

Men Do Not Often Stumble Into The Presence of the Lord

By Brian Herren

Men do not often stumble into the presence of the Lord, nor is He most easily discerned by those distracted by self-interest and pride. No, more often the Lord is revealed to those who have been liberated from themselves through a disciplined obedience to His counsel. It may seem paradoxical, that those who bind themselves more strictly to His will find themselves more free in the end, but when one is motivated by love, sacrificial offerings find a greater meaning in opportunity than they once did in obedience to the law. It is better to obey than to sacrifice, but both works are fulfilled in the heart of one disinterested in one's own welfare for the vision he has caught of His Father's Kingdom. Men are often moved by way of comfort. The decisions we make are made to make us comfortable, to entertain us, to make us impressive to others, to win favor, or make us happy. A better way finds one governed by principle, and there are no finer principles whereby the government of men might be executed than by those illuminated in the will of God. Men do not often stumble into the presence of God. It is a revelation most often reserved for the disciplined, both in body and spirit. In body, that we liberate ourselves from self-interest; and in spirit, that we might rightfully sanctify the temple of the Lord. Perhaps many enjoy a true desire to experience the power of the Lord, but how many engage in those preparatory measures whereby it is invoked. It is easier to settle for less. Rather than purge our lives of distractions, untoward allegiances, uncomely conduct, lazy worship, idle moments, unproductive business, excess laughter, hours of leisure in television and movies, etc., we may choose to settle for less. Perhaps, rather than the power of the Lord's presence, we might settle for an occasional priesthood visit or a timely sermon. Instead of the humbling and overwhelming experience of the Holy Spirit wherein every element of one's soul is filled with light and shaken with glory, we might settle for the spirit of brotherly love and emotional sharing in our time together. Instead of preaching, one might settle for storytelling. At best, those who settle do so willingly. At worst, they have settled for so long that they no longer can rightly divide the two. For those who would not settle, particular demand is placed upon every moment, that each day might find itself redeemed in the purchase of God's will at the expense of our own. For too long, men have sought to carry both in one hand. We can choose our master, but we can only choose one. To choose two is to choose one, and suffer the mediocrity that cankers the Church to some degree in every generation. Be hot or be cold, but be something. And if something, then

something worthy of God's indwelling. We will not stumble into the presence of the Lord. He will be found by those who exert themselves in every effort to liberate themselves from the captivity of ignoble principalities. If one is governed by money, he has his governor. If another is governed by self-aggrandizement, he has his governor. Another is governed by time, another by food, another by sleep. Each has their governor and an allegiance divided. The scriptures record the lives of some who successfully overthrew these governments so that they might pledge themselves to a different kind of kingdom. But the overthrow of the natural government, those worldly influences men accept as a guide (money, time, honor, leisure, etc.), has never been dressed in the countenance of ease and pleasure. This overthrow is necessarily arduous. Moses sojourned 40 days at the top of a mountain to meet with the Lord. We may find it difficult to make time for Wednesday and Sunday services. Elijah traveled on foot 40 days and nights to commune with the Lord at Horeb. We might find it hard to drive 70 miles to reunion. We read of Christ: "in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed". Some may find it difficult to roll out of bed in time to study the scriptures before work. Brother Enos disciplined himself in mighty prayer all day long and into the night. Men may find it hard to make time for focused, uninterrupted prayer. Under the leadership of Alma, the Church gathered often to pray together. We may find prayer services inconvenient. The Lord fasted 40 days in communion, and the Saints once gathered together often to fast collectively. This may seem unnecessary to some today. The early missionaries of the Restoration walked hundreds of miles, they walked in the snow, they slept on the ground with their coats for pillows, and they left their families for months to preach, teach, and deliver the Book of Mormon. Brother J.J. Cornish threw his swing up into the branches of the tree in his front yard on Saturday evening, lest any young one decide to play on Sunday. Card games, gambling, alcohol, and dancing were forbidden. Some may think these men had no fun at all. Perhaps they didn't (I believe they did), but what they did have were unparalleled spiritual blessings, revelations, visions, tongues and interpretation, miracles, healings, and an undeniable presence of the Holy Spirit.

It would be a great disservice, and one offensive to the truth, to disassociate the daily discipline of our fathers and the rich spiritual blessings they received. Is there some better way today? If so, then one would expect the bearer of such a plan to also be the recipient of such immeasurable spiritual outcomes. In the absence of such, it seems reasonable to honor the former.

Remember, when our brother Isaac desired water, he dug wells in the earth. He could have chosen to dig his wells anywhere in the land, but he chose to return again to the wells which his father had once dug. Isaac dug the same wells as his father Abraham, and behold, he too found the same water that had sustained those that had come before him (Genesis 26:18). Read Jeremiah 6:16 also.

The Lord is Good. He is Wonderful. God loves us with an abiding affection that will not tarnish with time or extinguish upon our wrongdoing. I believe that it is His desire to bless us, and I believe that it is our desire to be blessed. Zion will be redeemed, the Saints clothed with light, the fullness of the Kingdom manifest and the enemies of God's children subdued. The faithful will be redeemed and crowned at the right hand of God. The glory of God will shine radiantly forever. Every tear will be wiped away and His Majesty will liberate the captives. The day of peace will come, and the sons of men will rest. But, we will not stumble into the presence of our Lord by chance in that day, nor will we find a fuller revelation of His Son today in the throws of apathy. He will be found today in the same place He has always been found, and I suspect, by the same disciplined means. Should the question arise, "why not these gifts today, in power, as in the days of old?" or "why do we not receive as our fathers once did?", let us closely examine the rudimentary discipline of those which the Spirit did honor, and discover the surrender of their will for the reception of His. He is as willing today to bless His sons and daughters as He has been in any dispensation. The Spirit is willing, but perhaps the flesh is weak. We would do well to remember the scriptural admonition, that "it is by grace that we are saved, **after** all we can do" (II Nephi 11:44). It might be well to ask ourselves if we have truly done "all we can do". In the closing words of the Book of Mormon, Moroni reiterates that His grace is sufficient for us...**if** we deny ourselves of ALL ungodliness, and love God with ALL our might, mind, and strength (Moroni 10:29). This is the measure of love that inspired the obedience of those we discover in the scriptures, and ultimately invoked the charitable display of power and glory that the Church still needs today. But, we will not stumble into the presence of the Lord. It will be a dedicated and disciplined people who are awarded this great privilege. I pray that we might be numbered among that people.