



Planned for God's Pleasure

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Chapter 14

Notes: This Bible Study is intended to be a companion to "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

Chapter 14 – When God Seems Distant

When do you feel closest to God?

It is easy to feel close to God when things are going great in your life, when you are worshiping Him, when He has provided food, friends, family, health, and happy situations.

When do you feel the furthest from God?

When I have sinned, when I am suffering the consequences of a bad decision or just going through difficulties that may have nothing to do with what I did or did not do.

Are we really any less close to God during these times?

No, God is always present, He is omnipresent...

Psalm 139:7-10 - Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.

Which is more pleasing to the Lord, worshiping Him when we feel close to Him or when we don't?

The deepest level of worship is praising God in spite of pain, thanking God during a trial, trusting him when tempted, surrendering while suffering, and loving him when he seems distant.

So what purpose does our feeling distant from God serve?

Our feeling distant from God tests our friendship with God and this makes it stronger. As Philip Yancey said, "Any relationship involves times of closeness and times of distance, and in a relationship with God, no matter how intimate, the pendulum will swing from one side to the other."

What causes us to feel distant from God?

It may be as a result of being disciplined for sin since sin does disconnect us from intimate fellowship with God.

What else besides sin can cause us to feel distant from God?

Often the feeling of abandonment or estrangement from God has nothing to do with sin. It is a test of faith... one we all must face: Will you continue to love, trust, obey, and worship God, even when you have no sense of his presence or visible evidence of his work in your life? After all...

2 Corinthians 5:7 - For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Is it necessary to feel close to God when you worship Him?

Seeking a feeling, even the feeling of closeness to God, is not worship.

What is the problem with seeking an emotional response in our worship of God?

People doing this will be seeking an experience for themselves rather than trying to please God.

People with this attitude will come to think that worship is only possible in certain circumstances rather than see it as a lifestyle.

How is it evidence of spiritual growth when you do not seek emotional experiences in your worship?

When you are a baby Christian, God gives you a lot of confirming emotions and often answers the most immature, self centered prayers-so you'll know he exists. But as you grow in faith, he will wean you of these dependencies.

1 Corinthians 13:11 - When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

How do you praise God when you don't understand what's happening in your life and God is silent?

You do what Job did: "Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised'" (Job 1:20-21, NIV).

Job is a good case study for us for what we should do when God seems distant... What else besides praising God did Job do during his time of distress?

- Job told God exactly how he felt.
- Job focused on who God is, His unchanging nature.
- Job trusted God to keep His promises.

Why should we unload on God, telling Him exactly how you feel when things are not going well?

God can handle your doubt, anger, fear, grief, confusion, and questions. Above all He wants us to be honest with Him.

How may admitting your hopelessness to God actually be an expression of faith?

Expressing your feelings is often the first step in getting to the root cause of the problem. God wants us to cry out to Him so that He may help us.

What do the following verses have to say about the attributes of God can we focus on to help us during times of distress?

Job 10:12 - You have granted me life and favor, and Your care has preserved my spirit.

- That He is good and loving.

Job 42:2 - I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.

- That He is all-powerful.

Job 31:4 - Does He not see my ways, and count all my steps?

- That He notices every detail of my life.

Job 34:13 - Who gave Him charge over the earth? Or who appointed Him over the whole world?

- That He is in control.

Job 23:14 - For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him.

- That He has a plan for my life.

Job 19:25 - For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth

- That He will save me.

Our book and the Bible says a good way to get through difficult times is to trust God to keep His promises.

What promises has God made that helps you through adversity?

My favorite is Romans 8:28 that tells me that God is in sufficient control to bring good results from bad circumstances...

Romans 8:28 - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

If God never did anything else for you, why would He still deserve your continual praise for the rest of your life?

God deserves our continual praise because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. God's Son died for us! This is the greatest reason for worship.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Why should we never be at a loss for what we should be thankful for?

Jesus gave up everything so we could have everything. He died so we may live forever. That alone is worthy of your continual thanks and praise.

How can we stay focused on God's presence, especially when he feels distant?

I need to be better at remembering what God did for me in the past. I need to spend more time meditating on God; who He is, His character and promises.

What have you learned from a time which God seemed distant?

I learned to slow down and be more patient with others when I lost trailer ownership documents in the parking lot. I also learned to trust God for the path of my career when I was passed over for a promotion.

When is it appropriate to express anger with God?

It is appropriate to express anger with God when circumstances cause you to be angry with Him. God wants us to be honest with Him and confronting the root cause of your anger is essential to overcoming it.

What fears surface when you think of surrendering your complete life to Christ?

My greatest fear is continuing to live a comfortable life without my good job at TI. I know that this situation is really God's provision and that when it is time to move on to something else He will make that clear. I also have a fear of being a bold proactive witness, I need to be better at trusting that the Lord will do all the "heavy lifting" when it comes to leading people to Christ.