



## THE FACES OF GOD

### Discipleship

Senior Pastor, Scott McAlister

Sunday, February 7, 2010

**Intro:** In every one of us is the desire to be closer to the God who made us...I think that we all want to see His face! That's why people come to church. That's why many of you are here this morning, because you want to feel His presence...you long to see His face.

This desire to be close to God is one of the basic needs of life. I think that we all have this desire planted deep within us to be close to something bigger than we are; we want to be valued by someone who we think is more important than we are. And I think that you can see that desire reflected in some really strange ways in our society. Have you ever noticed how people desire to be close to celebrities?

Just go to a ballgame early and watch how people want to get close to a sport's star and maybe, if they are lucky, get their autograph. The truth of the matter is, if you sat down with that sports star, they're just a person like you and me. But because they're more famous, we think they're more important. The reason people have that desire is really based on a deeper desire. It's the desire to be close to the most important **"being"** of the universe. We have this inward desire to be close to God and sometimes we get confused and think that someone here on earth can fill the God shaped void in our lives.

This morning we're going to talk about how to do that? How do I get closer to God? How can I see the face of God? I think sometimes the face of God gets blurred...we can't really focus and see God for who He really is. So this morning I want us to talk about how to clear things up!

Our theme verse for this morning is **Luke 2:52, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor [in relationship] with God and with man."** Theologically we all know that Jesus and God are the same. Yet Jesus came to this earth and He chose to grow in His relationship with God. They were one yet Jesus chose to give

us an example of how to grow spiritually. I love the fact that the Bible says that Jesus grew in favor with God and His relationship with God.

So how do we get close to God? Well God has already done a lot of the work for us. **James 4:8, “Come near to God and He’ll come near to you.”** The truth of the matter is He’s already taken the first step. He came to earth...Christmas is the celebration of His coming. And in a few short weeks from now we will celebrate His going. We will celebrate the fact that He died on the cross for our sin. He gave His life for us. He showed His love for us.

The Bible says that God took the first step and all we have to do is take the next step and chose to be close to Him. So this morning we’re going to talk about how to get closer to God. How do you grow spiritually? When we talk about growing spiritually that’s what it really means. It means growing closer to Him in our everyday lives...it’s seeing the face of God.

To be honest I don’t have all the answers yet. I’m still growing just like you. But I have learned some of the basic questions that are behind growth, and my hope is that it will clear things up so we can see His face and know Him for who He really is.

Seeing the face of God...spiritual growth depends on several basic questions:

### **Am I Certain I’m Saved By God’s Grace?**

If you want to grow...if you want to see the face of God, you’ve got to know the answer to that question. You see the truth is I will never be able to recognize the face of someone I don’t know!

Have you ever had a lunch meeting with someone you don’t know? Do you remember how awkward it felt trying to figure out who that person might be as people entered the restaurant? Maybe you told them what you would be wearing and what you look like and they told you what they look. But it is so hard to recognize the face of someone you don’t really know.

The foundation of growth is being secure in God’s grace. Do you have it? Jesus said we could be secure in His grace. **John 5:24, “I tell you the truth. Whoever**

**hears what I say and believes on The One who sent Me has eternal life. That person will not be judged guilty. [Not “might not be” but “will not be judged guilty.”] But has already left death and entered life.”**

The picture, that some of you might have, is standing at the gate of heaven, and not knowing if you’re going to get in or not. Here’s what I want you to know if you are a follower of Jesus: **Judgment of whether we get into heaven or not, if you’re a believer in Christ, is already taken care of.** You’ve already passed out of death into life. That’s security.

Jesus said you can be sure. You’re already a new person. I encourage you, if you want to grow this year, do not make the mistake of trying to do spiritual things in order to build a sense of security in God’s love and grace. Don’t make that mistake.

The way it really works is, I find a sense of security in God’s love and grace and that enables me to do the spiritual things that God wants me to do. You’ve got to get the foundation first.

I warn you about this because it’s a very easy mistake to make. It happened in the New Testament in the book of **Galatians chapter 3**. The whole chapter is about that mistake, the struggle of trying to do it all on your own. Paul is not happy with the Galatians. He talks to them about how they began their spiritual life in Christ through grace. **Galatians 3:3, “You began your life in Christ through the Spirit. Are you now trying to make it complete by your own power? That is foolish.”** It’s one of the oldest and easiest traps to fall into as a believer.

Maybe it’s one you’ve fallen into lately. Paul calls it for what it is... foolish. How in the world do I think I’m saved by grace, and then after that think that it’s all about me? It won’t work. If you’re trying to build on a foundation of what you do, how much you read the Bible, how much you come to church, how much you serve the Lord – if that’s the foundation, it’ll crumble.

You want to know why... because you’re imperfect and I’m imperfect. And you’ll never be able to see the face of God because you won’t think that you desire to see

His face and be in His presence. But if God's grace and love are the foundation, then you've got something you can build on the rest of your life.

**Here's a second question...**

### **Do I Really Want To Grow?**

**"Seeing the face of God is determined by my desire to grow spiritually."**

**Matthew 5:6** Jesus talked about the genuine desire to grow. Here's the picture He painted: **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They'll be filled."** They'll be satisfied!

Jesus used a picture to talk about our soul. He used everyday language to talk about our spiritual condition. He said, **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."** The words **"hunger"** and **"thirst"** paints a picture of three things for me. If I'm hungry, if I'm thirsting for righteousness it means:

**1. I know I can't live without it.** You've got to have food and water to live. They are two of the basic necessities of life. Jesus says, ***"I want you to be hungry and thirsty for Me. To know you can't live without Me."***

**2. I know that this hunger inevitably draws me towards the thing that will satisfy me.** Aren't you sort of inevitably drawn towards food? I don't go through a whole day and at the end of the day realize I've forgotten to eat. I'm sort of drawn toward food and things that quench my thirst.

Jesus said, ***"That's the way I want you to be with Me."*** You're drawn to God's word and you want Him to be a part of your life. You're drawn to pick up the Bible in the middle of the day and take a look at it because you want to be close to Him.

**3. When you partake of it you enjoy it.** How many folks can confess this morning that you really like to eat? A lot of people forget that. They think ***"hunger and thirst"*** only means you have to really want it. But it also means when you get it you really enjoy it. I enjoy food. I enjoy eating and

drinking. It's just the way God made me. God says, ***"I want you to feel that way about Me. I want you to really enjoy Me."***

Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Do you really desire to see the face of God?

It's a desire that Jesus challenged in His disciples. **Luke 9:23, "If you want to come after Me, deny yourself, take up your cross. Follow Me."** You can't do that without desire. That takes incredible commitment. It means we have to build great relational habits in our spiritual lives. I have to build the habit of being in The Word, praying, doing life with other followers of Jesus, and the habit of being a part of cooperate worship.

Those habits will never happen without a depth of desire to be close to God. It takes both. I know some people who just try to do it with desire and they don't have any daily habits in their lives. It won't work any more than a marriage can work without daily communication and a strong work ethic.

Other people try to do it with just daily habits. Do the right things every day. They get up, read their Bibles, close it and go to work, come back, and pray for five minutes. That doesn't work either. It takes both of those things to have the genuine growing relationship with God.

Here's the thing: If I'm going to really desire to follow Him I've got to face this thing in myself. We all have to face the thing in ourselves that says, ***"I don't want somebody else to control my life."*** Face it for what it is...sin. Ask God for His forgiveness, and admit that we were made to have Him in control of our lives.

The early believers in the first century had a phrase they used when they were baptized. Right before the baptism they would make a confession of faith. ***"Jesus is my Lord."*** It's a simple statement. To us, the phrase, ***"Jesus is Lord"*** sounds real religious. But it was a very contemporary phrase for them. In their society, which was governed by Rome, the people all looked to the Roman ruler, Caesar as the lord.

In fact, the pledge of allegiance they would give (like we give to our flag) to their country was **“Caesar is lord.”** But Christians didn’t believe that. He wasn’t the one in control. Jesus was the one in control. Christians said, **“Jesus is Lord.”** Not the government, not some human, Jesus is Lord.

They said it when they were baptized and many of them said it right before their death. They would be given the opportunity to confess Caesar as lord. In fact, as Christianity began to spread, the government began to try to repress it. They would bring Christians in and say, **“Just say Caesar is lord. That’s all you have to say. Just say it.”**

I can just imagine the guard saying, **“You don’t have to really believe it. Just say it!”** The Christians would say, **“Jesus is Lord.”** That’s why Christians were thrown to the lions. That’s why Christians were burned at the stake. They had this desire to say that Jesus is the one in control of my life. It starts with this incredible desire to be close to God.

### **Will I Discipline Myself For Growth?**

There is the desire part and there’s also the discipline part. Will I discipline myself for growth? I know what you’re thinking, **“I am not a naturally disciplined person.”** That may be true. But you are a supernaturally disciplined person.

**2 Timothy 1:7, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and of a sound mind.”** It’s a gift of God that He wants to give into our lives. We may feel like we can never be disciplined to do the right thing but God’s given it to you as His power.

I want you to be aware of some of the disciplines that Christians have practiced over the years:

**The discipline of solitude.** That’s a discipline we don’t get much of in our world, just being alone. Some of you are scared to death to be alone. There’s always noise around you. Get in the car, the radio’s on. For some of you solitude would be two minutes with the radio off. Who knows what God could do in that kind of time? Solitude is just resting and listening.

**The discipline of worship.** Sometimes you come in, you're tired, and you sort of just sing the songs. Sometimes it's a discipline to focus your mind on the Lord and to really make that a time of thinking about Him.

**The discipline of confession.** Taking some time to think through your sins, and confession also means thinking through God's forgiveness.

**The discipline of intercession.** That means spending extended time in praying for others.

**The discipline of Bible reading.**

**The discipline of sacrificial giving.** Not just giving a tithe but sacrificially giving, generously giving to meet people's needs.

**The discipline of journaling,** of writing down what God's doing in your life to look back on it.

**The disciple of fasting.** Fasting is a discipline that Jesus talked about. and why do people fast? We just want to take something off our overcrowded list and add more time to be with Jesus...we want to hear from Him...we just long to see His face.

I think in every one of us is the desire to be closer to the God who made us...I think that we all want to see His face! That's why people practice these disciplines. That's why people come to church. That's why many of you are here this morning, because you want to feel His presence...you long to see His face.

**SONG—"Your Beautiful"**

I guess the bottom line is, it's up to you to take the second step...remember Jesus has already taken the first step. Now what will you do?