



WHEN GOD BECOMES YOUR MOST ESSENTIAL NEED

FROM RELIGION TO PURSUIT

When God Becomes Your Most Essential Need

STUDY GUIDE

Acts 17:22-34 · Amos 5:6 · Mark 10:46-52

Pastor JD Bellamy

VERTICAL TAMPA

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide walks back through the message, “*When God Becomes Your Most Essential Need*,” so you can move beyond simply being around God and examine what genuine pursuit looks like. Read each point slowly, sit with the Scripture and Key Line boxes, and use the questions for personal reflection or group discussion.

A suggested rhythm: work through one point at a time. Do not rush to finish. Let the central question follow you through the week: *When did God stop being your most essential need?*

BIG IDEA

You can be religious, spiritual, attend church, know Christian language, and still not truly know or pursue God.

God is calling us beyond proximity, routine, and inherited religion into a life where He becomes our most essential need. The God who made the world was never optional; we only developed the illusion that He was.

REFLECT BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Where has your relationship with God become routine, familiar, or mostly external?
2. What is the difference between practicing things associated with God and actually knowing God?
3. If your calendar revealed what is most essential to you, what would it say?

POINT 1 · YOU CAN BE AROUND GOD AND STILL NOT KNOW GOD

ACTS 17:22-23

Paul sees Athens filled with religion and tells the people, “I see that in every way you are very religious.” Yet he also finds an altar marked “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” They were worshiping, but they did not know the One they worshiped.

The danger was not atheism. It was religion without relationship. They had altars, spiritual conversations, and religious activity, but God was still unknown to them. The same danger exists when church attendance, devotionals, worship music, Christian language, or outward spirituality become substitutes for actually knowing Him.

Religion works from the outside in. Relationship works from the inside out.

Paul's aim was not merely to practice God but to know Him. Philippians 3:10 describes this as knowing Christ experientially and becoming more thoroughly acquainted with Him. Proximity is not the same as intimacy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which Christian habits in your life are alive with relationship, and which ones have become boxes to check?
2. How can someone be surrounded by spiritual things and still worship an “unknown God”?
3. What would it look like for you to move from knowing about God to knowing Him more deeply?

RIGHT ALTAR · WRONG GOD

ACTS 17:22-24 · NIV

22 Paul stood in the Areopagus and observed that the people of Athens were very religious. 23 He had even found an altar inscribed *TO AN UNKNOWN GOD*; they were worshiping what they did not know. 24 Paul then magnifies the God who made the world and everything in it—the Lord of heaven and earth, who does not live in temples built by human hands.

THE MAGNIFICATION OF WHO GOD IS

Before there was ever a temple for Him to dwell in, there was a universe that testified that He existed. Before anybody ever lifted a hand in worship, **God was already God.**

He stretched out the heavens, hung the earth on nothing, set boundaries for the oceans, carved valleys between mountains, poured rivers through the earth, and taught the sun and moon their appointed rhythm. He gave the eagle its wings, the lion its roar, the fish its instinct to swim, and the birds an invisible highway through the sky.

He sends wind without hands pushing it and rain from clouds with no faucets. He gave thunder its voice and lightning its fire. He put breath in lungs, blood in veins, rhythm in a heartbeat, and thought in a mind.

“Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?”

There is nobody in His category, nobody in His class, nobody on His level. Heaven is His throne and the earth His footstool. Creation itself testifies that He is too great to be contained by anything human hands can build.

And yet humanity has always possessed the strange ability to take a God who cannot be contained and try to reduce Him to something we can control.

The greatest threat to spiritual transformation is when familiarity with God convinces us that pursuing Him is optional.

RIGHT ALTAR · WRONG GOD · CONTINUED

ACTS 17:25-30 · NIV

25 God is not served by human hands as if He needed anything; He gives life, breath, and everything else. **26** He made the nations and appointed their times and boundaries. **27** His purpose was that they would **seek Him**, reach for Him, and find Him, though He is not far from us. **28** “*For in Him we live and move and have our being.*” **29-30** Therefore God must not be reduced to an image made by human design; He commands people everywhere to repent.

Athens had the right activity—altars, worship, spirituality—but the wrong understanding of God. The issue was not the absence of religion. It was worship without knowledge and familiarity without pursuit.

You can have the right altar and still have the wrong God in your mind.

Paul's answer is not to make God smaller or more manageable. He magnifies Him: Creator, Lord, Giver of life and breath, the One in whom we live, move, and exist. When we see Him rightly, pursuit is no longer optional.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where has familiarity with God made your pursuit of Him feel optional?
2. What are some ways we reduce an uncontainable God into something comfortable or controllable?
3. How does Acts 17:24-28 change the way you think about your dependence on God?
4. What would repentance look like if it included changing the way you see God's greatness and worth?

POINT 2 · GOD IS NOT OPTIONAL

ACTS 17:24-25

The God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of heaven and earth. He is not served as though He needed anything; He Himself gives everyone life, breath, and everything else.

Before there was a temple, creation already testified that God existed. Before anyone worshiped, God was already God. He gives breath to lungs, strength to work, minds the ability to learn, and another day in which to live. We did not choose whether we needed Him; we arrived needing Him.

God has never been optional. We have only developed the illusion that He is.

We can become so busy building the life we prayed for that we no longer have time for the God who gave us life. We may say, “I gave God my Sunday,” but He gave us seven days. We may say, “I served,” but He gave the gifts. God is not fortunate because we showed up; we are alive because He showed up.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where have you begun treating God like one priority among many instead of the source of everything?
2. Which gift, ability, opportunity, or provision have you been tempted to view as self-made?
3. What changes when gratitude replaces the feeling that you are doing God a favor?

POINT 3 · SEEK HIM AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDED ON HIM

AMOS 5:6 · ACTS 17:27-28

“Seek the LORD...long for Him as your most essential need, so that you may live.” Paul says God made humanity so that we would seek Him, reach for Him, and find Him, because “in Him we live and move and have our being.”

God is not an accessory, a Sunday appointment, an emergency contact, or only the One we call when money, work, or relationships fall apart. He is our most essential need.

BARTIMAEUS · MARK 10:46-52

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, he cried out for mercy. People told him to be quiet, but he cried even louder. They could afford to let Jesus pass by. He could not.

Never allow somebody who doesn't have your hunger to determine the intensity of your pursuit.

Religion says, “That’s enough.” Hunger says, “Jesus, I need You.” We can survive weeks without food, days without water, and only minutes without oxygen; but the message presses deeper: without Him, there is no us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who or what has been influencing the intensity of your pursuit of God?
2. Where have you allowed comfort, embarrassment, or other people's opinions to quiet your hunger?
3. What would seeking God as your most essential need look like this week?

POINT 4 · CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE HIM

ACTS 17:30 · METANOIA

Paul calls the people to repent. The message explains *metanoia* as a change of mind: not only stopping bad behavior, but recognizing that we have thought wrongly about God.

They thought God could be contained in a temple. They thought He needed something from them. They reduced Him to something manageable. They worshiped without knowing Him and treated Him as one part of life. The call is to change our mind about who He is.

Once I change my mind about WHO HE IS, I change my mind about WHAT HE IS WORTH.

When His worth changes in our minds, pursuit changes. Worship changes. Priorities, relationships, calendars, money, ambitions, and careers begin reorganizing around Him. Repentance can sound like: “Lord, forgive me for treating You as optional, Your presence as supplemental, worship as an event, prayer as an obligation, and church attendance as relationship.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What have you believed about God that has made Him easier to keep at the edges of your life?
2. Which area of your life most needs to reorganize around His worth?
3. Finish this prayer honestly: “God, forgive me for what I've allowed You to become to me...”

WHAT HUNGER LOOKS LIKE

When God becomes necessary, things that once looked extreme begin to make sense. The message gives several pictures of pursuit:

DAVID · 2 SAMUEL 6:12-22

David was willing to become even more undignified in worship because the presence of God was worth more than his image. His posture was: “I need His presence more than I need your approval.”

MARY · JOHN 12:1-8

Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus. Judas calculated the cost; Mary calculated His worth. Religion asks what God is costing me. Hunger asks, “What is He worth?”

JOASH · 2 KINGS 13:14-19

Joash struck the ground three times and stopped. His problem was not that he never started; he stopped too soon. The message asks whether life, success, disappointment, relationships, or routine caused your pursuit to lose its hunger.

Don't stop striking.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which picture challenges you most right now: David's abandon, Mary's costly worship, Bartimaeus' cry, or Joash's unfinished pursuit?
2. What has caused your hunger for God to become routine?
3. Where do you need to begin striking again - praying, seeking, worshiping, serving, believing, or surrendering?

CLOSE · FROM RELIGION TO PURSUIT

The Athenians had altars but did not know Him. The Samaritan woman had worship but did not know Him. David valued God's presence above his image. Mary decided Jesus was worth the cost. Bartimaeus refused to be silenced. The message ends by bringing everything back to one question:

WHEN DID GOD STOP BEING YOUR MOST ESSENTIAL NEED?

Maybe you did not leave church. Maybe you still believe, worship, and serve. But somewhere along the way you may have become satisfied with being near Him instead of knowing Him. The call is not merely, "God, forgive me for what I've done," but also, "God, forgive me for what I've allowed You to become to me."

THE FINAL CALL

Optional. Convenient. Scheduled. Familiar. Religious.

CHANGE MY MIND ABOUT YOUR WORTH.

Because if I see You again for who You really are, nobody will have to make me pray, worship, seek, or surrender.

YOU ARE NOT PART OF MY LIFE. YOU ARE MY LIFE.

THIS WEEK

1. Where have you become satisfied with being near God instead of knowing Him?
2. What is one concrete act of pursuit you will choose this week?
3. Write your own prayer of metanoia: what needs to change in the way you see God's worth?

"For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." — Acts 17:28