

Why Aren't You Closer to God?

What prevents you from enjoying a deep, full, close relationship with your Father in heaven?

You need to know how to draw closer to God.

By Bernie Schnippert

"At 8:13 Friday morning, members of Philadelphia's 'Friday the 13th Club' will walk under a ladder, eat a breakfast of 13 items, break mirrors, spill salt, open umbrellas, joke about black cats and light three cigarettes on one match. The ceremony will wrap up at 10:13 a.m."

That statement is from an Associated Press news release describing how one group of people feels about common superstitions. These people poke fun at them, as well they should. But not everyone shares their levity.

It's a pity, but some people believe life is based on luck. They feel that they've come to whatever station in life they have, or to whatever rung of the ladder they are on, because of forces that are totally outside their control.

They feel that they are merely corks floating on the waves of the sea of life, tossed hither and yon by overpowering forces they neither understand nor can face.

Some people exhibit this fatalistic view of life openly. They carry rabbits' feet or four-leafed clovers. They refuse to step on cracks for fear they

will "break their mother's back," or they cross the street so black cats won't saunter in front of them.

Other people are superstitious about religion. They carry medals of "saints," pray with relics clutched to their bosoms or carry prayers in little boxes around their necks or strapped to their arms or foreheads.

Even more people, though they may not believe in religious superstitions or in such charms as rabbits' feet, nonetheless, deep within themselves, feel trapped by the circumstances of this world. They feel that their lives are out of control. And, sadly, their lives probably are.

But not because they have to be.

Trapped by circumstances?

Although this type of erroneous thinking affects every area of a person's life, it does the most damage to one's spiritual growth.

Right in God's Church we have members who believe that they could never be really, truly close to their Creator God, for a broad number of irrational reasons.

They feel, for example, that they are from the wrong type of background. Their parents were not religious, so how could they ever be? They feel they are from the wrong part of the country, have the wrong heredity, that the wrong teachers taught them in high school or that

their bosses are standing in their way.

A great many people feel that they would be better Christians if only their bosses, their wives, their children, their brethren or even their minister would be different!

Other people say that they are too young to be close to God, or that they're too old. Some say they have too much of this world's education, while others feel they don't have enough. And, finally, some blame the Church's government. If only the Church's government was different, then their relationship with their God would be better.

Hogwash!

Your mother, father, boss, teacher, age, education or the Church's government do not determine how close your relationship is with God. **The only person who affects how close you are to God is you.**

Free moral agency

What about you? Do you feel your life is under your control? Or do you feel that you're the victim of outside forces that prohibit you from having a close, satisfying, deeply personal and constantly growing relationship with your God?

If you feel that way — if you feel that you could never be a Moses, an Aaron or a David because of somebody or something beyond your con-

trol — then you need to discover one of the most basic lessons of the Bible.

That lesson is this: You are a free moral agent. **Your spiritual life is under your control. You can be as close to God as any person has or will ever be.**

But be careful! This is not to say that you will have the same job or role or calling on earth now as Moses or Aaron or Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong. These men all were called to specific jobs, to positions of authority in the past and now.

But you *can* be as close to God as any man or woman has ever been, if you really want to be — if you do what these spiritually successful people have done in their lives. In fact, Mr. Armstrong writes each article and does each broadcast in the hope that you will do just that — follow the principles of the Bible and grow spiritually strong and close to God.

Not a “spiritual winner”?

So ask yourself this question: “Why do I feel that I cannot be a spiritual winner?”

Perhaps you feel you can’t win spiritually because you are not a physical winner in this life. But notice I Corinthians 1:27-28. These verses describe the type of people God calls — they describe *us*:

“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen.”

We tend to look upon ourselves as physically inferior persons — that is, persons not highly successful in material ways in this world — and therefore conclude that we can amount to nothing spiritually. We “compare ourselves with some that commend themselves” (II Cor. 10:12) and come up losers in our own minds. We then conclude we cannot be spiritual winners.

However, God says the exact opposite. James tells us that God has chosen “the poor of this world rich in faith” to be “heirs of the kingdom” (Jas. 2:5).

God condemns those who look

upon the outward appearance and become respecters of persons because of their material possessions or status (verses 1-4).

God rather promises us that He will look upon our hearts even as He did when He picked humble David to be king over Israel instead of his more physically appealing brothers (I Sam. 16:6-7).

Another reason we may decide we can’t be spiritual winners is because hiding behind circumstances “beyond our control” gives us an excuse for not living up to our poten-

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tial. It takes the responsibility off of us.

But this excuse is not new. The first humans used the same technique in the Garden of Eden.

When God confronted Adam with his sin of eating the forbidden fruit, Adam, instead of admitting that as a free moral agent he was responsible for his own act, immediately put the blame on Eve, who in turn put the blame on the serpent (Gen. 3:8-13). The first human beings were telling God that they were “victims” — that other people or circumstances were standing in the way of their relationship with Him.

God explains in dramatic and

powerful language His feelings about the excuse that you and I are victims of the unrighteousness of others:

“The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?” (Ezek. 18:1-2).

We say the same thing today. We say, in effect, that relatives, our bosses or somebody or something else is responsible for our not praying enough or studying enough or serving enough in the Church. But God condemns such an attitude.

“As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (verses 3-4).

In other words, God holds each person responsible for his own actions. Blaming your boss or your Aunt Mary just doesn’t impress God.

Gain control of your life

But there is a way to gain control of your spiritual life! There is a way to make sure that you reach your spiritual potential.

First, quit blaming others. Realize that God gave you free moral agency, and nothing can take it from you. Your age, your education or lack of it, your job, your wife, your husband, your children, your boss or your minister cannot stand in your way.

You alone determine how much you pray. You alone determine how much time you spend in Bible study, how much you fast, how much you meditate and what good works you do.

Second, since God commands you to obey Him, realize that He will give you the ability to do just that if you truly want to.

Deuteronomy 30:19 says: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

How could God command you to “choose life” if He knew that circum-

stances would make it impossible for you to do so? The decision is truly up to you.

Next, realize that God does not just command you to seek His way, but commands you to *run* in the direction of righteousness. Many people meander along the spiritual road, blaming each person they come in contact with or each unfortunate circumstance that arises in their lives, picturing these obstacles as insurmountable boulders blocking their way.

But God tells us plainly that, once He has called us, His truth is right before us and can be acquired if we will only seek it.

"For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?"

"Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (verses 11-14).

Seek God's way

Yes, in spite of the fact that men try to picture God's way as impossible to follow, the apostle Paul says plainly that we "should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27).

And remember this: **Once God has called you, the rest is in your hands.** Yes, God must take the first step. We do not come to God because of some goodness or desire that we may have on our own. We must be called (John 6:44).

But once we are called by God, it is up to us.

Remember the story of the parable of the pounds. A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. He delivered to his citizens money and hoped that they would trade with it to gain more for themselves and him. When he returned, he took account of his servants, "that he might know

how much every man had gained by trading" (Luke 19:12-15).

The first man gained 10 pounds, and the second one five. But the third, who was fearful and made excuses, gained nothing for himself or his master. As a result the Lord was wroth and took from him even what he had.

The lesson for us is clear, if we will only hear it and heed. We are free moral agents. **We can draw close to God if we truly want to. No excuse will justify our doing otherwise.** God did not accept the excuse of the

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nobleman's fearful servant, and He will not accept ours, either.

What's your excuse?

So what's your reason? What's your excuse for not being closer to God?

Are you "too young"? Then read the story of the child Samuel in I Samuel 2, especially verse 26: "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men." No, being too young is not a good excuse.

Are you "too old"? Then read of the prophetess Anna, who, though she was "of a great age," served God diligently (Luke 2:36-38).

Are you from a rough-and-tumble

background, having spent many years using bad or foul language? Then you are in good company, for Isaiah also declared himself "a man of unclean lips" who dwelt "in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). God used him, and you can be just as close to God as he was.

Are you too uneducated? Then take a place beside the prophet Jeremiah, who felt himself so inexperienced and untrained that he called himself "a child" in learning (Jer. 1:6).

Are you a poor speaker? Then sit beside God's powerful servant, Moses, who declared, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10).

Instead of relying on these or other excuses, remember Paul's admonition that nothing can separate us from God: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35).

No, these things cannot separate us from Christ. And neither can your mother-in-law, your parents, your children, your boss, your education, your age, your IQ, your height, your previous religion or your looks.

The way you can get close to God is the same way that David or Moses or the prophets did or Mr. Armstrong does. **You must pray. You must study your Bible and fast. You must meditate, obey God and do good works. If you do these things, you will draw close to God.** Nothing or no one can keep you from it. God promises that they who "hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

God is merciful and loving. He wants us to be close to Him.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. **Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart"** (Jer. 29:11-13).

Nothing can separate you from God. Nothing but you.

What's your excuse? □