

## \* Seasons

This is the Christmas Season.

### \* **There are Seasons when God comes near.**

Christmas is the ULTIMATE reminder of that! One of the names Isaiah called Jesus was Immanuel – which means ‘God with us.’

It was God’s intention at creation to have a daily personal relationship with his creation. He would walk in the garden with Adam.

But Adam’s sin made that impossible because of the sin nature.

So God gave Moses the sacrificial system that let sins be covered. Under that system:

- Abraham was a friend of God
- Moses knew God face to face
- David was a man after God’s heart
- Enoch walked with God and was not
- And a lot more ALL showing us that it is possible to have God show up in our lives.

**Finally - God became man and came to earth.** Most of Jesus most memorable encounters were with named individuals. Not just crowds.

\* He wants us to have personal encounters with Him. And I felt pretty strongly that is what I am supposed to talk about this morning.

**My expectation would be that God would like to VISIT some of you in the coming year and I want to help prepare you for that.**

What happens each year as Christmas gets closer? I want us to think about these because you are going to find them to be true if God visits you!!

- \* The weather – the atmosphere changes. We watch for signs!
- \* The environment changes – people are more open!
- \* Our AWARENESS goes UP! We tune in to sights, sounds, smells, etc.
- \* Our expectations go up! We know something is coming – something GOOD is coming, but we’re not sure exactly what.
- \* We are a little kinder – we demonstrate more grace & goodwill.
- \* We are typically more generous.

- \* We have to prepare – we have things to do to get ready for our family or guest. Clean up!
- \* We get pretty focused.
- \* It seems like time speeds up.
- \* We are able to accomplish two months worth of stuff in about a week!
- \* There are added cost! Money, but also TIME.
- \* We can get so burdened by the details and activities that we lose the JOY of the season and MISS the visitation! We miss the REASON for the SEASON.

Lets think about the Christmas Story – this Season of Visitation – and **consider some of the details that we can apply to our own lives** if WE are looking for an encounter with God.

- \* We have wise men – SEARCHING scripture – listening for anything that would help them PERSONALLY meet with Jesus.
- \* Following a star – travelling long distances. Leaving no stone unturned!
- \* Bearing valuable gifts. (All of that important)
- \* We have Shepherds
  - simple folks
  - \* just doing their job
  - \* and SUDDENLY INTERRUPTED.

So some spent years looking. Others were waiting, expectant, but going on with life.

- \* We have Mary & Joseph
- \* going from place to place looking for a room – who would make room for a visitation from God?

**That is still the question! \* Who will make room for a visitation from God?**

Now - I have never had a face to face visit from God. Never had an open vision. Nothing Extraordinary as Biblical Events go. **BUT LIKE THE SHEPHERDS – if you are looking for the SPECTACULAR – you will miss THE SUBTLE!** God in your field! God in your barn! God in your car!

**(NOTE – TAX TIME – Harod Killing Babies! – Can't read the paper!!)**

\* God often comes in simple ways. The one thing we learn from the Christmas story is that \* GOD comes to where we are!! That raises our level of expectation!

Several times in my life – the atmosphere changed. Something was different. I can't exactly tell you how to read that. Like the wise men, I have spent time looking and learning. \* **Learn from someone who has encounters!**

And a big key I HAVE LEARNED IS: \* YOU can change the atmosphere! With God – you can NURTURE an atmosphere that invites His presence.

\* Jer. 29:13 And ye shall seek me, and **find me**, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

\* James 4:8 **Draw nigh** to God, and he will **draw nigh** to you.

God is always pursuing us. I just began to recognize when God was drawing near and I began to yield to His Spirit in greater ways. When He gets close we know!

**The first thing here is you have to TUNE IN!** Learn to listen to your Spirit man!

Remember after Jesus resurrection He came walking with a couple of the disciples and they didn't RECOGNIZE Him, but after He left, they said "Did not our hearts burn within us?" You have to learn to recognize when your heart burns or you miss Him.

It might be a song that strikes a cord, a scripture, or just a sense of His presence. That is learned! We know our children's cry! We know our father's voice!

**God never shouts! He whispers! And if we can't hear the whispers we miss Him!** That means turning off the radio – TV – whatever else distracts. That alone is MAJOR. God won't compete with our stuff!

\* Praise & Worship are also Big Keys –

\* Psa. 22:3 But thou *art* holy, *O thou* that **inhabitest** the praises of Israel.

\* Worship invites the Presence of God. In the OT Tabernacle they would burn incense as worship – it would roll up the walls – across the ceiling and come back down. That is how worship works! It rolls up – heaven fills – and His presence comes down.

\* Worship changes the atmosphere. This is one of the COST!

\* Worship Takes TIME! God is not going to SHOVE Himself into our schedules.

We have to set aside time if we are going to meet with him.

We have to MAKE ROOM in our lives!

Build a tabernacle in our homes and lives where He wants to be.

\* FASTING is another Key. I have done a fair amount of fasting over the years. When I have been desperate to hear from God, I have fasted.

\* Fasting doesn't move God or force His hand. IT MOVES ME. Aligns my heart with His heart. Doesn't have to be long. First fast was 3 days and it set the stage for everything.

\* Fasting is denying the physical – body & soul – for spiritual. TRADE!!! HUNGRIER for God than LUNCH!! Most of my fast my hunger began to lift – just lost my appetite. I began to realize God was knocking! So I would start fasting – I would draw closer to Him, and He would draw closer to me.

YEAR of FASTING IN MANILA! 4 nations – largest team – just staring....

THIS IS ANOTHER COST. \* More of God will always cost MORE of me! Getting quiet – Worshipping – Fasting all nurture an atmosphere God wants to be in.

Remember Mary and Martha? Jesus was there, they had a house full of guest, and Martha was SERVING, but Mary was sitting! Jesus said – Mary has chosen the better!

God shows up in our Serving, but meetings are best held SITTING!

So lets look at our list again. How do we prepare for a season of visitation?

\* Raise our awareness! Be interruptible!!

\* Raise our expectations!

\* Prepare! Prepare your heart! Get cleaned up! Straighten some stuff out!

\* Make Room!! Make Time! Space in your life.

\* Focus your gaze!!

\* Read the signs – heart – Spirit!!

Now – as the Lord begins to visit – you yield to that.

\* Psa. 91:1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

That is where you want to be. You have to find the secret place!

**Then you learn to maintain that place!**

When Moses spent time with the Lord – his face would shine and the people would recognize he had been with God.

They said of the disciples in the New Testament, these men have been with Jesus.

That is what a visitation from heaven does. It changes us.

\*2Cor. 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from **glory to glory**, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We have more grace.

We are kinder.

Demonstrate greater genuine love.

More fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

There is no formula here!

More than anything it is the expectation of the heart!

God knows hungry hearts! Find me when you seek me....

Then responding as He comes near.

Be AWARE in the NEW YEAR!!