

This morning we will continue in our Seeking Him series which will be focused on how we can know a deeper intimacy in our relationship with God, today we will begin look at the *means* by which by the power of the Holy Spirit we can seek God and grow in our walk with God. But before so, lets take a step back and look at the context of our Seeking Him sermon series. This series started when we spent the first eight months of 2015 going through the book of Romans, which was the apostle Paul’s letter to the churches in Roman regarding the Holy Spirit empowered work of God for salvation through Jesus Christ. We then spent the next three months walking through Galatians 5:16-25 looking at the numerous fruits of the Spirit that should be evident in us when we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. And we then concluded that series with Gerhardt Du Toit leading us through six sessions of a three-day prayer summit, which was focused on our common desperate need to grow in our walk God by deepening our relationship with God. We finished the year by looking at four God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered prayers in scripture that taught us that God will answer our prayers when we embrace the reality that prayer is not so much about communicating with God or asking things from God as it is about developing a deep, intimate relationship with God. And we learned that when we do pray to God and ask things from God, we will end up waiting for God to answer our prayers - and that waiting is not about waiting to see what God what will give us or do for us, but rather about waiting to see when we are willing to surrender our hearts and lives God’s will.

The bottom line in everything we heard and learned and experienced in God’s Word last year was that *the only thing that matters in all of life is where we are in our relationship with God*. And last week we looked at the reality that God tells us in His Word that we all need *to continually seek God* because we live in a fallen world; and the devil still prowls around seeking to deceive us and destroy us; and we all, even as born-again followers of Jesus Christ, still have within us, remaining sin that keeps us from God. And because that is true 1 Chronicles 16:11 commands us to: *“Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!”* In light of that command and because we are natural born spiritual wanderers, we also saw that scripture is replete with warnings and cautions about doing so. And last week we learned that if left to ourselves we would not heed God’s warnings/ cautions, and we would continue to wander, but that by God’s mercy and grace He has provided a way to empower us to seek God - and that way the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:13-14 the apostle Paul tells us: *“If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”* The Puritan pastor John Owen once said: “If you are not killing sin, sin is killing you.” But we cannot kill our remaining sin or defeat the devil or defend ourselves against world on our own. But we can - *by the power of the Holy Spirit!*

But that does not mean we do nothing. While we cannot succeed on our own without the Holy Spirit, we are still responsible to *respond* to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word commands us to *“Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!”* This is what we saw last week when the prophet Hosea proclaimed to God’s people: *“Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you”* (Hosea 10:12). The Spirit is the one who empowers us to sow and reap and break up and *“seek.”*

This is what revival/renewal is all about: a constant and continuous seeking a deeper relationship with God by humbly and obediently following Jesus by the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit, in the midst of the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual battles of life – the greatest of which is the inward battle within our own hearts. God’s Word affirms this in Jeremiah 17:9: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 15:19 when he said: *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”* We also saw the apostle Paul affirm this issue regarding the *heart* as we went through Romans together. After opening his letter by presenting God’s case for the total depravity of our sin, he then declares God’s provision for rescuing and redeeming us from sin, and then in Romans 5:1 proclaims: *“Therefore, since we*

*have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” - and then in Romans 6:17 Paul speaks where that change happened: “Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart” because in Romans 5:5 he tells us how it happened: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”*

For those of us in Christ - this means life on earth is about *change*. Because we are fallen creatures who live in a fallen world, everything in the world is changing all the time - ascending or declining, constructing or crumbling, developing or decaying, ripening or rotting, growing or shrinking, living or dying. And regardless of what we might want to believe, there’s no status quo, no coasting when it comes to our natural or our spiritual lives. We are either growing stronger towards life in the Spirit or growing weaker towards death in the flesh. Romans 8:6 says: *“For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”* This is the battle that will always be in our hearts as long as we are alive on this earth. This is why God’s Word calls us to seek a deeper relationship with God by humbly and obediently following Jesus by the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is why we are looking at the memory verses from the Bible in the Seeking Him workbook that will speak to us about the *different means* by which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can seek God and grow in our walk with God – through humility, honesty, repentance, grace, holiness, obedience, a clear conscience, forgiveness, sexual purity, the spirit filled life and a personal devotional life.

I know some of you have been through studies, seminars and church services that were focused on revival/renewal. I’ve been through those myself and they have their place in our faith. But I’ve also experienced a *different kind* of personal and corporate revival and renewal than the studies, seminars and services I attended - which dramatically changed my heart and life because it went much deeper than anything I’ve ever read, studied and experienced. In fact so much so, that I spent five years of my life reading, studying, researching, writing, and teaching and receiving a Doctorate Degree in Revival *because* once you’ve experienced and tasted and been changed by a deep, Holy Spirit-empowered revival/renewal – *you desperately want it again*. And I know from that experience that I constantly and desperately need it again. I also know from 3 decades of ministry experience that everyone who claims Jesus constantly and desperately needs it again too. I also know some of us are going to have a hard time with this because we don’t like change and don’t want to change. But the reality is none of us is perfect yet, we are all a work in progress and we all have far to go in our walk with God. And the truth is God loves us too much to leave us as we are. That’s why Jesus died on a cross. And so we are not going to conduct seminars or revival meetings in the weeks ahead. We are just going to *humbly* seek God because the only thing that matters in all of life is where we are in our relationship with God.

In the summer of 1986, two passenger ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed that the cause of the accident wasn’t a technology problem like radar malfunction or even thick fog. The cause of the fatal collision was the result of *human pride*. Each captain was aware of the other ship’s presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first – and by the time they came to their senses, it was too late – and many lost their lives. God’s Word tells us time and again that the very first step down the path towards God is the step of *humility*. Zephaniah 2:3 says: *“Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.”* Psalm 25:9 tells us God *“leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.”* The Bible tells us that the God saves the humble (Psalm 18:27), hears the humble (Psalm 55:19), makes the humble glad (Psalm 34:2), takes pleasure in the humble (Psalm 149:4), and lifts up the humble (Psalm 147:6). The pathway to God’s heart in revival/renewal is *humility*; it is the first step we take in seeking God: *“If my people who are called by my name HUMBLE themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land”* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Humbleness is a character quality of the heart, which reflects the character of God's heart we were created for: *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, HUMILITY, meekness, and patience"* (Colossians 3:12). Humility is a character quality of our hearts that should be reflected in all our actions. William Willimon, chaplain at Duke University, said he had a church member once who, in his job with a large corporation, was responsible for hiring people for his company's executive training program. He was the one who had to figure out who of those who were young and inexperienced would make it. He gave them tests, asked for recommendations, looked at their college transcripts. However his most effective test was the evening he took each of them out to dinner and observed their behavior at the table. "Watch how a person acts at a meal," he claimed, "that will tell you all you need to know about their character." This is something Jesus understood.

*Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* Luke 14:7-11

The 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke opens with Jesus visiting the house of a prominent Pharisee; it was the custom of the day for the head of the religious leaders to invite the visiting preacher over for dinner after synagogue. Tradition tells us they would have sat around a low table and people would have reclined as they ate. Though there were no assigned places to be seated, it would also have been customary for such a group of officials to sit in a place that had a sort of an imaginary level of honor attributed to it. Basically, people picked their seats based on their opinion of themselves – and the closer you sat to the head of the table and the guest of honor, the more status you were given.

We read that Jesus and his disciples arrived at the home of the prominent religious leader early enough at this meal to observe that there was clearly a pecking order among this group. Back then there were no place cards to indicate where the guests were to sit, so as a guest entered he would look for the most honored spots at the table. But the reality is - the guests were not really free to sit where they desired. True proper etiquette was *for the host* to seat and reseal guests as the need arose. Jesus gave them an example of a host asking a presumptuous guest to give up his place of honor to another guest. In thinking more of themselves than they ought, they mostly likely would find themselves embarrassed at being asked to "step down" to a lower place. The one who seeks to advance in their social standing may end up overreaching themselves and become publicly humiliated.

Jesus recommended to the group that they should take the most humble spot; then they might be happily surprised when the host asks them to move closer to him. He says: *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* In this statement our Lord addresses the *heart* in moving from an issue of social custom to spiritual application. It is not just the dinner host who might humble you, Jesus is saying - but God Himself. Therefore don't presume on your position, but be humble before God and others. Let God exalt you, not yourself. The reality of what is going on here - for the religious leaders and for us - is that Jesus is not trying to teach kingdom principles to those who are curious. He is speaking to a people who professed to love God. As these folks scrambled for the seats of honor, Jesus suggested they seek the lowest place in the pecking order.

While it may be appropriate for the best musician to get the "first chair" in a high school band or college orchestra – it is not in the kingdom of God. Where God reigns *“the last will be first, and the first last”* (Matthew 20:16). Yet this is so far from where we live. By nature we are a selfish prideful people. Every time I take an airplane somewhere I am amazed at how grown people who will push and shove like little children to be the first ones on and off the plane. We see the same on the streets we drive on, at the stores that we shop at, and in the places where we work. Sadly we see it in the churches also.

We who claim Christ are just as often self-centered as the society we live in. One person wrote: “Pride has infected all of us. We are easily hurt. We are quick to pout and mope. We whine and complain about our feelings. We are emotionally weak; it doesn’t take much for us to break. Our marriages break easily. Our happiness breaks easily. Our faith in Christ and our commitment to the church breaks easily. We are easily disheartened, and have little capacity for surviving and thriving in the face of criticism and opposition. When historians list the outstanding character traits of our day - tenacity, commitment, endurance, patience, resolve and perseverance will probably not be on the list. The list will begin with an all-consuming interest in the self. When you are surrounded by a society of emotionally fragile quitters, that same ethos will work its way into our hearts and lives.” This is why we need to honestly and gracefully challenge one another to something joyfully deeper in Jesus Christ.

It’s been said that the greatest enemy of Christianity is Christians. To those outside the community of faith we are often seen as rude and self-centered. And we are because we have a pride problem. Pride is the root of all sin because pride is all about us: what we want, what we get, what we look like, what we can do, how people see us, how people treat us – and how people, things and life revolve around us. The truth is - Christian folk sometimes say and do some pretty awful things to one another and to others outside the community of faith - in the name of Jesus. There’s a "Peanuts" cartoon where the terrible-tempered Lucy approaches her brother Linus, who is watching television. Linus says to Lucy, "I was here first, so I get to watch what I want." Without another word, Lucy marches over to the television set and switches the channel to what she wants to watch. Linus protests with a "Hey!" Lucy assumes her know-it-all stance and proclaims, "In the 19th chapter of the book of Matthew it says, 'Many that are first will be last, and the last first.'" Linus' responses: "I'll bet Matthew didn't have an older sister!" It is a sad day and a terrible witness when we justify our pride with scripture.

A true story is told about an aristocratic, middle-aged white South African lady who found herself sitting next to a common, black, African man on a British Airways flight from Johannesburg. She called the flight attendant over to complain about her seating, insisting that she would not, in her words “sit next to this disgusting human.” She demanded another seat. The flight attendant calmed the woman down and went to check other available seating. She returned to tell the woman that all of the economy seating was full, but they had one seat left in first class. But before the lady had a chance to answer, the flight attendant said: "It's most extraordinary to make this kind of upgrade, and I had to get special permission from the captain. But, given the circumstances, the captain felt that it was outrageous that anyone should be forced to sit next such an obnoxious person." With that, she turned to the black man and said, "Sir, if you'd like to get your things, I have your first class seat ready for you." The surrounding passengers gave a standing ovation while the man walked to his new seat.

We are such a mixture of motives: some God, some flesh. In our prideful lack of humility we seek to spiritualize everything we possibly can. I need God to do a work in my life in the area of pride; I constantly and continuously see it and I sense it around me and in me. And you need for God to do that work in your lives also – I constantly and continuously see it and sense it around you and in you too. Oh that God would gently loosen and pull out the roots of the weeds of selfishness and pride and self-exaltation that have infected us. I need the work of God’s grace in me. We all need the work of God’s grace in us. Not a self-serving surface kind of grace, but the deep, Holy Spirit empowered, soul transforming character-of-Jesus kind of grace in our barren, wandering, needy, desperate hearts.

James 4:10 says: *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”* Our sinful pride will always cause us to humbly exalt ourselves. But this verse calls us, commands us, to another way. The truth is, we cannot exalt ourselves; only God can do that. And God will not *“exalt”* us until we take our proper place before Him. Three different times (Mt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14) Jesus said: *“he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* In all of these cases the word *“humble”* is in the passive mood, which means *“humble yourselves”* means *“allow yourselves to be humbled.”* God must be the one to humble us, but we must surrender and submit to Him first. We will always naturally resist being humbled because we are naturally prideful in our sin. Before a horse can be of any use, that horse must be broken of its self-will and brought to the place of submission. Likewise before we can humbly be of any use to God, we must first be broken of the self-will of our pride. In Psalm 51:17 King David brokenly wrote: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* There us a clear difference between proud people and broken (humble) people.

Proud people focus on the failures of others. Broken people are overwhelmed with a sense of their own spiritual need. Proud people have a critical, faultfinding spirit; they look at everyone else’s faults with a microscope but their own with a telescope. Broken people are compassionate; they can forgive much because they know how much they have been forgiven. Proud people have an independent, self-sufficient spirit. Broken people have a dependent spirit; they recognize their need for others. Proud people have to prove that they are right. Broken people are willing to yield the right to be right. Proud people claim rights; they have a demanding spirit. Broken people yield their rights; they have a meek spirit. Proud people desire self-advancement. Broken people desire to promote others. Proud people have a drive to be recognized and appreciated. Broken people have a sense of their own unworthiness; they are thrilled that God would use them at all. Proud people think of what they can do for God. Broken people know that they have nothing to offer God except the life of Jesus flowing through their broken lives. Proud people feel confident in how much they know. Broken people are humbled by how very much they have to learn. Proud people are concerned with being respectable, with what others think; they work to protect their own image and reputation. Broken people are concerned with being real; what matters to them is not what others think but what God knows; they are willing to die to their own reputation. Proud people find it difficult to share their spiritual need with others. Broken people are willing to be open and transparent with others as God directs. Proud people compare themselves with others and feel worthy of honor. Broken people compare themselves to the holiness of God and feel a desperate need for His mercy. Proud people don’t think they have anything to repent of. Broken people realize they have need of a continual heart attitude of repentance. Proud people don’t think they need revival, but they are sure that everyone else does. Broken people continually sense their need for a fresh encounter with God and for a fresh filling of His Holy Spirit [from *“Seeking Him”*].

*“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* We must take care brothers and sisters in our discernment regarding one another – whether it be in church or on an airplane or anywhere in life. James 4:6 tells us *“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* God’s Word here is telling us that where there is humility there is grace. Jesus calls all of us to a life filled with grace: *“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace”* (John 1:16) and it is in our Lord Jesus that we see the perfect revelation of character of humility that God desires from us.

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:3-11*

God's Word tells us here that the enemies of "humility" are "selfish ambition" and "conceit." To be motivated by "selfish ambition" means to seek to advance ourselves rather than advance Jesus or the gospel or others. The single word for "selfish ambition" in the original language speaks of "self-centeredness that causes strife and contention. The word "conceit" is literally translated "empty glory." The words "empty" and "glory" are both used in connection with Jesus in the following verses, but in a completely contrary way; Christ "emptied" himself — and God exalted him so that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the "glory" of God the Father. Jesus humbly sought to glorify God not himself. For us the solution to our selfish ambition and empty glory is "humility." Because our fallen sinful nature is rooted in pride, God sent Jesus to die on a cross to pay the penalty for the sin of our prideful rebellion against God. And we praise God that while Romans 6:23 does say: "For the wages of sin is death" it also says "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." But even after we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior - we will still continue to struggle with pride.

In his book *Gospel-powered Humility* William Farley writes: "Pride . . . is spiritual blindness. It is unreality on steroids. And the scary part is this: The thing to which we are most blind is *our pride*. A demonic Catch-22, pride causes us to chase our spiritual tails. We cannot see pride - even though it is our most grievous, disabling sin - *because its very nature is blindness*, and the first thing to which it is blind is *its own existence*. My contention is that the church is most apt to fulfill its God-given purpose when we preach the gospel in such a way that it produces a faith that humbles sinner and saints alike." Everyone in this room and everyone in the whole world desperately needs revival and renewal because we all suffer from the spiritual blindness of pride. King David confessed the spiritual blindness of his pride in his prayer to God in Psalm 19:12-14: "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Paul gave us the antidote for the spiritual blindness of the inherent pride of our fallen sinful nature that lives deep down within the depths of our souls when he wrote: "in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Paul's words here are crucial in understanding how to defeat our pride and we must properly understand what he is saying and what he is not saying. "Humility" he said, will enable us to "count others more significant" than ourselves. This doesn't mean that we are subject to the desires and whims of everyone who makes demands of us. But it does mean that the interests of "others" should be higher on our agenda than our own interests. In other words humility should prompt us to serve others *for God* and we should assign our interests a lower priority than the needs of those who are around us.

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8*

In these words the apostle Paul reveals Jesus to be the supreme example of *humility* in that even though Jesus was equal with God, he did not claim his right to further his own interests ahead of God's interests. While equality is a dominant theme in our culture today whether it be race or gender or age or sexual orientation – we are not called to claim our rights and entitlements, but rather to humbly *deny ourselves*, take up our crosses and follow Jesus. The cross of Jesus Christ is the great equalizer of humanity. Because we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) we have no basis whatsoever to claim any rights, entitlements or special status before God or each other. The ground of the cross is level. None of us is more deserving than another. Equality is the context for humility - in that all of us are *equally* deserving of God's wrath and we have all received an *equal* share of God's grace through Jesus Christ. We are all equal in our need for God.

None of us deserves to be saved and none of us deserves a place in heaven. We cannot save ourselves nor can we seek God on our own - and we all desperately need constant and continuous revival and renewal *because* we are saints who still sin; and we still live in a fallen world; and we are still constantly and continually tripping and falling over our sin and over ourselves and over each other and over our fallen world and over the deceptions and deceit the devil puts in our way. God's Word speaks of the Spirit-empowered step of humility that leads us down the path towards revival and renewal in our constant desperate need for a deeper relationship with God.

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

*Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:12*

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. Romans 12:1-3*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:6-11*

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Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church