

## God's Sweet Sixteen – Part 2

Welcome to God's Sweet Sixteen, Part 2, May 21, 2008. In part one, we reviewed praying and praising. Today we'll pick it up with seeking, surrendering, and rejoicing. You remember the various presences of God; the one in between was the communion presence and that's what's available to us. God has made it available and that's what we're seeking to enter is the communion presence of God that He has made available to us. On this list we'll begin with prayer; I covered that last session in part one. Certainly prayer is to seek God. None of us are truly seeking God if we're not regularly seeking to commune with God in prayer. The second is the Word of God. Bible study and meditation thereon is to seek God. The Bible is God's letter to man. It's the reference point for all things about our relationship to God. It is true that God has spoken to us by creation in a general way. But the Word of God that is written even tells us how He has done that and how we're to view creation. It is true He has spoken to us through His Son, the incarnate Word of God. But the written Word is our primary source to teach us about the incarnate Word. The written Word even testifies of itself; it tells us how it was written and tells us how we're to interpret it and how we're to regard it. So no one can claim to be seeking God if he's not seeking God through God's own written testimony to us about Himself.

The communion of the saints – you all know that the church is not a building. We do not really go to church; we are the church before we go to the local church. The church is a community of believers in Jesus Christ and we're simply told in Hebrews 10:25 not to forsake the communion of the saints. Well why not? Because no one is to play solitaire in the Kingdom of God. No one is capable of doing so and it is extreme self worship to pronounce that you alone are capable of doing so. The church is designed by God Himself for the members to be interdependent. It is true that Jesus would go to the top of the mountain to commune with the Father. It's also true that He would immediately come down from the top of the mountain to commune with His disciples and others to share whatever He received on the mountain. So whatever you receive in private prayer is not for you alone. We are members of a body and these parts are made to function together. In fact, I'd go so far as to say the following. If you show me a Christian who is in large part functioning independently, I would probably show you a Christian with a blind spot big enough to drive a truck through; because we all have blind spots and by definition you can't see your own. The only way you will know your blind spot and the size of it is to be in a trust relationship with other saints who in love and grace will speak truth to you about what your blind spot is.

Matthew 18:20 – For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. It doesn't say where two or three are gathered together. You can gather together as Christians, but not gather together in His name; because in His name in an ultimate sense means that each of those gathering is abiding in Him. There is an aspect of the communion presence of God that's available to us as individuals. But this verse tells us there's an additive level of His communion presence available to us when we, as His children, gather in His name. You hear people say that they see God better in nature than they do in the church. To say that you find God in nature better than you do with other Christians, is to say that you know better than God how He is to be found. Seeing God in creation is true, but it is a beginning point, not the end point. I dare say my personal experience is the following. When I hear someone say that they see God in nature better than they do in church, I never hear that person give any evidence

that they're meditating and fixing their gaze on Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They are seeing in a general sense the God Who created, but they see no specificity in Jesus Christ the Son and Him crucified as the way to salvation and our focus for purification. Another aspect of avoiding church is this. You hear some people say they are getting nothing from church. Well when you hear someone say that they're getting nothing from church, what they're saying is they're spiritually superior to everyone in that church. And therefore, the ones in that church have nothing of value to give the one who is getting nothing from church. But the flip side of that is the following. That would mean that you are spiritually superior to everyone in that church and that would mean that that church has a desperate need for what you have in your spiritual superiority. So when you stop at the point of "I'm getting nothing from church," the flip side of that is that church has a desperate need for what you have to give, but you're refusing to give it. Refusal to commune with the saints is to say that you have no love for the saints. If you have no love for the saints, then you have no love of God. Not my words; it's the Word of God. I John 4:20 – For the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God Whom he has not seen. Those who refuse to commune with the saints because of the degree of imperfections in those saints, denies that truth. God will always speak to you through imperfect people because imperfect people are the only kind that he has. So if you're saying that you will only commune with saints who are perfect in your estimation, then you're saying that no one will ever commune with you because I can tell you, you are all imperfect. The one who is truly seeking God simply must commune with the saints. After all, God does. Can you justify refusing to do that which God does?

Next, God has appointed messengers for us; it's part of His provision. Ephesians 4:11 – And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers. We seek God when we seek to hear from the messengers whom He has called; because He has called them (not just for themselves); He has called them to give the message of God to us. So we have an intent to hear the messengers called by God; but with every messenger, we have a responsibility. I Thessalonians 5:21 – Discern all things carefully and hold onto that which is good. We are to seek to listen to the messengers called by God; but we never worship the messenger. We worship only the God whom the messenger is describing. We seek God by seeking to hear God's messengers while simultaneously comparing the message through the messenger with the written Word of God as the ultimate determinant. And we do not seek God if we seek to delegate that task for others to do for us. We can benefit from the seeking that others have done as you can benefit, hopefully in some way, from the seeking I have done that's expressed through this series. But we're never to have an attitude of delegating the seeking so we can only then hear from the other people. And we cannot default our call to discern when we are listening even to God-appointed messengers.

There's another aspect of seeking God that tends to get suppressed in our busy lifestyles. This is the command of Psalms 46:10 (in the KJV) – Be still and know. Hebrews 2:1 (I've used several times) – Pay attention lest you drift (because if we're not paying attention, we will drift). Next poster. In the context of ultimately surrendering which will be the next of the Sweet Sixteen that I'll head into, the point is this. No one drifts to stillness. That's why we're constantly told to pay attention unless we drift; because no one drifts to abiding in Jesus Christ. No one drifts to summing up all things in Jesus. No one drifts to standing on the rock called Jesus Christ. And no one drifts to stillness to be still and know God. So we need to constantly remind ourselves

that stillness does not occur naturally; and stillness does not begin with stillness. Stillness begins with simplification. I Corinthians 10:23 – All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. Simplification means to begin to eliminate things in your life that are lawful, but not profitable in seeking to commune with your God.

The next step after simplification is solitude, not solitaire, solitude. We're to enter solitude to prepare us to go out and commune with the saints. To be alone with God is to truly take Him personally, one-on-one. But being alone in our solitude is not helpful if we do not progress to silence. We need to make our minds quiet before God by ceasing our endless ruminations when we're alone about ourselves and our circumstances. God will speak to us in a quiet voice, even in a whisper. But it tends not to be heard if we don't begin with simplification, progress to solitude, and then silence. Matthew 6:6 – But you, when you pray, go into your inner room and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father Who is in secret and your Father Who sees in secret will repay you. We can learn from the natural. To hear God, we simply do what we do in the natural realm where we're so comfortable functioning. What do we do when we desire to hear someone who is quietly speaking and we want to hear what they're saying? We turn down all surrounding noise. We draw near to the source of the voice and we listen intently. This is to incline your ear. Isaiah 55:3 – Incline your ear and come to Me, listen that you may live. To take these steps to simplify, to reach solitude, and to be silent is to head to the stillness where you can be still and know with your ear inclined as you turn down all surrounding noise, draw near to the source, and listen intently to hear from God. That is to be still and know and seek God.

But remember that the ultimate goal of stillness is not just to be still. The ultimate goal of seeking in any form is to surrender. If your plan is not to surrender, then you're not truly seeking God. We did not enter the family of God by achievement. Admission is by submission. We're admitted by being submitted to Jesus Christ as the one way to God. To submit is to place oneself under another. Salvation is accessed by submission to Jesus as the one way to be our Savior. Maximal glory is given to God and maximal abundant life is reciprocally given to us by submitting to Jesus as Lord. So how will we know when we have surrendered? Paul tells us in Philippians 3:8 – When we view all else as rubbish compared to the surpassing value of gaining Christ. Jesus Himself tells us in Matthew 13:44 – We have surrendered when we view the Kingdom of God as a treasure in a field and we're willing to sell all that we have with joy in order to obtain that field and access that treasure. We're willing to give up everything to glorify God through Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That's because when we give up everything for that pursuit, we truly give up nothing. For apart from Jesus Christ and Him crucified, everything else is nothing; because the only thing that we can take into eternity with us is nothing of this material realm. The only thing that we can take into eternity is the glory which we have given the Father by constantly focusing and abiding in His Son. Mark 8:36 – For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his own soul? Well, that refers primarily to salvation. True enough; but I ask you as Christians, what does it profit us as Christians to gain the whole world and forfeit giving glory to God while still here on planet Earth?

We're surrendered when God has these components of the Sweet Sixteen which you've already covered. We're surrendered when God has your prayers, your praise, your pursuit, and ultimately your possessions. When you're surrendered like that, that's when you have made the transition from *have a heart* as a demand to God wanting Him to rescue you from whatever the

circumstance and progressed to *have a heart* as an offer to God. You never lose by surrendering. We tend to remain focused in the natural realm where whatever we surrender means we have less of something in the future. But in the Kingdom of God, whatever you surrender you gain. II Chronicles 16:9 – The eyes of the Lord search the Earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. To progressively surrender is to progressively sum up all things in Jesus. After all, that's what God does. This is My beloved Son, listen to Him. To refuse to surrender is to say, “No, Lord”. Can you imagine using no and Lord in the same sentence? There's no greater oxymoron than saying, “No, Lord” by refusing to surrender to the God that you're ostensibly seeking; because if He's worth seeking, He's worth saying yes to. Remember, there is no vacuum in the spirit realm. We tend to think there's God here and evil far away and a vast neutral ground in the middle. But that's not true. It's either/or. The only way that you can say no to God is to simultaneously say yes to self worship.

The next of the Sweet Sixteen (and the last one we'll cover today) is to rejoice. Joy is the inner state of emotion that serves as the fuel for the act of rejoicing. Joy is the noun that leads to rejoicing as the verb. So what is joy? Joy is the euphoric condition of the inner man who is overflowing with the knowledge of Who God is and with the knowledge of love that God has for him as revealed primarily through Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Joy is the root and rejoicing is the fruit out of the root of joy. Since God always is, since God does not change, and since God always loves us, then we always have reason for joy. And that's cause for rejoicing. Jesus told us that simple truth in Luke 10:20 – rejoice that your names are written in Heaven. We're called to become Christlike. The next verse, immediately after the utterance of rejoice that your names are written in Heaven (speaking of Jesus) says at that very time, He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit. So as He was telling His disciples to constantly rejoice that your names are written in Heaven, after the utterance Jesus immediately slipped into rejoicing Himself that their names are written in Heaven.

Jesus teaches us how to walk in the tension of holding two emotions simultaneously. We tend to think that you can only function in one emotion at a time. It's not a matter of one at a time; it's a matter of which is overt and which is somewhat covert, that is, hidden beneath the surface. John 11:35 (simply says) – Jesus wept. But recall the setting. This occurred when Jesus saw the tears of Lazarus' family and friends after Lazarus had died. Recall that Jesus had intentionally tarried to let several days pass long enough to allow Lazarus to begin to rot and be foul-smelling in the grave. Jesus knew that He was coming to raise Lazarus from the dead. But He did not allow even that knowledge to harden His heart toward the suffering of others that He passed through. That is the meaning of compassion. Jesus wept with those who wept even as He was about to wipe away the reason for their weeping and replace it with the joy of the resurrection of Lazarus.

Recall that repetition was a matter of emphasis among the Jews. Paul writes in Philippians 4:4 – Rejoice, I say, rejoice. I Thessalonians 5:16 (he takes it one step higher) – Rejoice always. Even as we are weeping with those who weep, we're always to have an undercurrent of joy. We do that by always living every moment in the light of the love of God which still exists even in midst of the reason for our weeping; because like Lazarus, we know that our resurrection is forthcoming. When we live like that is when we begin to draw from the joy of the Lord which is our strength as we're told in Nehemiah 8:10.

Next poster. Recall that we, as natural creatures, tend to evaluate everything in the light of the cocoon of carnality. The cocoon of carnality is where we assess everything in terms of the frames of reference of comfort, convenience, cost, and control. This cocoon of carnality in large part is what determines our emotional state moment-by-moment.

Next poster. I used that to set the stage for this poster. This contrasts two emotional states, both positive. I choose two words to make the point. I never insist that you use the same two words in the same way, but look at the spiritual truth presented regardless of what words you might prefer. I use joy and happiness. Happiness is the state of emotional pleasure that is circumstance dependent and time limited because its basis is the cocoon of carnality where we assess everything in terms of cost, comfort, convenience, and control. Happiness does not outlast the favorable circumstances that produce the state of happiness. But joy is a deeper state of emotional pleasure that is not dependent on moment-by-moment circumstances; because it is dependent on eternal truth and dependent on our eternal relationship with the One Who is eternal truth. Thus, joy is based on communion with our eternal God with Whom we relate because of who we are in Jesus Christ. Our joy is thus resistant to circumstances; because as circumstances change (positive or negative, up or down) our communion with God is to remain constant. John 15:11 (Jesus says) – These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full. Fullness of joy is what we experience when we are in oneness with God through Jesus Christ. Remember, that's the passion called love, the passion for oneness. We will experience the fullness of joy fully when we are in Heaven. But we're to progressively grow toward fullness of joy while here on Earth; because the whole time of our remaining on Earth is to progressively grow into what we will have in the eternal state. Fullness of joy is not only circumstance resistant. Fullness of joy is circumstance independent. Fullness of joy is not only time prolonged. Fullness of joy is eternal. We're to begin here with rejoice always meaning constantly; because there, in Heaven, we will rejoice always both constantly and eternally.

Next poster. Part of how we do this is to enter the crescendo of delight with our God as Moses did. Exodus 33:13 (Moses says to God) – Now therefore, I pray Thee (number one) if I have found favor in Thy sight (number two) let me know Thy ways (number three) that I may know Thee (number four) so that I may find favor in Thy sight. Notice that Moses completed a cycle here. He begins with, if I have found favor in Thy sight and he ends with, that I may find favor in Thy sight. In between those two points he has grown in the knowledge of the ways of God; and thus, grown in knowing God. Thus the favor of God, in the sight of God that he has found is greater in step four than it is in step one. In other words, this is not a closed loop, a circle, that Moses has entered. It is a crescendo where each turn of the cycle goes to progressively higher levels. It's more like a coiled spring where each coil goes higher and higher than it is a closed loop. Psalms 16:11 – In Thy presence is fullness of joy, as a result of our praying, praising, seeking, and surrendering, we come more and more into the communion presence of God. Thus, our joy here on Earth progressively grows toward the fullness of joy when we will ultimately be constantly and eternally—not only in the communion presence—but in the manifest presence of God. This is to enter the crescendo of delight with our God. Now so many times, these things of the Spirit seem high-minded and theologic and so on. That's why Jesus would always give natural examples. And you'll recall the simple natural example that I use which is the story of Susan and the ottoman. If I am comfortable in my recliner chair in the family room, when Susan enters the room to join me, I notice that the ottoman that she uses to elevate her legs to be

maximally comfortable has been moved. I have found favor in her sight by her presence. So I bound out of my recliner to obtain the ottoman, to retrieve it and position it for her and I delight in doing so. Then I begin to learn another of her ways. She is delighting in having the ottoman which I would have known already. But now I see that she's even more delighting in my delight in being willing to get out of the recliner, retrieve the ottoman and position it for her. When I begin to note that, then I come to know her better. This isn't only about having the ottoman or not. Then I delight in more than bringing her the ottoman. Now I also delight in her delight in my delight in bringing her the ottoman. Then it keeps progressively continuing. She delights in my delight in her delight in my delight in bringing her the ottoman. We've entered the crescendo of delight together in such a simple, natural example as bringing an ottoman. Should we not do the same with our God Who assuredly will delight in our delight in seeking and surrendering in His communion presence.

Remember, with the Sweet Sixteen, these are not works by which we try to achieve them in the flesh while functioning in the law of sin and death proclaiming to bring glory to God. We do not rejoice by conjuring up rejoicing. We rejoice by looking at this God Who has provided His Son for us; and then looking at how this God rejoices in us, His people. Isaiah 62:5 – And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you. Zephaniah 3:17 – He (God) will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. Some might say those are OT Scriptures taken out of context. But I do not think that the God Who does not change rejoices less over the church of Jesus Christ and rejoices less over me being His child than He rejoices over the children of Israel. So praise be to God Who rejoices in me; thus, producing joy in me by which I rejoice in Him independent of circumstances. So I can never conjure up joy. I rejoice because I have joy because I see the joy that God has in me in being His child through the Son of God.

So my time is up for today and we'll continue forward in the Sweet Sixteen next time. So thank you for your time.