

How to Approach God in the Desert

Lesson for Sunday, June 16, 2024

Text: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ Ask the following questions: Have you ever found yourself in the position where your faith is more intellectual than it is real? Have you ever arrived at the place where you can help others with their problems but are at a loss what to do in dealing with your own? Have you experienced a time when there was a sin you just could not shake? Have you ever been through a time when God seemed distant and your faith was dry?
- ⇒ If you answered “yes” to any or all of these questions, you have been in a spiritual desert.
- ⇒ Solomon began Ecclesiastes reminding us that life without God is monotonous and meaningless. But with God, everything becomes sacred. True life is found in Christ.
- ⇒ But even when we are saved, our faith can grow cold. In today’s text, Solomon gives us his wise insight into how to approach God in the desert.

OUTLINE: STEPS FOR MOVING OUT OF THE DESERT

1. Keep thy **FEET** (vs. 1)
 - a. This phrase (“Keep thy foot”) in Hebrew means, “Pay attention to the direction of your feet.”
 - b. The direction of your feet dictates the direction of your life. Solomon made this point in Proverbs 4:23-27 (esp. vs. 26).
 - c. Solomon’s specific instruction is that our feet should point toward the house of God.
 - i. What does that mean? What does that look like in 2024 at FBT?
 - d. Nothing good happens when church becomes optional instead of a priority.
 - i. Consider the church as a fire. When we move away from the fire we get cold. It’s often not a purposeful decision! People can even miss church for valid reasons (such as sickness).
 - ii. But when we move away from the house of God, our hearts will grow cold.
2. Be ready to **HEAR** (vs. 1)
 - a. Determine to listen to God. Often this is difficult because the very fact that you are in a dry season usually implies you don’t feel you are hearing anything.
 - b. Nothing will bring you out of the desert faster than feasting on the Word of God. See Proverbs 4:20-22 (esp. vs. 22) & Hebrews 4:12. The Word of God can do more for the human heart than we often recognize!
 - c. This is another reason to make church attendance a priority. We need to hear the Word of God!
 - d. Discuss: What are the different ways we can hear God’s Word?
 - e. Action step: Saturate your mind with Biblical teaching.
3. Be not rash with your **MOUTH** (vs. 2-3)
 - a. Solomon now addresses how we pray. The idea is to sincerely pray to God.
 - b. Solomon is making the point that we should be much less concerned about the eloquence of our words and much more concerned about talking honestly to God.
 - c. Most of us do not talk openly before God.
 - i. Why? We are afraid of Him and how He may reply.
 - ii. Why? If we were honest it would most likely reveal our sinful hearts.
 - d. Note Jesus’s instructions in Matthew 6:7-8.
 - e. Prayer may be the most difficult thing to do when we are in the desert, but it may be the most important thing we need to do!
4. Fulfill your **VOWS** to God (verse 4)

- a. Commit to a life of obedience. Nothing will move us into the desert faster than sin that we refuse to deal with. It doesn't have to be major, life-dominating sin. It's an attitude that refuses to repent and mortify our flesh from known sin.
 - b. Principle to remember: God will not bless the one who holds onto their sin more than they hold onto Him.
 - c. Question to ask: Where am I not fulfilling my vows to God? (Or, where am I living in disobedience?)
 - i. There are general areas that we are aware of.
 - ii. There are other areas that we glide right by.
 - d. Oftentimes we are in the desert because of our disobedience, and our obedience will often lead us out.
5. Sometimes God **ORDAINS** the desert (verse 7)
- a. Solomon says, "If you do these things, maybe you will walk out of the desert, but in the end, maybe you won't. In the end, God is the one you must fear."
 - b. Sometimes it's not because of sin and it's not because of disobedience, but because God put you there.
 - c. Remember that your "dry time" is not because God is angry with you, but because He desperately loves you.
 - i. God can show you much more of His goodness in the desert.
 - ii. The desert allows us to recognize how much we need Him.
 - d. Discuss: What lessons have you learned throughout your life from your time spent in the spiritual desert?

APPLICATION GROUPS:

Here are some questions to consider in your group discussion and application time:

1. STEP #1: Pay attention to the direction of your feet.
 - a. Why does it often surprise us that we are far from God when our feet (lives) are pointed away from Him?
 - b. This is a great opportunity to lovingly challenge our people to be faithful Sunday PM and Wednesday PM.
2. STEP #2: Determine to listen to God.
 - a. Where are some areas that are difficult to take God at His Word?
 - b. Where are some areas that we like to "barter with God?"
3. STEP #3: Sincerely pray to God.
 - a. What makes sincere prayer difficult?
 - b. Why is it sometimes difficult to be honest with God?
 - c. Read part of Psalm 13. David is a great example of praying honestly.
4. STEP #4: Commit to a life of obedience.
 - a. Maybe do not discuss this openly, but give the group a chance to evaluate their lives quietly for a moment.
 - b. Ask: What areas of your life do you struggle to live obediently before God? Encourage them to write them down.
 - c. Ask: What keeps you from being obedient in these areas?
 - d. Ask: What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to do as a result of this lesson? Will you fulfill this vow?
5. STEP #5: Trust the Lord – even in the desert.
 - a. What makes this point difficult to accept?
 - b. Has anyone been in the desert and now considered it a good thing because of what God taught you during that time?

TO DO: Follow the steps we have discussed that are outlined in Ecclesiastes 5:1-7. You may want to have them write these down on an index card to carry with them.