

Study 10. Submission: The Secret to the Presence of God

Growing Faith in God Series

Warm-up Question: If God were to give you all the money you needed, all the time you needed, and all the people help you needed, what would you do with such resources? What's your dream?

I gave my life to Christ in 1977, after some years of conviction and some near-death experiences. During the last thirty years, I attended many different churches and fulfilled a ministry of church planting, teaching and preaching in various churches and denominations. There have been many hardships and difficulties for my family and myself during those years just as many of you have also experienced. At times the Lord has had to deal with my stubborn attitude by humbling me and testing me so that I may see how far short I still fall in Christ-likeness and learn to rely on Him. At times I have felt ready to be shot from His bow into a fruitful ministry, only to find that His testing of me is not done yet, with more pain and frustration following.

I am aware that I have been given much and have an acute awareness that I will be called to account by God for my time, energy, knowledge and money. At times I have wondered if the enemy's tactic against me has been to stop me from taking the initiative by reminding me of past mistakes, seeking to have me fearful of repeating them in the present and future. In the early days of my Christian life, my nickname was "Go-go Thomas," because I was always looking to go here or there for Jesus. I wanted to do something to change the world. Looking back, I feel thankful for what I have experienced, and I know there is still much to do. I still want to do my small part and invest spiritually in people's lives and build a body of people by equipping *them* to be world changers.

What's my dream? In my lifetime I want to be a part of something that is Christ-centered, God-honoring and biblical, and I want to see God move in power. I want to be used of God in whatever way He sees fit in a genuine move of the Holy Spirit. I want to follow Him wholeheartedly. Knowing my shortcomings, I see myself as a simple fisherman that loves Jesus. As much as I know of myself, I want the world to see Christ, the lover of my soul and theirs. I want to know His plan to wake up His Church and revive her to be all that she can be in these last days of this age of grace. For years in previous churches where I have served, I have been hungry to know the answer to the big question; how does God want to bring about a Holy Spirit revival where God's presence and power are seen in the lives of His people. I want to look at hundreds and thousands of people coming to Christ and become ardent followers and ministers of the Gospel in our day, just as I have read about in past revivals that the church in America and Europe have experienced. I read in Christian news magazines of churches in South America, Africa, and Asia that have several hundred thousand members and I say, "why not here?" Are there things that the Church in third world countries is doing that we are not doing? Are there specific qualifications that we are missing in Europe and America?

What are some of the things that you think may hinder us from seeing God move in power?

What are the Qualifications that God Requires Before He Moves in Power?

Many things seem part and parcel of genuine revivals, such as prayer and fasting, preaching and teaching God's Word, repentance, brokenness, and humility amongst perhaps many other things. As I searched the Scriptures for times when God appeared to men or women, I wanted to see what things stood out, what kind of things He required of them before He acted on their behalf. I felt that if I could learn the requirements that God needed then maybe I could begin down that road to see a revival in my time and my generation. I have seen men trying to bring restoration through various means but saw little fruit from it. I wanted to know God's way to build and be involved in it; I haven't got time to waste. I want to develop something God-honoring according to the Lord's pattern. Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain (Psalm 127:1). We need God to show up in sovereign power—so can we expect such a thing?

As I searched various passages of scripture, I came across times and seasons where God Himself showed up at critical times on Earth. The Scriptures tell us of a time the Angel of the Lord revealed Himself to Gideon after Israel cried out for help (Judges 6:6):

²²When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!" ²³But the LORD said to him, Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die" (Judges 6:22-23).

This messenger wasn't just a regular angel, though, because the word "LORD" is capitalized in English to let us know that the name in Hebrew is YHWH, the personal name of God. We add vowels to the Hebrew to be able to say it better, making it Jehovah, the great I AM. Most scholars believe that this was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus. In fact, towards the end of the encounter, Gideon realized who this angel was, God manifest in the flesh, and he cried out in fear because he had seen YHWH face to face. God had revealed Himself to Moses several hundred years before as YHWH, translated into English as "I AM."

¹⁴God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: '**I AM** has sent me to you.' " ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, '**The LORD**, (YHWH) the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This **is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered** from generation to generation (Exodus 3:14-15).

The expression "I AM" is the translation of the Hebrew word YHWH, vocalized as "Yahweh" and translated "LORD." It was and is the personal name by which God revealed Himself and occurs more than 6000 times in the Old Testament.

In a few chapters later in the book of Judges, God showed up again. A woman, who is not named, had an appearance from the angel of the LORD (YHWH). Her husband's name was Manoah. The angel tells her that she will have a son and gives instructions in raising the young Samson. Manoah also wanted to meet the angel, so God shows up a second time, and Manoah gets to meet Him. After giving the pair of them instructions on raising Samson, Manoah says:

¹⁵Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you." ¹⁶The angel of the LORD replied, "Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD."

(Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.) ¹⁷Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?" ¹⁸He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding" (Judges 13:15-18).

When the Angel of the LORD disappeared while they were watching, they realized that the one who had visited them was the LORD Himself. Note from the text that when they realized they had been in the presence of the LORD, they fell on their faces in reverence and Holy fear:

²¹When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. ²²"We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!" (Judges 13:21-22)

One thing that I do notice about these two appearances is that Gideon, and Manoah, or his wife, were not told to take off their sandals. I wondered why not. I remembered reading about Moses that when He had a God encounter, he had to take off his sandals. Why didn't the others have to take off their shoes? Was there something significant in this minor detail? I decided to also look at Isaiah's encounter with the Living God. His vision of the King, the LORD (YHWH) Almighty is overwhelming to him. He says:

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5).

As I examined the passage, Isaiah is undoubtedly aware of his sinfulness before YHWH, but he was not told to take off his shoes either. It is evident from the text that this was an appearance again of the LORD. I examined Abraham's talk with YHWH before the two angels with Him are sent to get Lot and his family out of Sodom (Genesis 18:20-22). Again, there was no mention to Abraham about taking off his shoes before the LORD. I also checked out Ezekiel's encounter with the Lord in the first couple of chapters of the book of Ezekiel. Again, there was nothing required of Ezekiel in the matter of his sandals. I only found two passages in the entire Bible where those encountering God were required to take off their sandals. The two people were Moses and Joshua. Let's take a look at the two passages and see if we can learn a lesson about why they were told to take off their sandals:

¹Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the **angel of the LORD** appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." ⁴When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, **God called to him from within the bush**, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵"Do not come any closer," God said. **"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."** ⁶Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. ⁷The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. **I have heard them crying out**

because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. «So I have **come down to rescue them** from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. «**And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me**, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰So now, go. **I am sending you** to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:1-10).

¹³Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" ¹⁴"**Neither,**" he replied, "but as **commander of the army of the LORD** I have now come." Then Joshua **fell facedown to the ground in reverence**, and asked him, "What message does **my Lord** have for his servant?" ¹⁵The commander of the LORD's army replied, "**Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.**" And Joshua did so (Joshua 5:13-15).

Do you see anything that Joshua and Moses have in common?

Again, the person talking to Joshua is YHWH for He is so called two verses later (6:2). The commander of the armies of the LORD has come with a drawn sword neither to fight on the enemy's side nor to fight on our side. He was leading a spiritual force of angelic beings, and He expected the children of Israel to be on His side as He directed them. He gave specific instructions on how Jericho's walls will fall. It will not be by any strength of arms that the armies of Israel can fight with; God will give the victory to Israel as they in weakness submit to His leadership. He will fight our battles if we will relinquish control and look to Him. He calls for Joshua to take off his sandals. Why? The key, I believe is found in God's encouragement to Joshua at the beginning of His dealings with him:

Every place that the **sole of your foot** shall tread upon **that have I given unto you**, as I said unto **Moses** (Joshua 1:3).

Just as Moses was promised that God would give him every place he put his foot upon, now God gave Joshua the same promise. There are two ways that we can look at this matter of the taking off of the sandals:

1) I have always wondered that if one could find that same spot of territory on earth, would one encounter God there? Almost like a square yard of land had become a kind of a worm-hole between heaven and earth, a place where one could tread into and suddenly experience the presence of God. A place that was so holy and awesome that one would have to take off their dirty shoes, which speaks of a sinful lifestyle, or a sinful walk. Wouldn't it be awesome to find a piece of territory where God once stood at a burning bush or the place where God stood and talked to Joshua? I wish becoming holy was as easy as stepping into a place where God once showed up. I remember once being awestruck to sit in the Garden of Gethsemane knowing that this was the place where our Lord once prayed earnestly for you and me. I used to worship on Mount Zion three times a week at the Church of Saint Peter Gallicantu, a church built over the site of the house of Caiphas, where Jesus was imprisoned for several hours before His

appearance before Pilate. Somehow it did not make me any more holy. I was also baptized in the River Jordan at the place supposedly where John baptized Jesus the Baptist. It did not make me any more holy. Why not? Our battles against self and our enemy, the Devil, are only won when we give up our territory, that of our inner soul, to the Lord Jesus to fight our battles over self and the Devil.

2) The book of Ruth explains a possible second option. The context is of a time in early Israel, when a man wanted to buy a piece of land in Israel, but it was someone else's right to buy before Boaz. When the first person who had the right to the land, mentioned as the kinsman-redeemer, could not buy it, he gave up his ownership to Boaz by the act of removing his sandal, and giving it to Boaz:

7(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) 8So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal. 9Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon (Ruth 4:7-9).

I don't want to make a doctrine of it for I may be entirely way off in my interpretation of the passage. In Middle Eastern culture, permission was given for another to tread on a person's land by the ownership of the man's shoe. In our culture, there is a printed document with a signature giving up ownership to land. In Israel, the previous owner would give up their shoes to the new owner, thereby permitting to tread on the ground. I suspect that it is more than just being a symbol of respect and honor to God by Moses and Joshua taking off of their sandals.

I find it interesting to note that Moses had an idea when he was forty years old, that he was called to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, but he was not ready to wait for God's timing and power:

23"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. 24He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not (Acts 7:24-25).

When he was eighty years old, God appeared to him in the burning bush. Moses went about his calling in his way, and with his own strength, abilities, and timing. The timing was not God's, though. Moses thought that Israel would rally to his leadership, but they did not. Many of us know how God wants to use us, but we want to escape the preparation required for us to fulfill His calling and purposes. It would take forty years of quietness and solitude in the desert before Moses would be ready for His call. In asking Moses to take his sandals off may have been a way of saying to him, "yes, you have made a mess of what I have called you to, you have gone about it in the wrong way, without my leadership and guidance. Now it's time to permit me to fight your battles and to walk on the territory that I have given you. I gave you Egypt's land to tread on, every place that the sole of your foot shall tread, (remember that he was vice-regent to

Pharaoh). God says to him in effect, will you now let me redeem the property that I gave you? Give me your shoes and let me fight your battles for you.”

Likewise, Joshua felt entirely out of his depth when Moses died and left him to carry on the work of leading Israel to capture the land. Four times in Joshua chapter one, the Lord had to tell him to be strong and courageous (verses 6, 7, 9, 18), and that was after Moses had told him to be strong and courageous (Deuteronomy 31:7) and to not be afraid or discouraged (Deuteronomy 31:8). Why such an emphasis on strengthening Joshua’s heart? Joshua had big shoes to fill in trying to follow Moses’ ministry. God was assuring and encouraging Joshua to release control and to follow the Lord and let Him fight the battles.

Have you ever felt that you had to face a responsibility that was too big for you, or faced something which caused you to feel out of your depth? Who did you turn to and how did you handle it?

You may wonder how this all relates to learning to grow in our faith. You and I have labored under our own steam for long enough. The older I get, the more I realize that I don't have the stamina or the energy to do things in my strength. If God is not in it, I don't want to be. I don't want to be like Moses and undertake something for God that He is not doing. Many of us have started climbing ladders hoping that success and fulfillment will come as we get up the ladder, only to find, that the ladder is leaning on the wrong wall. When we were younger, we had energy and zeal to think that success comes by expending our strength and sharpening our skills and abilities, but the older I get, the more I realize that I don't want to be on any ladder that God is not on. I don't wish for God to be on my side; I want to make sure that I am on His side. In every person's life, there's a point where we have to submit everything we are and have into His hands and trust what He will do.

In the same way, any of you who **does not give up everything he has** cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

Victory over our inner sinful nature and Satan does not occur until we die to our selfish ways, take up our cross, and follow Him. When we place our lives entirely into His hands and trust Him, really trust Him, there is a Growing Faith, an exchange of strength, our weakness for His strength and power:

²⁹**He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.** ³⁰Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹but **those who hope in the LORD will renew** (can also be translated *exchange*) **their strength.** They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:29-31).

God longs to step in and exchange our strength for His mighty power if we will only let Him by choosing to trust Him by submitting our lives to Him. **“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).** What does it mean to submit? The Greek word, *hypotasso*, means to: “to place in order, to place under in an orderly fashion. To subjugate, place

in submission.”¹ God will judge on our side and in our favor, when He sees that we have no reserves left to call on, no one to step in but Himself:

The LORD will judge (for and on the side of) **his people and have compassion on his servants** when he sees **their strength is gone** and no one is left, slave or free (we have no reserves or back up plan but God) (Deuteronomy 32:36).

Have you come to that place yet? Are you ready to abandon yourself to God and to call upon His help? He gives strength to the weary. Are you tired of your efforts? Have you expended your strength in vain? Then it's time to take off your shoes to Him, as a way of saying that you will submit your life to God; a life of submission, a life dependent upon God, that He may be glorified in your life by a growing faith, a faith that God Himself has imparted to your soul. Are you ready to see His ministry? Are you prepared to see what He can do through you?

It is said that we have (in our experience) as much of God as we want. It is an exchange; our life for His; and His life is infinitely better. How does God impart His life to us? It starts with a decision on our part. As much as we give Him of ourselves, He gives more; we cannot "out-give" God. The more of God's life and power we experience, the more we will hunger for more of Him. Scripture says, **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). When you hear God speak, His words create faith in your heart. The more we listen to His words, the more trust will grow in our hearts. God's word will not return to Him empty or have not fulfilled its purpose. So it follows that, when you give yourself to the reading, studying and the meditation of the word of God, something will happen. He will cause you to will, and then do what pleases Him (Philippians 2:13).

Eric Liddell, the British runner, who was also a Christian and a missionary to China, in the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, describes what happens to him when He runs for God. He said, “Where does the power come from—to see the race to the end. I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure.” You may want to click on the below address or paste it into your Internet browser and watch a clip from *Chariots of Fire*.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwyltmUR3MU> (4 Minutes, 27 seconds).

The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, likewise, has created you for a purpose. He never makes mistakes. When Eric Liddell ran, he felt God's pleasure. When every one of us fulfills our calling and purpose in this life, we will feel His pleasure. Is there anything better than that?

Prayer: “Father, we want to be used of You to do Your work and influence lives for the Kingdom of God. Increase our hunger and strengthen us to do what pleases You. We want to feel your pleasure.”

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¹ AMG Publishers, *Key Word Study Bible*, hypotasso, Page 1683.