

*Ask and it will be given to you;
seek and you will find...
—Matthew 7:7*

Two rules for your wrestling match with God...

1. Ask openly and honestly

"When the Israelites ask their questions, bad things often happen.... But now I notice that Moses' questions bring very different results.... Why this radical difference in God's responses? The answer becomes clear when I look at the questions again. Israel questions Moses. Moses questions God. The difference has nothing to do with the audacity of the questions. Moses doubts from the very beginning. Some of Moses' questions are indeed an affront to the Lord. Some even make him angry. But Moses takes his questions and doubts to God openly and honestly." (TGAM)

- ✓ **Teacher:** Read the following verses (and go on to read God's response) with proper intonation, to show that Moses and God are having an argument! (Note: this can be pretty funny if you ham it up a bit by reading Moses' part as if he's frustrated and whining—which he is!)

- He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?" (Nu 11:11-12) NIV

2. Ask humbly...but boldly.

"Is it humility or is it a warped kind of pride to assume the Lord cannot stoop low enough to hear my little questions? ...Believing I am beneath the Lord's reach is the same as believing I am above it. Above or beneath—either way I pretend I am beyond God's power and that is something he will not tolerate." (TGAM)

Consider this scripture as an illustration of God's grace:

You give me your shield of victory; you stoop down to make me great. (2 Sam 22:36) NIV

This illustrates the fact that God is eager to meet us where we are—just imagine: the Creator of everything that exists stoops down to us! We always remember how much God wants to answer. After all, he values us enough to allow Jesus' crucifixion on our behalf. He deems us very worthwhile. Why should we be timid in pursuing Him?

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But there's a balance to maintain. Consider this additional scripture:

Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes..." (Ge 18:27) NIV

While we are indeed deemed worthy of great sacrifices by the Creator, Abraham here illustrates a healthy understanding of our status as mere creatures. We must always remember we do not deserve answers. We must be humble.

- ▶ What is the difference between timidity and humility, and what influence does your answer have on seeking God?
- ✓ Timidity is based on a lack of self respect, and is therefore self focused.
- ✓ Humility is based on respect for God, and is therefore God focused.

Four questions to consider when God gives you the silent treatment...

1. Are you asking with the wrong attitude? Read **Ge 18:30**, where Abraham "bargains" with God for the sake of Sodom and Gomorrah. Note that Abraham, who knows he is mere "dust and ashes," underscores his fear of God by asking him not to be angry, and yet he asks. While God never intended to do wrong (he cannot) and while Abraham's question seems to reveal a lack of understanding about God's perfect righteousness, God honors Abraham's instinct to stand for what is right, so he answers. But later, when God commands the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham does not ask for another way. This may be the result of learning that God cannot do wrong...Abraham is a wiser man. Fear of the Lord led Abraham to ask bold and honest questions in the proper way (with humility) which in turn has yielded wisdom for Abraham. (Consider Proverbs 9:10.)

"I must also remember that every time I approach the Lord I come with empty hands. God owes no answers and does not respond to ultimatums. Indeed, one sure way to receive the haunting answer of silence is to frame my questions as demands." (TGAM)

2. Are you asking for answers you cannot understand? Read **Job 42:1-6**. Note the "dust and ashes" parallel between Job and Abraham. If we find ourselves thinking, "God's silence is not good enough! Why did he let Job suffer? I want an answer!" then we may have a pride problem, or a faith problem, which is sometimes the same thing.

"Small wonder then that I sense a haunting silence when I ask foolish questions such as this: "What was it like before creation?" Even the words I use to frame such a question reveal my ignorance. By definition, before creation there was no "it" because nothing had been created.... For that matter, there was no "was" since the concept of a past tense verb is tied to time, which

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almost certainly did not exist before creation's "first day...." Obviously, only God can understand some questions, much less grasp the answers." (TGAM)

3. Can you safely handle everything there is to know about God? Read God's answer when Moses asked to "see" His glory (or essence) in **Ex 33:18-20**. The Lord's warning there is illustrated in **Lv 10:1-2**, where Nadab and Abihu attempt to come close to God without proper preparation. Some believe God reacted in a harsh way that was out of proportion to the priest's offense. What do you think? Did God "react"? Do you "react" when a germ or bacteria encounters one of your bloodstream's anti-bodies? Does gravity "react" when you step off of a roof? Or could it be that God is what he is, and we simply cannot safely encounter everything that means?

"Just as Dr. Einstein would not dream of giving [a] little girl access to highly radioactive material, God may withhold some answers for my very survival. (TGAM)"

Reason to believe..."The Lord wants to communicate with me as badly as I want to communicate with him. ...it was he who provided the Scriptures, which are filled with answers. God also caused my curiosity about him....it follows that he would try to answer my questions in the most complete and comprehensible way possible. Yet how can this be done when God and I are mentally farther apart than Einstein and amoebas? ...Jesus is the Creator of the universe on hands and knees, a proud Daddy talking baby talk to all humanity, a God who has become man so that I can better understand his answers." (TGAM)

4. Could silence be the answer? Consider **Ps 5:3** and **Isa 8:17**. Waiting on the Lord during times of silence can build your faith. It forces us to rely on faith to maintain our certainty that God is real and He is there, even when we do not hear or feel him. This corresponds to Jesus' frequent teaching about *agape* love. *Agape* love is "doing love." Jesus was not concerned with a "touchy-feely" kind of love. God values love that expresses itself even when there is no feeling of affection, just as He expects obedience based on truth, not emotions, and not only when we sense His presence strongly.

"When the Lord offers no clear answer to my questions, it may mean I will learn greater truths by continuing to ask the question. Sometimes questions have many possible answers, so God declines to point to a "correct" one.... So long as I do not attribute that silence to a deficiency on God's part, merely asking can be a learning experience." (TGAM)

- ▶ Should we wrestle with God? How does God want us to respond when we feel hurt by him, or angry with him, or confused by him?
- ✓ How would you want a loved one to respond to you under those circumstances?

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The Gospel according to

MOSES

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- ▶ Is it possible to argue with God, while still remaining humble toward him? Read the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in **John 4:7-21**. Also, read about Moses' conversation with God in **Nu 11:10-29**. Did the Samaritan woman warm up to Jesus right away? Did she immediately accept his story? Was she disrespectful toward him? And consider Moses' tone: is he happy with God? Is he timid toward God? Is he humble? Finally: do you see parallels between the way the woman behaved after asking her questions of Jesus, and Moses' behavior after questioning God?

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- ✓ Note the woman's many questions and objections to what Jesus has to say:
 - How can you ask me for a drink?
 - Where can you get this living water?
 - Are you greater than Jacob?
 - Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim...
- ✓ But note her underlying respect:
 - She calls him "sir," (*kurios* – almost always translated elsewhere in the New Testament as "lord").
- ✓ And when her questions are answered, she spreads the word (John 4:28-29).
- ✓ Note Moses' tone. He is unhappy, and has real doubts about God's plans (Nu 11:22).
- ✓ But he tempers his words with respect (Nu 11:15).
- ✓ And when his questions are answered, he spreads the word and takes action on the answers due to his faith in God (Nu 11:24).
- ▶ See **Ge 3:10 & 32:7-8; Ex 2:14-15 & 3:6; Luke 12:5**. and **Acts 5:5&11**. How does the Proverbs' "fear of the Lord" relate to knowing God? Does it mean "fear" in the sense of reverence, or does it mean actual fear? What is the connection between fear of the Lord and wisdom? Can we both fear the Lord and love him? (See **Dt 5:29 & 10:12**.) Finally, how do the answers to these questions relate to the way Abraham and Moses wrestled with God?
- ✓ What "fear" means:
 - *Yirah* (yir-aw') feminine of *yare* is the word used in the Proverb. Almost always used in the formal phrase, "fear of the LORD," it is difficult to know if *yirah* means "awe" or actual "fear."
 - *Yare* (yaw-rey') on the other hand, is often used in ways that do mean "fear" in the sense of being terrified. (See examples at **Ge 3:10, Ge 32:7-8, Ex 2:14-15** and **Ex 3:6**.)

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- Jesus taught that we should fear God, and he did not seem to mean simply revere him, but rather actually be afraid (see **Luke 12:5**).
- In Acts 5:5 & 11 it says “great fear seized” the Christians who heard what happened to Ananias and his wife. Again this is not reverential awe (awe does not “seize”), but something more like terror.
- ✓ Connection between “fear” and “wisdom” and love:
 - The connection between fear of God and wisdom is based on Jesus’ warning: it is wise to fear One who can throw us into hell.
 - The connection between fear of God and love is based on the fact that God does not want to throw us into hell, but rather wants the best for us...because he loves us (see **Dt 5:29** and **Dt 10:12**). This “wisdom” cannot be fully appreciated, however, until we fully believe the terrifying alternative (hence the Proverb, and Jesus’ warning).
- ✓ Abraham and Moses were both afraid when God first singled them out for personal attention, but they trusted God when he told them not to fear, and approached, and engaged in a life-long struggle to understand and obey Him. But it is probably safe to say that the very good reasons for their initial fear were never far from their minds, since they in particular often saw how vast and powerful the Lord truly is.

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