

Most of us have a desire to be closer to God, but many of us don't have a very clear conception of what that means, which is why the movement to be "spiritual but not religious" has gained traction and become very popular. In this conception, being spiritual is mostly about the freedom to follow our emotions, while being religious is about submitting our emotions to some kind of institutional authority that usually commands us to do the opposite of what would be emotionally gratifying. In the bible, however, God does not meet with us without some kind of mediating presence, whether that is a king, a priest, or a prophet. Because of this, if we want to be close to God, we must reconcile ourselves to the idea of submitting to the mediators that God has placed before us. We will spend some time this week understanding how to be obedient to God by submitting to the mediators he has put in our lives.

Day 1

Find your place

In the garden, Adam and Eve sinned by taking the place of God for themselves. In doing this, they were able to decide for themselves who they were, what their appropriate place in creation was, and what they were responsible for. You can see this reflected in the world today with the insistence that one only needs to be true to themselves. Accepting God as God means accepting his definition of what we should be, in essence, accepting the original covenant of our creation. It means taking the place in the hierarchy of creation he has given, and accepting the particulars of our making with joy and gratitude. Did God make you a man or woman? Did He make you short or tall, smart or athletic, funny or serious? Were you born able bodied or not? Were you born into riches or into poverty? Can you accept that God is God, and has made many sovereign decisions about you that you had little or even no control over? Can you joyfully accept this as the starting point in your life, understanding that you get a very big say in the end point? Once when Jesus encountered a disabled person, he was asked whether the man or his parents had sinned, and he answered that neither had sinned but that this situation was given that God might be glorified. Can you joyfully accept your starting point as an opportunity to glorify God and show the greatness of His love, knowing that an eternity awaits where the starting point is a new body, a new community, and a new closeness to our creator? Can you find your place in God's creation joyfully?

Verses: John 9:1-3, Romans 12:1-2, 1 Peter 4:10

Prayer Topics: Submission, by submitting to our feelings or desires are we gaining in return than we would if we submitted to God? What is the biggest obstacle keeping us from submitting to God? Are there any benefits to the things we view as problems in our lives?

Day 2

Kingship is given, not taken

King David of the bible started his reign with a big problem, namely that a king already sat on the throne. David then spent a good deal of time running for his life from that king, who pursued him relentlessly. On two different occasions David had the opportunity to end that king's life and take the throne, but he refused to do it stating that he would not strike down the Lord's anointed. Many modern readers find David's actions baffling, but a look into the past problems of people trying to take the throne sheds some light on his reticence. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, many theologians believe their sin was in jumping the gun. They point out that this phrase is used in the description of biblical kingship, and that the first couple's sin seems to lay in taking on the role of kingship before they had mastered the role of priesthood. If this is truly the case it would explain David's reluctance to take the throne before God had handed it to him. In fact, this idea of taking on authority before one has been trained by obedience continues to be a problem that plagues all organizations and

societies. If you are more than 30 or 40 years old, you can probably remember things that you were certain of in your teenage years that now, with experience, you realize were complete mistakes. Had you had more power and authority in your younger years, and had you proceeded to move forward on the things you were certain of, you would have created damage that would not be easy to fix. In nearly any situation, being humble and realizing your need to learn through experience before you are given leadership is wise and will yield positive results. Learning obedience to our earthly authorities is a positive step in our relationship with God, and taking kingship only when it is granted to us brings benefit to us and to those we lead.

Verses: Philippians 4:6, Isaiah 40:31, Jeremiah 29:11

Prayer Topics: Priesthood, Kingship, Leadership, Maturity, Wisdom, Patience, Trust, Obedience

Day 3

Have some respect

James Dean was the king of cool. Although he had a short career as a movie star, he has had a big effect on our culture. He became the symbol of the cool, young, rebellious and dangerous outcast. This image was not just the result of publicity, but was a part of his personality. He developed an unfortunate nickname on-set because of his difficult demeanor. He would refuse to come out of his trailer, he was obstinate and disrespectful, and would do whatever he wanted in the moment in spite of previous agreements. He died in 1955 while driving to a race he was contractually obligated to not attend. In contrast to this, the bible teaches us to develop a healthy respect to our authorities as they are mediators of God's authority. Romans 13 encourages us to have respect for our governing authorities as they are placed there by God. Other passages command us to respect parents and other authorities. All these authorities mediate the authority of God, and all of them have their place. Many times, authorities try to exceed the boundaries that God has laid out for them, and when this happens, we are not obliged to obey them. But in general, when acting in their proper realm, we are to show respect and honor to those in authority over us. In doing this we bring honor to God, and develop proper character in ourselves.

Verses: Roman 13:1-7, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5, Ephesians 5:18-21

Prayer Topics: Is being a Christian cool? Is rebellion to our governing or earthly authorities giving us what we want? What do we really want?

Day 4

Be gracious and polite

When watching older movies it is strange to see the level of politeness that used to be part of western culture. From the fancy clothing that people wore to show respect to others, to the decorum used in addressing other people of different social standing, being polite was an artform. It is easy to see this as outdated, but when we see the callousness that people now treat each other with, it sometimes becomes apparent what we have lost. Politeness was a way of showing each other the inherent dignity that we possessed as human beings made in the image of God. We greeted one another as we passed by, bowed or curtsied, and showed one another respect because it was appropriate to us as the image of God expressed in our offices as priests and kings of the earth. It was a constant reminder that we gave and received of our inherent worth, that we were not just tools and obstacles to each other's goals but were "owned" by God and made for his purposes which we were duty bound to respect. The bible asks us how we can love God whom we cannot see, if we do not love our brothers, who we can see?

Verses: 1 John 4:20, 1 John 4:7-9, Luke 6:32-36

Prayer Topics: Love, Joy, Generosity, Kindness

Day 5

Due diligence

It is easy to obey on the outside while being rebellious on the inside. One way that manifests itself is by not doing our best. When we fail to do our best, we are holding some of ourselves back. We are failing to be “sold out” to the goodness, the appropriateness, and the honor and dignity of the service that we render. We are advocating that there is some kind of glory in holding back some of ourselves from pure obedience, that there is something wrong with putting everything into what is being commanded of us. It is a small act of rebellion. When I was younger, I would go to our school’s pep-rallies and inwardly scoff at the school spirit we were being led to participate in. I had much the same reaction to morning meetings when I worked in retail, and the clumsy attempts to get us “into” being a team player for the company. In reality, I was not being a good employee and was punishing no one more than myself, making my days a drudgery and belittling what earned my provision. The bible tells us to do everything with our whole heart as to the lord. It is hard to draw near to God while ignoring his commands to us, so let us all do our due diligence and obey our earthly authorities with our whole hearts.

Verses: Psalm 51:10, Matthew 5:8, 1 Samuel 16:7

Prayer Topics: Authority, Submission of the Heart, Gratitude