promises to do. God won’t do A. He won’t do what He requires from you. He won’t fill your mind with the Word of God. He won’t do it. He says, “You have to do that.”

Nor can you do what God promises to do—release the inward-working Spirit in your heart. You can’t make your heart change. You can change your mind, but you can’t change your emotions. Only God, by the Spirit of God, can re-fashion and make your emotions. You can change your mind, you can fill your mind with anything, but only God can change your emotional chemistry. Only God can release supernatural power inside of you.

It’s like the illustration I heard once. A pastor of a church went to have Sunday lunch with the farmer. They were driving up the long driveway of this beautifully manicured farm. Everything was in order, a picture of beauty, for acres and acres.

The pastor said to the farmer, “Boy, the Lord really blessed you with this farm.”

The farmer said, “When God had this farm, it was a mess!”

The point is that God will not water and weed and cultivate that farm. When God has the farm without the farmer, there are weeds everywhere. In other words, there’s a divine cooperation. The farmer has to put the seed in the ground; the farmer has to water and weed. God creates the sunlight and brings life forth from the seed. The farmer can’t make the seed grow, but God won’t water and weed the garden in one sense of the word. He won’t plant the seed and then weed it. God will not do what He requires us to do, and we can’t do what He promises to do. We can’t confuse the two issues.

Some people are saying, “Well, I’m just waiting for the Lord to change my heart.”

The Lord says, “I’m waiting for you to fill your mind with the Word of God, and I will change your heart.”

Another person is trying really hard to change their heart, and they’re gritting their teeth and striving and they can’t. All you can do is fill your mind, and He will change the makeup of your heart.

What God requires from us in terms of devotional disciplines—that’s all we’re looking at right now. He wants us to behold the glory of the Lord. That’s what He’s talking about. That’s what He requires us to do, to look at, to behold, to meditate on the glory of God.

The word *behold* means to look at, to meditate on, the glory of who God is. God says, “You look at who I am; you study, you meditate, you gaze on the truth of Me through the Word of God. That’s your part. Then I will

transform you inwardly from glory to glory. You behold Me; I will transform you.” Don’t confuse the two. There’s a division of labor that’s clear in the Word of God.

WE WILL BE LIKE HIM, FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS

The basic premise is what I call the “1 John 3:2 principle.” John the apostle said, “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). We talked about it the other day. When you see God, it does impact and change you internally. You can’t see God even a little without it impacting your emotions and the way you think and feel on the inside.

I’m skipping these verses because we covered them all. Yesterday we covered Isaiah 6:1-8. Praying before God’s throne: I like to call it gazing on the throne. That’s how I would say it now. Actually, I wrote these notes years ago. It says, “May 1997” on the front. My secretary handwrote that. I would call it, “Gazing on God’s throne,” instead of, “Praying before the throne.” That’s how I would re-title it.

Revelation 4. Now, this has been a very helpful passage of Scripture for many years. I highly recommend it even though I get accused of being “New Age” because of what I’m going to tell you.

I like what Paul Cain says. He says, “‘New Age’? I’m only worried about old age!” He says, “They accuse me of being new age. I’m struggling so much with old age, I don’t even get around to the New Age.” Those of you who know Paul Cain or know of his ministry know that he’s the king of corn, but it really is funny.

GAZING ON THE THRONE OF GOD

Revelation 4:1-10 describes the throne of God. We mentioned it yesterday. It’s the clearest description of the throne of God. I just want to give it to you really clearly, and you can study it out later. It’s something you really want to spend time developing. I spend a chapter in my book *Passion for Jesus* describing, just a little, the throne of God. I’m in the process of writing a book called something like *Gazing on the Throne of God*. I don’t know what the title will be, but I have studied every passage I can find from Genesis to Revelation that describes anything about the throne of God in the eternal city. Whatever God wants us to know is revealed in the Scriptures. There are many things about His throne that He doesn’t want us to know, but the things that He wants us to know are in the Word—in Ezekiel and the Psalms, especially. I’ve tried to piece it all together the best I can because I feel like it’s a fantastic aid in our devotional life to focus on a person as that Person, who is God, describes Himself. Again, it isn’t a full description but it’s the description He wants us to have. It’s a very limited description, but it’s the one He wants us to have of Him. It’s like a puzzle. It’s just a hint. I think it’s worth putting those hints together and getting this dim picture He wants us to have of where He dwells, and the scene around His personhood.

Revelation 4 describes God the Father sitting on the throne, and it says His appearance is like a sardis and a jasper stone (Rev. 4:3). It actually tells us the color of the light that emanates out of the being of God. Now I don’t know why He tells us that color, but He does. John the apostle says it was like a jasper stone and a sardis. I don’t know much about precious gems, but I’ve looked it up in a few books that are dedicated to the study of precious gems. Sardis is a deep, red gem, and a jasper stone is a green gem. I assume that’s right; it looked like a really scholarly book. That means there’s some variation of green and red emanating from the being of God. For some reason, He wants us to know the colors.

You have the Lord, God the Father, sitting on His throne. His Son is at His right hand. Yesterday we looked at Daniel 7:9: the throne is ablaze with flaming fire. We find from Psalm 104:2 that God guards Himself. Actually, He's guarding the beings that surround Him. He clothes Himself in garments of light, which is a protection to the created beings that are near Him so that it doesn't short-circuit their entire being and fry them. He puts a garment around Himself to protect the brilliance of His glory. 1 Timothy 6:16 says He dwells in "unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16). The light that He dwells in is unapproachable, but if that light wasn't like a protective garment He would really be inaccessible to us in terms of our capacity to comprehend Him even in our glorified bodies at the throne of God.

Hebrews 1:3 calls it "the radiance of His glory" (Heb. 1:3). It's the brightness of His glory. Jesus is the express brightness of the glory of the image of His Father. There's this radiantly, brilliantly bright God sitting on a throne. He's depicted as sitting on a throne that's engulfed in flaming fire. There's a garment of light protecting even the most exalted creatures around the throne from being completely overwhelmed and decimated by the glory of God.

THE EMERALD RAINBOW ABOVE THE THRONE

Then the Scripture says in Revelation 4 that there's a rainbow around the throne of God. There's this rainbow, which again speaks of the covenant. That's where people cry, "New Age!" The rainbow belongs to God, not to the devil. The rainbow surrounded the throne of God before it ever appeared to Noah back in Genesis. The reason the rainbow appeared in creation was because it existed over the throne. It didn't begin with creation; it appeared in creation because it existed in the throne room. The devil wants to distort it, and he does funny things with it in the New Age movement, but that's another matter. The rainbow belongs to God. There's a rainbow around the throne, and that rainbow is actually emerald. I realize that a rainbow has seven colors, but then again, I guess the Holy Spirit hasn't made this clear to me. I assume it means the rainbow is many colors, even though it's emerald in appearance. So there's this overriding emerald green that's surrounding or enmeshed in the seven colors of the rainbow that are arcing over the throne of God.

Then there are twenty-four elders before the throne. They're sitting on thrones clothed in white with crowns on their heads (Rev. 4:4). Many people believe those twenty-four elders are saints or believers from redemptive history. I don't know that they are. Maybe they are; maybe they are not. I don't know, but it's possible that they are. Those twenty-four elders are sitting before Him, gazing at His throne. There are four living creatures that appear to be the seraphim, because they have six wings like the seraphim of Isaiah 6. They're flying around the top of God's throne, and they're looking down upon God's face, although they're still protected by the garment of light that's around the throne of God. They're crying, "Holy, holy, holy."

Then, as we saw yesterday in Daniel 7:10, there's a river of fire proceeding from the throne of God. That river of fire, I believe, is the person of the Holy Spirit. That river of fire is proceeding, breaking forth. You have to work with your own thinking. In order to make room for that river, I split the twenty-four elders, twelve on one side and twelve on the other, so the river can go somewhere. The river has to fit in there somewhere.

STANDING IN THE REFLECTION OF THE GLORY OF GOD'S THRONE

Revelation 15 says that before the throne is a "sea of glass like crystal, mingled with flaming fire." There's a sea of glass right before the throne. Revelation 4 says it, and Revelation 15 says it. That sea of glass is mingled with flaming fire, and that's where the saints stand and worship. The saints stand on the sea of glass like crystal that's mingled with flaming fire. Here we have a God, God the Father, with God the Son at His right hand.

Their throne is filled with flaming fire. There's a garment of light. There's a rainbow; there are four living creatures. There are twenty-four elders, and I imagine twelve on either side. The river of fire breaking out of the throne of God flows into that sea of glass like crystal where the saints are standing, and their worship is mingled with flaming fire. I imagine us on the last day standing on this sea of glass like crystal with the fire of God all around us, worshiping God. That's the picture of the saints in eternity in the great gathering times when we all gather before the throne. We're standing on the sea of glass like crystal because it's reflecting the glory of God. We're standing on the reflected glory of the throne of God. We're standing in the reflection of the glory of God's throne, because that's where we stand in redemption. We're worshiping.

There are seven lamps of fire; I don't know where they fit. Put three on one side, four on the other. I don't know where the seven lamps go; I just put them there somewhere. There are angels all around, myriads and myriads of angels all throughout the atmosphere.

That's some of the description of the throne of God. Now the reason I like this description is because when I used to pray years ago, I would sort of pray into the air, but I like to focus my mind on a real person, on a real throne, as He described Himself for us in the Word of God. That's why I don't believe it's illegal to use this description. It's the description God gave to the saints so that they would use it to come before Him in worship. I close my eyes and I don't see it very clearly at all, but I create the picture in my thinking. I stand before the Lord and say, "Father, with Your Son at Your right hand, I stand before Your holy throne and the presence of Your angels."

There's that rainbow there. There's flaming fire all around us, which is the Holy Spirit's power and influence on us. That's really what happens when you pray and worship. When you were worshiping this morning that's the scene you were in, whether you knew it or not. Believe it or not, when you say, "Lord, bless this food," that's where those words show up, in that scene there. They really do. That's the only place your prayers end up when they're addressed to God—in the court of God Himself.

"THE MAN CHRIST JESUS HAS PLED FOR MERCY FOR YOU BEFORE MY THRONE"

I like to speak to a real person when I pray. I like 1 Timothy 2:5. It says, "The Man Christ Jesus"—the person of God. It isn't His humanity I focus on; it's His personhood.

One time I was driving down the road. It was seventeen or eighteen years ago, in 1980 or 1982. I heard the internal, audible voice of the Lord. I was driving down the road and I was worshiping. I was singing in the Spirit and worshipping in the car. I was in another city and the Lord spoke to me. I rarely discern in a powerful way the voice of the Lord; I've done it maybe a few times in twenty years, and this was one of them. It came to me with such power, I was shocked. He said to me, "You have a future in ministry." That was the sentence: "You have a future in ministry."

It came out of nowhere. I thought, "Where did that come from?" I call it the internal, audible voice of God. It was so clear. I was shocked by this sentence from nowhere. He said, "You have a future in ministry because the Man Christ Jesus has pled before My throne for mercy for you."

That shocked me. I thought, "Wow. Where did that come from?"

The Father was quoting 1 Timothy 2:5. He said, “You have a future in ministry because the Man Christ Jesus has pled for mercy for you before My throne.”

I almost wrecked the car. I pulled over and started sobbing. I was weeping. It totally broke my heart. Ever since that happened, I always call Jesus, “the Man Christ Jesus.” It makes Him so personal in my thinking at the throne of God. That’s why I put that verse there. I like actually talking to a person, not just speaking to the air. Whenever I’m in intercession or worship or devotion or meditating on the Word, I like to lock my mind right into God as He described Himself on the throne, recognizing the scene around God’s throne. That’s why I’ve taken some time, and I want to get this in print. I’ve done a bit of work on it. I don’t have it ready for publication yet, but it won’t be too long. I don’t know what I’ll call it, but I’m using every verse I can find on the throne of God—not that I’ve found every one of them—because I think it helps direct our thinking and our focus. And because of our human weakness, I think it’s helpful to do that. The angels are all listening.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE SONG OF THE ANGELS

I’ll tell you another experience I had in the Holy Spirit about ten years ago, in 1987. This was a real shocker as well. It surprised me. I was on my way to an intercessory prayer meeting we have every Saturday morning. I pulled up to the prayer room. It was a little prayer room that seated about 100 people. I was standing outside, and the music was so loud in there. I thought, “Well, the youth group is in there. They’re playing Handel’s *Messiah* or something.” It was so beautiful. I thought, “Well, at least they have good music. They have it up on volume ten out of ten.” It was so loud, I thought it was going to demolish the speakers. I thought, “Oh man.” I said, “How do they do that?” As a pastor I thought, “Who left the door unlocked? Who has the keys? Who gave the youth group the keys?”

I opened the door. There were only about four cars there. I was one of the first people there. I thought, “Boy, they are really cranking this thing.” I opened the door to the building; the prayer room was right there, just as if I opened the door.

I opened the door and it was totally silent. I shut the door; I opened it again. I said, “What was that?” I went in and there were two or three men sitting up at the front, and no one at the sound booth.

I said, “Was someone playing music?”

They said, “No. No. We just got here a couple of minutes ago.”

I said, “Oh my goodness, what was that?” I mean, it was thunderously loud, like Handel’s *Messiah*. It was the voice of angels worshiping.

I said, “Honestly, don’t play games with me!” Because I didn’t know how they could have gotten from the front of the room to the back of the room as it was, but I thought maybe they had some new e-mail remote control or something. With all the new computer stuff, you never know what’s up.

I said, “Really?” I didn’t tell anyone what happened; I just kept it to myself. I said, “Boy, this is going to be a really hot prayer meeting today.”

About fifteen or twenty people came, and the man got up and struggled through the worship. I thought, “OK, well, it’s going to be a really anointed prayer time. The worship was a little strained, but it’s going to be a really anointed prayer time.”

Three or four different guys and gals got up and prayed. It was a typical prayer meeting—a little boring and a little scattered and hard to stay with, but there we were.

I said, “Oh, I know. Something is going to happen when I pray—when the man of God gets up there!” I was so excited, because I knew something was going to break loose today. I went up there with a certain amount of smugness and self-righteousness. No one knew, but I was smiling all the way up there. “Let the man of God pray and you’ll see where the anointing is!” you know. I didn’t say that, of course.

I got up there; it was pretty low level, and not anointed at all. I sat down; I said, “Well, maybe it will come at the end. I don’t know; something is bound to happen. I had a major encounter with the choirs of heaven.” I’ve never experienced anything like it, before or since. It was thunderous, powerful, and beautiful. Then it was over.

I left and I was driving home. I thought, “What was that? Why did that happen?”

This thought came to me, which I assume was inspired by the Lord. I can’t say the Lord told me, but I believe it was a divinely-inspired thought. It was this; I’ll speak it as the Lord was saying it: “Every time you gather before My throne, that’s what’s happening in the realm of the Spirit. Every time.”

THE ANGELS ARE ENRAPTURED WHEN THE SAINTS ON EARTH ARE PRAYING

I’ve been to so many unanointed, boring, dull prayer meetings like this, and this is what was happening on the other side. He says, “This was the reason nothing special happened in your experience, because you don’t understand that your life is hidden in Christ” (cf. Col. 3:3). “This is what’s happening every time you pray—every time.”

I was blown away. I said, “Really?”

Then the thought came to me very strongly, that out of 1.5 million people in Kansas City how many human beings were actually praying that morning? Maybe two or three thousand in their private prayer times; maybe 5,000—who knows? Out of 1.5 million people, only a few thousand people were praying, at most, and the Lord’s inspiration to me was this: He said, “The percentage of the human race that actually does this wise thing called ‘coming before God’ is so small. They don’t feel much, but it’s so infinitely wise to do what you did this morning that the angels are exuberant when a human being does this. There are only a few thousand of you out of the millions here who are bothering with it.”

The angels see the value of it. It’s so glorious. It’s hidden from you because, again, your life is hidden. So much of the glory of our life is hidden, but the angels are enraptured with joy when the saints on earth are praying.

Hebrews 12:1 says a great cloud of witnesses surrounds us. The angels and believers who stand around the throne of God are witnessing what we do here. I don’t mean they see everything we do down here, but they’re somewhere witnessing some of the unfolding of the drama of redemption. I’m not saying they know everything you do every day, but the Scripture speaks of witness. They have joy in heaven when you initially get saved. I

believe their joy doesn't stop when you get saved, and their involvement doesn't stop when you get saved. Angels are involved in ways we cannot see. It's hidden from us, but they're excited when you're praying.

THE ANGELS REJOICE WHEN WE PURSUE THE HEART OF GOD

I come before the throne of God and say, "Father, I love You. I stand in Your presence, Lord. I stand before Your holy throne."

I imagine myself on the sea of glass like crystal, speaking to this God who is clothed in the garments of light, with His Son at His right hand, with this rainbow around the throne, and myriads of angels, and the angels are singing Handel's *Messiah*. They're saying, "Another human being is worshiping You, God. This is occasion for celebration. Another human being on the earth is worshiping—one of the few." Maybe there are 500 million believers out of six billion people. The percentage is quite small. It really is. I think the angels are overjoyed when we initially repent, and I think they're overjoyed when we continue on in God. I think they really get excited. The way I interpreted that experience is that it's really special for those angels when we're praying. It's not of no consequence; it matters that we're doing this.

We're beholding, we're praying, we're gazing on God's throne. We're beholding God sitting on His throne. We're looking into the glory of God. Now we don't have a very clear picture, but we're still doing it. We're gazing, meditating, attending to, fixing our mind on the throne of God. That's what I believe it means when I say, "Beholding the glory of the Lord."

FOUR DISTINCT WAYS OF BEHOLDING THE GLORY OF GOD

I would say there are four distinct ways of beholding the glory of God. These are four of many; there are many more than four. There are four ways of beholding the glory of God. Number one: through the spiritual discipline of prayer—whether it's devotional prayer when you're saying, "God, I love You," or intercessory prayer—"God, send Your power and touch Your Church"—you're interfacing with the throne of God.

You're actually looking at the throne of God; even if you're not doing it in a very focused way, that's where your prayer is going, whether you're directing it there or not. Your heart is changed when you direct it there, but God still hears it even if you're aiming wrong.

The second distinct way to look at the glory of God is the knowledge of God's personality: specifically contemplating who God is and His loveliness. That's what we've been talking about for the last two days: the actual knowledge of God Himself.

The third way we can behold or interact with the glory of God is through supernatural encounters with the Spirit. Maybe God gives you a dream or a vision; in a limited way, you're beholding. You're looking at part of the glory of God. Maybe someone lays hands on you and the Spirit of God comes on you. In a minimal way you're experiencing, you're beholding, you're looking at, you're gazing on, you're interacting with the glory of God.

WE STRENGTHEN OUR GENERAL AWARENESS THROUGH FOCUSED PRAYER

Those are just four. You could list several other ways, too. I want you to get the idea that Paul is talking about more than devotional prayer, but I think devotional prayer is probably one of the most common ways to do this. We're focusing on one particular aspect of beholding the glory of the Lord. I mentioned four different ways,

and there are others as well. My idea is to let you know that devotional prayer isn't all that 2 Corinthians 3:18 is talking about. 2 Corinthians 3:18 is talking about something more than devotional prayer, but that's the one we're going to look at now. It's the principle of beholding the glory of the Lord in devotional prayer: we want to distinguish between times of direct focus on God and the times of general awareness of God.

I've had the discussion many times through the years. I've heard men of God say, "Well, I just sort of pray as I go." They say, "You know, I keep my communion with God; I talk to Him throughout the day." I call that the general awareness of the presence of God in our lives. I believe that in order to strengthen these times of our general awareness, we need to have times where we pull away and develop direct, focused attention on the Lord, which we call our devotional prayer time.

I've never actually gone into a prayer closet, but you'll know what I mean when I say that my private time, when I focus directly on the Lord, strengthens and enhances my awareness of the Lord's presence throughout the day when my hands and mind are occupied in other things. People who have only a general awareness generally find that it gets weaker and weaker, and then diminishes altogether, in my opinion. I believe we need to distinguish between those two things, because the direct focus times strengthen and enhance the general awareness times.

Beholding: it's a diligent activity of the mind that focuses directly on God in the context of His throne. Again, in place of *beholding* you might put the words *gazing*, *meditating*, "looking at," "interacting with"; those are other words that are similar in meaning.

Remember the principle: we change our mind; God changes our heart or our emotions. I'm speaking of our emotions in this regard. We change what we fill our mind with, and God changes our emotional chemistry. You can't grit your teeth and make your emotions different, but you can without any inspiration at all fill your mind with the Word of God. Even though you can't make it anointed, you can put it into your mind.

What I mean by beholding the glory of the Lord is the positioning of our minds before God with earnest attentiveness. It's coming before the Lord in our private prayer time. It's the positioning of our mind with real attentiveness. I don't mean we're just sitting there looking around the room whistling, thinking, "Dude, what's happening?" I mean we really lock into the throne of God. We focus with our mind upon Him in the attempt of unbroken concentration. Of course I've never succeeded in unbroken concentration, but it's that desire to take a time away to really focus on God the Father and His Son on Their throne, and locking into that, whether I'm interceding for revival, or telling God I love Him, or meditating on the Scriptures for the purpose of turning them into conversation. Whichever way it goes, I'm talking to God in a focused way.

I'm going to repeat number one in different language, because maybe if you say it differently, different people relate to it in different ways. It's a mental posture of reaching to God with focused concentration. It's a mental posture.

I guess the point I'm making is that beholding the Lord is an act of your will that engages your mind; you can do it whether you feel inspired or not. That's what I'm trying to say. You don't have to feel inspired to behold the Lord. It's an act of your will that specifically engages the mind, whether you feel inspired or don't have any spiritual feelings about it at all. It's a mental posture of reaching to God on His throne with focused concentration.

FIXING OUR GAZE ON JESUS IN THE MIDST OF THE LIGHT OF GOD'S THRONE

I'm going to say the same concept again: fixing our gaze on Jesus in the midst of the light of God's throne. It's the principle of setting our mind on God. I like how the New American Standard Bible says it in Romans 5; it says, "Those that set their mind on the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5, paraphrased). There's an act of your will where you set your mind in a certain direction. Again, you can't make your emotions flow, but you can set your mind. Your emotions will follow the setting of your mind in due time. Your emotions are the servants of your mind. That's why people who don't take time to set their mind on God through devotional prayer and filling their mind with the Word don't have emotions that are directed towards God. People who fill their mind with all kinds of recreation and entertainment have emotions like a little puppy dog, following them around. Your emotions will follow the setting of your mind. We have to take time to fill our mind with the Word of God.

That's why, again, I like the metaphor of a wood-burning stove. The wood-burning stove is your whole personhood. The fire is the indwelling Spirit. We put wood on it and we feed the Word of God into that wood-burning stove, into our personality. Then the heat, or the influence, will fill the house. It will impact whatever part of the Church God puts us in. The Lord is the One who provides the fire, but we have to stoke the fire by putting wood on it. We have to fill our mind with the Word of God.

WILLFULLY EXPOSING YOUR SPIRIT TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

It's the setting of our mind on God's glory. When you set your mind, when you behold the glory of God, you're thinking on God. This is what takes place. Number one: when you do this act of your will, you're deliberately exposing your human spirit to the presence of God. You're opening yourself to God's presence. You're basking in God's presence, so to speak. Whatever you set your mind, whether you know it or not, you're exposing your spirit to that influence. You may not feel it. In many ways it's kind of like an x-ray machine. You can be in front of an x-ray machine and not feel anything, but it's going through you. But if you get in front of that x-ray enough times, it will impact you inside. You get yourself in the presence of God or you get yourself in the presence of carnality; you set your mind on one or the other, and you may not feel the immediate impact in that hour, but you open your spirit to it.

You're sitting there. When you focus your mind, your spirit opens to it, and it does impact you; and even though it's invisible and indiscernible at first, the impact is accumulating in you. It really is accumulating in you. People go to movies and things that are constantly barraging their minds with sensuality. Even though they don't know it, they're exposing their spirit. Maybe an encounter or two isn't going to throw them off, but if they persist, time after time after time after time, it's like that x-ray machine. They may not feel the damage of it, but it will damage you if you get in front of it enough times. It works in a positive direction as well as a negative.

FRUIT GROWS IN OUR LIFE WHEN WE'RE HARDLY AWARE

Here I need to write, "The parable in Mark 4." I'll just quote it to you. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like the farmer who goes out and sows seed. When the farmer sows the seed, he goes to bed at night and, when he awakens, the seed grew. How it grew, he doesn't know. It grew when he was sleeping; it grew when he was unaware" (Mk. 4:26-27, paraphrased). One aspect of the kingdom of God is like that. My point is this: wherever you're setting your mind is how you're sowing seed into your spirit. If you set your mind on the throne of God, on the things of God, you go to bed, you go to sleep; in other words, you're unaware, you're not attending to it, and you wake up one day and your life is different.

Someone says, "When did you begin to really love God?"

You say, “I don’t even know when. I sowed the seed, I diligently sowed the seed, but when I wasn’t even aware, when I was sleeping, when I was in bed”—and being in bed means when he was unaware—“fruit grew in my life. I don’t even know when it happened.”

It’s working in you in an invisible, indiscernible way, but it’s accumulating in its impact in you. Again, it’s like the x-ray machine. You’re in front of it; you can’t feel a thing, but it will damage you in an unhealthy way if you stay in front of it too long.

COMING TO LOVE PRAYER THROUGH THE STRUGGLE TO PRAY

I remember my own personal struggle to be a man of prayer. I was eighteen and nineteen years old, and I was reading all these books on prayer. I was at the university. It was in 1974 or 1975. I was so adamant about being a man of prayer. I really wanted to be a man of prayer, but I found that prayer was so boring. It was terrible. I couldn’t stand praying, but I was afflicted by the idea that godly men pray. So I thought, “OK, if I want to be godly I have got to do this thing. It’s really going to make life hard for the next fifty years, but if I have to, I will.”

I would go into my prayer room. I did it every night at 9:00pm. I prayed from 9:00pm to 10:00pm, because someone said, “You have to pray an hour a day.” I don’t even know who said it, but some man said it and I believed it.

So at 9:01pm, I would go into my apartment. I lived with four men, and we were all involved in a campus ministry together. They all got the biggest kick out of this. I always hated 9:00pm. It would be 8:50, and I would start sweating. “Oh, no! In eight minutes I have to go face God who is so boring when He talks,” because He would never say anything. It was a really burdensome time. I always felt oppressed.

At 9:01pm I would go into the room. I would say, “OK. OK God, here I am. Fifty-nine minutes to go. OK, uh... oh yeah, thank You for arms and legs and thank You that I’m not starving and the people in the other part of the world are. Umm, stuff like that.” I played on the college football team. “Help me do well on the football team. Help me in the Bible studies. Yeah, that’s a good one. Help me in the Bible studies.” Fifty-eight minutes to go. I thought, “My goodness!” I said, “OK, God, what am I supposed to do for fifty-eight minutes?”

Then I actually started praying as I complained to God. I said, “I don’t know anything about this. Why are You so far away?” I didn’t even know I was actually praying when I was complaining, but prayer was so hard. I said, “Why do You make it so hard? Why will You not help me? Help me pray.”

I didn’t even count that as prayer. I count that as fleshing out, you know, but actually, looking back, that was the true prayer.

I could hardly ever make it until 10:00pm. It was miserable. Sometimes I would just sit on my bed in my bedroom and pout and be angry. “This is really a bad way to run Your kingdom, making me do this every day.” I really was oppressed in personal prayer. I had no idea that one day my life message would be prayer and communion with God. I couldn’t fathom such a thought in those days. I said to the Lord a number of times, “I’ll be the only man in the kingdom of God who dies hating prayer.” I said, “It will never work for me. I know I’ll be the only man for whom it will never work.” This way of thinking oppressed me for a number of years. I was eighteen years old.

I remember when I was twenty-three years old, and I was standing in front of a youth group. I was speaking on Psalm 19: “God’s Word is like honey, sweeter than the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:10, paraphrased). I was speaking on that. Not only was prayer really boring, but so was Bible study. Again, I liked to go to meetings. I didn’t like prayer; I didn’t like Bible study; I didn’t like witnessing. I hated fasting. I tried to fast as often as I could. I tried to fast once a week. I tried to pray; I tried to witness. I read some book where someone said he witnessed to a different person every day. He did it, so I promised God that I would do that. In those days, whatever a book did, I did. I don’t do it that way anymore, but I made this promise to God that I would witness to a person every day, like the man in the book.

I remember one night when I was at the university. It was 12:00am or 12:30am and I was in bed, and I said, “Oh, I forgot to witness to someone today.” I put on my clothes and ran down to the campus. I really did this. A man walked by at about 12:30, and I said, “Hey, how are you doing? Hey, do you ever think about God?”

He said, “No.”

I said, “Do you know Jesus?”

He said, “No.”

I said, “Do you want to know Jesus?”

He said, “No.”

I said, “Oh, goodbye.”

I went back up and went to bed. I said, “Are You satisfied? I did it, OK? Leave me alone. Why are You making me do this?”

I found out later that He wasn’t. I put a lot of this story in the book *Passion for Jesus*, but all the components were in place for a full-on Pharisee, trapped in self-righteousness. If I had succeeded in any of those disciplines, I would have been out of control with self-righteousness. Praise God I miserably failed in all of them.

I tell the story in the book of how the Lord changed me. Now it was five years later; I was twenty-three years old. I was speaking at this youth group on Psalm 19. I said, “The Word of God is sweeter than honey.”

“Oh,” I said. “I’ve come to love the Word of God. I’m not even aware of what I’m saying,” because by that time there was a flow of the Lord in me in the Word. I said, “Oh, I love the Word. It has become so precious to me.”

One of the people, some eighteen-year-old man, asked a question. He said, “When did you start loving the Word of God and prayer?”

That hit me like a bolt of lightning, because it hadn’t dawned on me that I loved the Word of God. I was so used to remembering myself as not liking it. I said, “What?”

He said, “When did you really start loving the Word of God? I want to be like you.”

It’s like that parable in Mark 4. The farmer sowed the seed, went to bed, woke up, and there was fruit. I said, “I don’t even know when.” I said, “I love the Word. This is incredible. I do love the Word!”

The little group said, “Oh, Mike is kind of spacing out on us.”

I said, “I really like the Word. It’s working. It works.”

They weren’t accustomed to the number of years that I agonized over not liking it. Here for the first time it dawned on me that I had never actually put the ideas together. I never had language for it. I said, “I’m changed. When did I change? I don’t even know when it happened.”

THAT WHICH WAS DIFFICULT AND LABORIOUS BECOMES A DELIGHT

That’s why that parable in Mark 4 is so powerful; that’s really how it works. When you’re completely unaware, the things that you used to love you don’t love so much anymore. The things that you used to disdain, the disciplines of the Spirit, you begin to enjoy. It’s like going on a canoe trip; you’re paddling against the current. There are always exceptions, but typically when you’re doing a new discipline in the Spirit, it’s like you’re swimming or paddling against the current. You’re going upstream. This is the case with every new discipline in the Spirit, whether for a number of months or even in some cases a number of years in my experience, although everyone’s experience is different. I went against the current for a season. It was effort; it was work. It wasn’t enjoyable. I remember very, very specifically in a very distinct way how laborious and difficult were these unfamiliar ways of the Spirit; I remember how hard they were, but there’s a place in God where the current changes. I don’t know how to define where that place is. It’s different for every person, even for every discipline of the Spirit. In each of those, the current changed, and that which was unfamiliar and difficult became enjoyable—not 100 percent enjoyable, but as a rule it became enjoyable. That was an amazing thing that I began to understand.

DESIRE, DETERMINATION, DISCIPLINE, DELIGHT

I want to encourage people to stay with it. Stay with it. Put your mind on it. Open your spirit to this thing. It’s the deliberate setting of your mind. This principle involves a conscious, deliberate activity of the mind. It does require some commitment, time, and energy. I would rather tell you that on the front end. I don’t want to say it will just be easy. I believe there’s an element in all the disciplines of the Spirit, on the front end, when you’ve envisioned doing it. I think Larry Lea is the one who coined the phrase. He said, “First there’s desire. You have a determination that you’re going to do it. ‘I want to be a man of prayer. I want to be a woman of prayer.’ Then there’s discipline. And then there comes delight.”

I heard this some years ago. I can’t remember if I said it correctly. First there’s the determination that you’re going to do it, the setting of your heart to do it. You get a vision for it. You go to a seminar, read a book, or have an experience. You say, “OK, I’m going to be a woman of prayer.” “I’m going to be a man of prayer.” You set your heart on it. Then there’s a season of discipline. Then later on, in the next season, there’s delight in it. Again, the delight isn’t an unbroken delight, but delight is the rule instead of the exception.

No matter where you are in God, there are still times when you experience a struggle in the disciplines, even in the ones you delighted in in former times. Most people quit the race on the front end, when they're swimming or paddling against the current. They don't give themselves a chance for the current to change, and they give up on it. I've found that to be true in intercession. I've found it to be true in devotional prayer. I've found it to be true in Bible study. I've found it to be true in fasting. I used to hate fasting. I've had seasons in the Lord where the Lord gave me an unusual grace in fasting, unusual in my experience, where I actually looked forward to fasting days. That's inconceivable to me, but I would find myself thinking, "Great! Tomorrow is a fasting day!" Whereas I used to say, "Tomorrow is a fasting day—oh no!"

FASTING INCREASES YOUR CAPACITY TO RECEIVE MORE EASILY AND FREELY

Fasting tenderizes your spirit. It really does. Fasting enhances your capacity to receive more. That's really what fasting does. Fasting doesn't earn you a thing; fasting gives you an increased capacity to receive more easily. That's what fasting does. It increases your capacity to receive more easily and freely. It enlarges your capacity to receive. It doesn't earn you anything, but I really believe in the discipline, the regular discipline of fasting. The Holy Spirit's impact on a person fasting produces tenderness inside of them.

I would challenge you if you don't have any heart for it right now. I certainly understand. I've gone years at a time without a heart for it, and I've gone years at a time where the Lord has helped me in a really regular way to fast at different times and in different ways. Ask the Lord to give you a desire and a grace to fast. Do that for a month or a year, and all of a sudden you'll discover a hunger, a willingness, even to some degree a longing for it. That's the Lord answering your preliminary cry: "Lord, help me fast." That's a real, legitimate thing to do. You'll find that all the disciplines in the Spirit have a kiss of God on them. There's a sweetness in every one of them, but the sweetness isn't necessarily found at the beginning. First, there's a determination to do it, or a decision to do it, because you have a vision for it. You've been inspired by someone; you've made a decision to do it.

Then there's that discipline season where you're doing it consistently against the current. Then there's the delight season where the current changes. Again, it isn't 100 percent delightful, but the rule, as opposed to the exception, is that there's the kiss of God, the enjoyment of God on it. This principle involves a deliberate activity of the mind that requires some time, some work, and some energy. I want to tell you on the front end, although many of you know this already: don't stumble or trip on the fact that some of these things are a little boring on the front end. It will change in time.

WE POSITION OURSELVES TO COOPERATE WITH GOD'S GRACE

Just to summarize the principle: we position ourselves to cooperate with God's grace. That's what we call it—*cooperating*. We do our part; God does His part. We cooperate with God's grace by setting our mind in a godly way that results in God releasing grace in due time to exalt the heart in grace. The reason I put, "exalt the heart," is because that verse in James 4. It says, "If you will humble yourself, God will exalt you in due time" (Js. 4:10, paraphrased). A lot of times we think that means He'll make us rich and famous. What it really means is this: He will exalt you in the grace of God. He will cause the grace of God to flow in you. There will be an exaltation in the grace of God in your experience. If you humble yourself, it isn't a guarantee that you'll be rich and famous one day, but it is a guarantee that God will exalt your heart in the grace of God. There will be a flow of God in you in due time. That's what He's talking about.

THE NATURE OF THE BEHOLDING THAT GOD REQUIRES

The nature of the beholding that God requires; this is a vital concept here. What kind of beholding? What's the nature of it? It's an interesting phrase, which the NIV obscures. I think the NIV makes it clear down in the margin. Most of the other versions put the phrase, "As in a mirror" (2 Cor. 3:18). We behold the Lord as in a mirror, or as in a *glass*, the King James says. The NASB talks about a mirror, as does the New King James and a number of others. That phrase, "as in a mirror," which the NIV puts in the margin, is a very vital phrase.

In the ancient world, a mirror was very different than a mirror in the twentieth century. If you look in a mirror today, what you see is what you get. However, 2,000 years ago in the ancient world, when you looked in a mirror, you had to move the mirror around. It was a very dim reflection. It wasn't a clear reflection at all. You had to squint and get in the light a little better. It wasn't that helpful; it was a dim beholding. Gazing as in a mirror meant a faint or dim ability to see. It didn't mean a clear ability to see. It's exactly the opposite of a mirror today.

NOW WE SEE AS IN A MIRROR DIMLY

Paul defines the metaphor of a mirror in the first letter to the Corinthians. So he expects them to know what he's talking about. In his first letter, in 1 Corinthians 13:12, he says, "In the age to come we will see face to face, but in this age we behold dimly as in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:12, paraphrased). He actually defines the metaphor of a mirror in 1 Corinthians 13:12. It's a dim beholding. We see faintly.

This is very, very important, because sometimes when you hear the subject of devotional prayer discussed, people tend to exaggerate. It never helps to exaggerate this subject. They use the two or three grand experiences they've had in devotional prayer, and present it like the norm. They take their intense, mountaintop experiences, and share them as though that's what happens, not just every day, but all day, every day. Then the innocent hearer listens to this, thinking, "All day, every day, you have that kind of intense ecstasy with God?"

That's a serious, non-biblical claim, and for people who are new in the Lord and believe that kind of exaggeration, the damage it does to them is great. Number one, they assume they're so broken that nothing can fix them, because their experience is nothing like that, or God doesn't like them at all. They end up really being enamored with the person giving the seminar, but they walk away with such judgment, condemnation, and despair about how messed up they are, because their experience is nothing like that.

Paul the apostle beheld the Lord dimly. He didn't behold the Lord in such clarity that it was like speaking face to face. Someone says, "I went face to face in communion with God." It's OK to use the metaphor, but Paul made it very clear. We don't see God face to face in this age. We don't see Him like that until the age to come. God never intended it to be face to face. If you want face-to-face communion in this age, you're simply believing for something that's not biblical. It isn't going to happen. I seriously suspect the person who proclaims those claims. I think it's exaggeration. If they mean, "I felt the Lord intensely a few times last week," OK, then that's what they mean, but "face to face" means something a lot more intense than that. But if that's all they mean, then that's OK. We see the Lord face to face in the age to come. That's the glory of the age to come. We see Him dimly; we see Him faintly.

What I mean by that is this: I close my eyes; I behold the glory of the Lord. My mind is wandering. I feel unanointed. Many times He seems really far away. I say, "Lord, what do You think?"

The Lord says, “Well, you’re doing it in a biblical way. I only told you to behold Me dimly like in a mirror. That’s all I’ve ever asked you to do.”

I remember when it hit me that unanointed prayer was the only kind of prayer God ever asked me to offer Him. I said, “Well, I can do that.”

See, I had this idea that the only kind of prayer that could change me was the kind of prayer where I felt God’s presence. I thought the only kind of beholding that resulted in transformation was beholding face to face. In my experience, most of my beholding of the Lord was like looking in a mirror, very dimly, but I thought the only kind of beholding that actually changed me was face-to-face beholding. I mean really feeling-oriented, really near to God. Of course my experience was so minimal; it hardly ever happened that I would feel God when I prayed, so what did I conclude? My prayer was a waste of time.

I remember the day. Finally, this verse made it click. I said, “‘As in a mirror, beholding dimly’?” I said, “Unanointed prayer is the only kind of beholding He has ever asked me to do.” I said, “I can do that. I can come before You with a scattered mind, feeling dull and spiritually lethargic. I can do that.”

I didn’t hear God’s voice, but the essence of the Word of God is this: “That’s all I’ve ever asked you to do. Position yourself before Me and let Me do the transforming. I’ll make it powerful and I’ll release feelings in due time, here and there according to My wisdom. You just get in front of Me.”

UNANOINTED PRAYER IS RELEVANT

I was so excited. I mean, I had more unanointed prayer per capita than any person I have ever met. I had so much unanointed prayer where I never felt anything. I was in great despair about it. When this verse connected with me, I remember in the university days telling my roommates, “Guys, this is incredible.”

Here’s the sentence: I said, “Unanointed prayer is relevant.”

They looked at me and said, “What?”

I said, “It’s relevant. That’s all God ever wanted me to do anyway. It counts. It works. Unanointed prayer is relevant. The hills are alive with the sound of music.” I was skipping and leaping on the hills. “Unanointed prayer is relevant! It’s great! I can do it. I can do it!” Literally I remember the day where it connected in my understanding that unanointed, dim beholding is all God ever asked me to do. His part was to transform, inspire, illuminate, empower my emotions, illuminate my understanding, and transform me. I said, “This is great.” I said, “Lord, do You understand the implications of this? We can all do this!”

The Lord might have said, “Yes, yes, I set it up that way.”

That’s why in the NIV, when they skip the words, “As in a mirror,” I want to write to the editors to get that back in the translation. That’s a big one: “Beholding the Lord as in a mirror.”

“WITH UNVEILED FACE . . . BEHOLDING AS IN A MIRROR THE GLORY OF THE LORD”

This is an interesting phrase: “But we all, with unveiled face. . .” (2 Cor. 3:18). It’s an unveiled face with a tender heart, as opposed to a hardened heart. Number two: with a heart that’s honest with our sin; we’re

transparent. Number three: *unveiled* means we have confidence that God is accepting us in our brokenness—with confidence in the mercy of God. It's the opposite of a veiled heart; it's an unveiled heart. It's an unveiled face. We're coming with tenderness. We're saying we really want a focus of intimacy. Number two: we're coming; we're not blame-shifting and covering our sin. We're very transparent. We're open. "God, we have sinned." We're not trying to rationalize anything; we have raw honesty before God.

THE CONFIDENCE THAT HE EMBRACES US IN OUR BROKENNESS AND WEAKNESS

Number three: most importantly, it's the confidence that in our brokenness and weakness He embraces us because of the work of the cross. You have to come with an unveiled face for the beholding to work. It's being consistent in the routine before you experience the feelings of inspiration. It's called swimming against the current—staying consistent in the midst of the routine. The feelings of inspiration will come in God's time.

There have been seasons in the last twenty years where the feelings were so much more regular for a number of months, and then in the next season the feelings of inspiration were withheld for a period. Then they were released again. I used to have simple equations. Now I don't. There were seasons where I was doing more carnal things, with less focus on the Lord. Your life in God doesn't begin on Monday. If you do Monday and Tuesday rightly, then you feel good on Wednesday and Thursday. That's not right. If you sow in 1996 and 1997 and 1998, you feel differently in 1999 and the year 2000. It isn't like you sow on Monday and then you feel good on Tuesday. That's not how it works for me. I sow for three years and I feel differently in the next three years.

Even in the next three years, when I get into a spiritual "funk," the operation of what I've done in these last three years is still working in my soul. It's a little more complex than just saying, "If I have my quiet time, then the day is filled with God; if I don't have my quiet time the day is hard." No, it's a life flow with the Man Jesus Christ.

There were times when I was really carnal, and in spiritual bad moods, and I felt the power of God on my heart. I said, "Now God, this is ridiculous."

He says, "No. You've been sowing in the Spirit for years, and even when you're feeling spiritually cranky, you're still going to feel Me."

Then I had other times when I was really locked in for a few months, I mean really devoted and focused, and I felt nothing like I did in the carnal season. I said, "Lord, this is a little confusing."

He says, "Well, you won't figure out all the operations of My Spirit, the releasing and the restraining, in a one-week or a one-month or a three-month cycle. These things come in two- and three- and five-year cycles, not in one-day and one-week and one-month cycles."

I quit worrying about it. My goal is just to be consistent in the routine. The feelings come and go. I can't make them come; I can't determine it at all, so I don't even worry about it. I don't measure it. When someone asks me how I'm doing, I answer according to my consistency in the routine. I don't answer according to how much feeling is being released. I quit measuring that a long time ago. I don't care about measuring that. My part is the consistency. God's part is the releasing of the feeling. God has all kinds of reasons why He releases and

restrains the feelings. There are a lot of principles behind that that aren't just, "If you sin today, you don't have feelings." It doesn't work exactly that way.

IT'S HARD TO PREDICT HOW THE SPIRIT WILL FLOW

I'm going to tell you a story that's a little different than this. It's off the path a bit, but it comes to mind, so I'm going to tell you. Rather than the feeling of inspiration in devotional prayer, the subject I'm talking about is feeling the anointing in my ministry. It's kind of the same principle, but it's my public ministry instead of my private devotions. I remember one time, maybe four or five or six years ago, when we were having a conference in Kansas City and I was speaking. It was one of the last mornings of the conference. When you have a conference like that, we have so many pastors and friends from all over the place, so you tend to stay up until two in the morning. You get up at six, have breakfast, and go to all the meetings. By Friday you're just fried toast. I was so tired.

I remember this. I got home really, really late on a Thursday night. I was talking on Friday morning. I was so tired from the week; it was a great week. I was exhausted, but I was so fragile. My body was so burnt out. I mean, I was at the end. I got home around two; I hadn't even thought about my message for the next morning.

I asked my wife, "Make sure you set the alarm for six. It'll be hard to get up at six, but I need to do it, because I totally haven't even thought about it because I've been so enjoying the fellowship and all the stuff all week."

So she forgot to set the alarm or something; I don't really know what happened. The meeting started at nine. It was a forty-five minute drive. The alarm went off at 8:15am. I should have been walking out the door about five minutes before. I was completely unprepared. I looked in the mirror. I looked like a train wreck, and I was mad at my wife. She said, "Oh yeah, I should have set the alarm. I meant to do that." At the time, that seemed like a dumber answer than it does now. Number one, I was so tired anyway because of the accumulated fatigue of the week. It was a great week, but I was so tired.

Now I was mad at my wife. I did a five-minute job and ran out the door. I had no thought for anything. There was a man sitting on my porch, a man who was on the verge of being church-disciplined because he was doing so many wrong things. We hardly ever church-disciplined anyone but he was one step away. He was sitting on my porch; I opened the door and he said, "I want a ride."

I said, "OK."

He said, "Do you know what troubles me about you guys? You guys think you're so special and anointed. You're too good for all of us little people."

He was sitting in the back of the car, kind of railing on me. I was totally exhausted, I hadn't had coffee, I was mad at my wife. I was completely unprepared, but I was so tired. He was explaining all the reasons why I was unfriendly and why I never did things with the common people like him. He was really mad because a few of the other pastors had been confronting him, and he was mad at all pastors right now. I was just trying not to scream at the man. That was my goal: if I didn't scream at him, I won. I had a forty-five minute drive. He was rebuking me; he was going on and on.

I asked my wife, "Would you just talk to this man for me?"

She was mad at me for being mad at her. She said, “No!”

So I was really mad at her now, because she wouldn’t talk to this man.

I said, “I have to think about God for a minute. I’m going to be on, and there are 7,000 people at this conference.”

We got there late. When you have 5,000-7,000 people at a conference, there’s no parking. It was 100 degrees outside; it was summer in Kansas City. We parked nine blocks away. By the time I arrived, I was sweating. Now it was so late—it was 9:45 or 10:00am. I walked into the building. It was the end of the week, so how was everyone feeling? They were all hyper; they were so excited. A lady walked in and stopped me: “Can I tell you the dream I had last night?”

I said, “Oh please, not right now.” I was on the verge of yelling at everything, you know.

She said, “Oh, I have to tell you. It must be the Lord, because I ran into you in the foyer!”

I said, “Listen, lady, it isn’t the Lord.” I didn’t really say that. She told me.

I was walking down a hallway, and another man grabbed my arm. I was thinking, “Ah, don’t touch me!”

He said, “Brother this is the Lord, because I ran into you and I asked the Lord, if it was His will, to let me see you!”

He wanted to tell me something, a dream or a prophecy. This happened three more times. I was so frustrated. Now it was ten minutes after 10:00am. I got up on stage, and I was so hot, because it was 100 degrees outside. I was mad at my wife twice over—once for not setting the alarm, and then again for not talking to the man. I was mad at the man; I was mad at me for being mad. I was totally unprepared. My hair was dirty because I hadn’t taken a shower. Anyway, I felt horrible. I got up on the platform, and I was so miserable. The man doing the emceeing had been saying, “One more song, one more song, one more song...”

One of my big rules to everyone on the ministry team is, “I want you there on time.”

He looked at me and said, “You’re supposed to be on time.”

He was very upset at me, and I was thinking, “This isn’t a good time to remind me of my rule.”

I didn’t say that, but he asked me, “No, really, where were you?”

I wanted to say, “My wife didn’t set the alarm,” etc. But instead I said, “It’s a long story.” I was sweating and frustrated beyond measure. It was 100 degrees—it was so hot!

They handed me the microphone. If I had been smart, I would have said, “I can’t do it.” But I said, “Turn to the Song of Solomon.” I didn’t have a clue what I was going to do. I said, “Turn to the Song of Solomon.” So they did. I just started reading. The energy of the Lord came on me.

After about thirty or forty minutes, the Spirit of the Lord descended in the midst of these thousands of people. People started weeping everywhere. It broke into the message and I couldn’t finish the message. People were weeping everywhere, and it went on for forty-five minutes. No one was leading the ministry time; they were just sobbing all across the room. The men on our ministry team were saying, “Wow, what’s going on?”

Then the worship team came up and we had the most intensive celebration and dancing for about an hour and a half. Now it was 1:30pm. It was the most glorious meeting I’ve ever done in my life.

A group of Korean students flew over from Korea and they wanted to talk to me. I was so happy right now. We were in the room together, and they said, “This was so awesome! How did you prepare for the meeting today?”

I looked at them and said, “You don’t want to know.”

They said, “No. Did you get up early and seek the Lord today?”

I looked at them, and it dawned on me. I looked up, and I imagined God winking with a smile. I said, “No, really, you don’t want to know how I prepared for the sermon today.”

They said, “No, we really do want to know.”

I said, “It’s going to blow all of your equations.”

“IT DOESN’T WORK THE WAY YOU THINK IT WORKS”

Here’s the point. I know that was a long story, but you did enjoy it. Though I’ve fallen into an anointed devotional prayer time after some of the most carnal times in my life, I’ve also had some of the most intensive times of devoted, single-minded focus on the Lord, and for weeks I couldn’t get a feeling towards God to save my life. I said, “Now Lord, You’re going to have to tell me how this works one of these days.”

The only answer God will give me is, “It doesn’t work the way you think it works.” That’s the only answer I could get from Him. “It does work according to a divine principle but not like you think.” The same thing is true in the anointing of ministry. There were times when I fasted and prayed for three days, and then I went to the conference, and the spirit of oppression fell; every word was so boring, no one could pay attention, and everyone was falling asleep. There have been other times when I was carnal, undistracted, and unfocused, and I went from there straight into the conference, and the Spirit of the Lord was there.

The Lord’s answer was something like this: “I’m not legalistic; I don’t do it like you would do it.”

WHAT WE’VE SOWN IN FOR YEARS CAN’T BE UNDONE IN A DAY

One of the other answers is, “What happens in one time frame is really some of the fruit of what you did for years in God.” So it isn’t just what you’ve done that day. Not only that, but the Lord hides His presence in devotional prayer and even in ministry, not only because you’ve done wrong, but sometimes precisely because

you've done right. The hiding of His face enlarges your heart in the big picture in a way that's greater than God releasing His presence on you. The withholdings of the Lord are as strategic as the releasings of the Lord.

So I quit trying to figure it out. I just say, "I trust You."

My goal is to do the consistency in the routine. When I don't do it, I don't worry about it. When I fall short of the consistency, which I've done many times, I just take up tomorrow where I left off today. It's like I told the folks when we had the forty-day fast at our church that was going around everywhere. I said, "If you're on this fast, and it's day eight, and you break down and go eat a pizza, so what? Start fasting again on day nine. Don't worry about a perfect track record; just start again the next day."

They said, "Really?"

I said, "Don't make a big deal out of it. God isn't a gymnastics teacher scoring you on every move you make. If someone asks you if you're fasting, you don't have to tell them every doughnut you ate. Just say, 'I like God!'"

It isn't a system of jumping through hoops. It's the embrace of a God who really loves you who calls you His bride. So if you fail, forget it. Push delete and start again tomorrow. It really is that simple. The pay is the same. Start again tomorrow.

"Well I fell four days in a row. I didn't fast on the eighth, ninth, tenth, or twelfth day."

"So what? Start again on the thirteenth day and don't worry about it."

I remember Day 32 was a Sunday, and I told the church, "You know, we have eight more days. If you want to be a part of the forty-day fast, start now. There are eight more days. Go for it."

So a few people did and they said, "We participated in the forty-day fast."

Of course the Pharisees said, "No you didn't!"

I said, "Yes they did. They did, too." I said, "It doesn't matter. Just start now on the last days and join us. Don't worry about it if you blow your goals. Start your goals anew tomorrow." Of course the key is that you don't want to make goals so high you blow them all the time, because then despair comes on you and you quit. You have to make attainable goals and let them increase over the years and over time.

AN ILLUMINED MIND AND AN EMPOWERED HEART

OK. The promised result of beholding the Lord: He said you'll be transformed from glory to glory. Basically this is different terminology for the same idea. It's the idea of being transformed—being strengthened in the inner man. It's having Christ formed in you. It's called being renewed; there's a fresh supply of the Spirit. Those are all different ways of saying *transformed*.

The verse I started with is Hebrews 10:16—God writing His law in your mind and your heart. That's one of the best verses for explaining transformation; it's an illumined mind and an empowered heart. So that's the result. if

you'll fill your mind with stuff, God promises to give you revelation and change your emotions. If you behold the Lord, He will transform you from glory to glory. It's a progressive experience. It's progressive.

Number one: there are subtle experiences of God's glory. I mean, they aren't very powerful, but they are real. For instance, you have spiritual hunger. You care about the fact that you're not praying. Did you know that it isn't the devil that's making you care that you're not praying, and it isn't the flesh? That's the work of the glory of God in your spirit already. It's the very fact that you might be sitting there saying, "O God, I really want to do this."

The Lord says, "It's already working in you." The very cry of hunger in you is the beginning of the glory of God in you. It isn't the devil and it isn't the flesh.

Other ways: there's dramatic experience of God's glory. There are the power encounters that usually occur only rarely. For example, I heard the angels in thunderous chorus for five or ten seconds. That's happened once in twenty-five years. That was a real rush. I thought, "Whoa!" I like that one, but mostly the glory of God is just the ebb and flow. It's a feeling. Again, it's the inspired heart and the empowered emotions. They come and they go. There's an ebb and a flow to it. That's the glory of God in your life. It really is.

Don't think to yourself, "Well, I'll have the glory of God when I'm as mature as Paul the apostle."

The Lord says, "No." You're going from glory to glory all the way through the journey; from your very beginning days all the way through, you're experiencing a little more of the presence of God. We're going from glory to glory.

Paragraph C. We're changed into the same image. We're reflecting the character of Jesus. We're reflecting Jesus' character. You may have heard the "beholding and becoming" principle. I've heard theologians say, "What you behold is what you become." If you gaze continually at sensuality, your heart will be filled with it. If you gaze on spiritual things you'll have a hunger for spiritual things. What you think on is what your emotions are. What you see is what you become. I encourage people to be strengthened in the specific areas of Christ's image. I'm quoting the verse in Isaiah 40:31. You know the passage: "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31). In whatever area you wait upon the Lord, you will be renewed in strength in that area. You want passion for Jesus? You want to be strengthened in passion? You want to love Jesus like the Father loves Him (Jn. 17:26)? Then take that passage into the prayer room and say, "Lord, I wait on You." "They that wait on the Lord will be strengthened. Strengthen me in passion." In whatever area you want to be strengthened, come before the Lord in that area. He will strengthen you in due time. Not necessarily in that week, but in the course of the months and years that follow, you will be strengthened.

You want more wisdom? Ask God for wisdom. You may not get it in a week or a month. In whatever area you wait upon the Lord, you'll be strengthened in that area.

Paul says, "Behold, we all with unveiled faces beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit."

It's the work of the Holy Spirit to change you. It isn't your discipline that changes you. All the discipline does is removes hindrances so that the life of the Spirit is more fully received. It's the life of the Spirit in you that's the author and the power of the change.