

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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A Step Toward God

by Dan Trygg

“Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says Yahweh of hosts.”

Malachi 3:7

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

James 4:8

“Yahweh is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”

2 Chronicles 15:2

“...those who honor Me I will honor, and those who disregard Me will be disregarded.”

1 Samuel 2:30

“The eyes of Yahweh are watching in all the earth to strongly-support (‘strengthen-to-overcome’) in every heart that is full toward Him...”

2 Chronicles 16:9 (LXX)

There can be no question that God is the great initiator. *He has always taken the first step towards us.*

When Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to hide from God. They felt naked, exposed and ashamed. God, however, called to them. He sought them out, and informed them of His plan of redemption, “...the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, but the serpent will strike him on his heel” (Gen. 3:15). God commissioned Noah to build the ark to save a remnant of people and animals from the devastation of the flood (Gen. 6). He called Abram to leave his homeland and his relatives, and go to the land He would direct him to (Gen. 12). This was the beginning of the nation of Israel, and the founding of a people of faith that has continued down to this day, and includes those of us who are in Christ (Rom. 4; Gal. 3). He took the initiative to call Moses in the wilderness to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 3), and made a covenant with the people at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19). **There are many, many occasions recorded in the OT, where God recruited someone to meet a need, or to deliver His word to the people.**

Of course, the greatest act of God’s initiative is in coming among us as a human child, to live among us, to experience our weaknesses and our limitations, to be able to identify with us completely, and to take our place as a sacrifice. He took this step toward us while we at odds with Him, ...alienated, unresponsive, helpless, and even hostile toward Him (Rom. 5:6-10). God’s grace in Christ is the greatest act of love, reaching out to open the way for relationship to be established between Him and us. He welcomes and receives anyone who is willing to respond to His initiative by choosing Him as their King. Having been reconciled by trusting in His grace, we can be assured that we have peace with Him, access to His presence, and the influx of the Spirit of glory imparted into our lives (Rom. 5:1-5).

While it can be clearly seen that God has been the primary initiator and seeker, the Savior and reconciler, **there are also many passages that describe how God responds to the cries and seeking of His people who long for Him.** The exodus happened because God heard the cries of His people, groaning over their mistreatment at the hands of the Egyptians (Ex. 3:7,8). The book of Judges is full of examples where God sent a deliverer in answer to the prayers of His people (e.g., Judg. 2:18; 3:9,15; 6:7-14).

One of the distinctives of David was that he sought God, and waited for Him to respond (1 Sam 30:8; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19,23-25). When you read the psalms, it is very apparent how often David was seeking God, whether to meet a need, or simply out of love and worship. It was because of David’s heart to seek and honor God, that Yahweh repeatedly answered David’s prayers and lifted him up in honor. David honored and esteemed God, so God showed him honor and supported him in his endeavors. **At the end of his life, as he prepared to hand over the kingdom to Solomon, his son, David stated the principle he had lived by, counseling his son to do likewise:** “...observe and seek after all the commandments of Yahweh your God, in order that you may possess the good land and bequeath it to your sons after you forever. ⁹ As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for Yahweh searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake (leave) Him, He will reject you (‘push you aside’) continually” (1 Chr. 28:8,9). **What was the principle? Honor God with obedience. Seek to know and serve Him. God will respond in kind to how you treat Him.**

In Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple, he repeatedly asked God to respond to the prayers and petitions of the people, as they sought Him in their various times of need and distress (1 Kg. 8). The ensuing history of the nation, and the kings of Israel and Judah, is a working out of the principle of relational reciprocity revealed by God back in the days of the judges, “Those who honor Me, I will honor; and those who disregard Me will be disregarded” (1 Sam. 2:30). **Solomon’s prayer offered hope and direction to the people, even when they had wandered far away,** and were experiencing the judgments and curses for disobeying God’s commandments (Deut. 27,28), and dishonoring Him. If they prayed toward the Jerusalem temple, and sought God in repentance and humility,

He promised to take note of their prayers. **But, if they persisted in unbelief and disobedience, God would still carry out the judgments He had spoken of in His word, even to the extent of destroying Jerusalem, and its temple, ...and even cutting off the nation of Israel and exiling the people to other lands.** Those who disregard, disobey, and mock God by their lives, will find themselves disregarded, diminished, defeated, and dispossessed. They themselves would become a byword, a mockery, and a curse in the eyes of their enemies. And so it happened.

It is important to understand this is who God is. This is what He is like. This is how He operates. He Himself has said so. He Himself told us this. He Himself warned the Israelites. He Himself has shown us throughout history that this is so. **Those who mock Him will eventually be diminished. Those who honor Him** (truly honor Him, not just with words, but in their hearts and in their actions) **will be honored by Him.** Those who seek Him will be given access to Him. He will let them find Him.

The invitation of Malachi 3:7 was extended to the people of Israel who had experienced defeat, expulsion and exile. But, God, the great initiator, had moved in the hearts of pagan kings to bring the light of hope into the darkness of shame and despair. King Cyrus the Persian had defeated the Babylonians, who had mocked Yahweh, destroyed the temple and the city of Zion, and took the people into exile. Now the predator had become the prey, and the Persian king published a decree, encouraging as many people who desired to return to their homeland to do so. **They were given favor and permission to rebuild their city and their temple to their God.** A remnant of those who had been scattered responded to this invitation, and returned. They successfully rebuilt the temple, and the city. **There was a time of repentance, great joy and revival.** The people saw the unthinkable happen right before their eyes. God restored them, their land, and even the sacred place of His presence.

The word of God through Malachi, however, came at a time shortly after these amazing events took place. Already a generation had passed, and corruption was creeping back into the priesthood. The people were drifting back into a disregard of God. Yahweh sent Malachi to expose these attitudes, and call the people back, “Return to Me, and I will return to you.” **God took the initiative to speak out, to expose what was happening and call the people back. But He was looking for a response from them.** He wanted the people to take a step toward Him, before He would take a step toward them. **We can see this pattern over and over in the scriptures, too. God calls, but He waits for us to come, before He shares more of Himself with us.**

In James, we see the principle plainly stated as though we are to be the initiator. God wants us to take a step toward Him, and then He will take a step toward us. This is really just a different way of expressing the principle of reciprocity from 1 Samuel 2:30. **We make the choice to honor and value God by seeking Him,** by attempting to draw near to Him. God says that “those who honor Me (*value Me, esteem Me, treasure Me, want Me*), I will honor (*value, esteem, treasure and desire*)”. **He is saying that He will reciprocate, ...He will respond to our advances, our pursuit, our search to know Him better, our desire for Him. If we will take a step toward Him, He will take a step toward us.**

There are a number of times where God says that if we seek Him, He will let us find Him (Deut. 4:29; Isa. 55:6,7; Hos. 10:12). We saw it in David’s counsel to Solomon, and we see it again in the prophetic word to King Asa in 2 Chronicles 15:2. Asa had just experienced a miraculous victory over an army nearly twice as numerous as his. He had chosen to call upon Yahweh, and trusted Him, ..and God routed the enemy. When he returned, the prophet met him with the message, “Yahweh is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.” This message encouraged Asa in his zeal for Yahweh to cleanse the land of idols, and renew the covenant with Yahweh. As a result, revival spread throughout the land, and they had peace. **Because Asa honored God, the Lord caused the people to turn to Him, and all were filled with praise and joy.**

As I was preparing this study, I was impressed by the Greek Septuagint translation of 2 Chronicles 16:9. **This was again about King Asa, but twenty-one years later.** Again, his country was being threatened by an enemy army, but **this time he did not seek Yahweh, or trust in Him.** Instead, he took the silver and gold from Yahweh’s temple and used it to hire another army to attack those who were threatening him. The plan worked, in the short term, but **because he disregarded God, and acted only on a natural, human level, Yahweh sent a prophet to rebuke him, and to remind him of the great deliverance God had given him previously. Because of his choice, his plot would backfire.** He had unwittingly strengthened the very army who would be the next, and *greater* threat. The prophet said, “For the eyes of Yahweh move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars” (2 Chr. 16:9). **Asa disregarded Yahweh, so God gave him over to his own devices, which became his undoing.**

But take notice of the principle of this verse. **God is looking. He is watching for anyone whose heart is completely His, so that He might “show Himself strong” on their behalf. The Septuagint adds another little nuance.** Instead of simply that “He might show Himself strong on behalf of the one whose heart is completely his”, it says that **He might “strengthen-to-overcome” in every heart which is full toward Him.** This seems to add an inner

dimension. **For the person whose heart is full toward God, Yahweh is willing to reciprocate *by strengthening the heart of that person to overcome weakness, fear or struggle.*** Take a step toward God; He will reciprocate.