



# Approach with Ulterior Motives

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Exodus 16:2-15

Why do we come to God? Why do we show up at church, read the Bible, or pray? On one hand, the reasons that bring us to God do not matter in the least, for they bring us to God's presence. On the other hand, what brings us to God changes how we respond to God and allow God's presence to impact our lives. We may come into God's presence and miss the whole point of that encounter.

Some arrive before God to be seen by others. Jesus was pretty clear about the result. Being seen would be the only reward and blessing flowing from such ulterior motives.

Others would come before God to assuage their guilt, but without allowing for any change in the rest of their living. Such a motive might generate a limited or temporary return, but with little true consequence. It's just as likely that such a motive would only end up increasing one's sense of guilt.

Many would come before God out of a sense of obligation, or duty. There is nothing exceptional about such an approach to God. It guarantees little blessing, but it does allow for an open door whereby God may affect an unexpected change over time.

A fair number would come before God in deference to the expectations of friends or family. They may or may not respect God's presence, but they likely miss its blessing for lack of attention.

What about a proper way to approach God? Why and how should we come before God?

The Hebrews often displayed no proper approach to God. Sure, they were called by Yahweh to be a chosen nation, but, as a whole, they did not have a good handle on how that relationship was to work. They missed the calling more than they got it right. Perhaps the story of Exodus 16 is a prime example of their failure to seek God appropriately.

They expected Moses and Aaron to stand between God and themselves. They wanted to keep God at an arm's length. They were ready to reap the blessings of God's provision, yet wanted someone else to assume all its responsibilities.

From a safe distance, they might complain about the actions of others, rejoice in the blessings they received, accuse others of not doing enough, or ignore instructions handed down to them. After all, they were not really invested in being a nation set apart by Yahweh. They were simply hangers-on to the faith and invested relationship of the official leaders like Moses and Aaron. Let the professionals deal with God; they were too busy with the business of living to pay much attention to the details.

There is a big difference between how Moses approached God and the manner of the majority of the people. While many complained, grumbled, and questioned, they did not take their concerns to God. They batted their complaints among themselves, accused others for responsibility for the situations they faced, and found other indirect ways to deal with their anger and anxiety. They did not, however, take responsibility for bringing their anxieties before God. It was easier to feel justified in their indignation than bring their concerns before God. It's much easier to accuse someone at a distance. After all, Moses, Aaron, or God might have some issues to set before them, as well.

By contrast, Moses and Aaron seem to have dealt with the issues very differently. They apparently brought them to God, asking for consideration, wisdom, and direction. Our text does not tell us about their communication to God, but describes that God communicated an answer to them. For that to have happened, they needed to have been open to hearing God. They needed to seek an answer to the grumbling and complaining that had reached their ears.

While the people were unsure of God, uncertain about approaching God, still trying to grasp what role God played in their lives, Moses and Aaron had the confidence to approach God for direction. They

recognized that their complaints they fielded were misdirected. They recognized them as reactions out of fear and uncertainty. They understood them to reflect the people's discomfort with coming to God in submission and trust.

They did not yet know God. They had come along in their exodus from Egypt looking for release from their oppression. That did not mean they were ready to come before God for relationship, worship, or any form of intimacy. Rather than look to God, they looked to God's representatives in Moses and Aaron. They came to God out of duty, obligation, or the repayment of a debt. They fulfilled the outward requirements, but did not come actually seeking to know Yahweh.

They came to God for motives of personal benefit. They wanted their bellies filled. They wanted freedom from oppression. They wanted leisure and an end to want. They wanted God to become their servant. They did not really want a God before whom they needed to bow, whom they should serve and obey, from whom they should seek direction and guidance, on whom they needed to depend. They really just wanted a genie at their beck and call.

Their concerns are issues of hunger and comfort. Their issues are questions of security and direction. Their focus is on their immediate future and how they will make sense of their new freedom without the support structures of Egyptian society. Even though the society was oppressive, it was a known quantity and provided the essentials for survival. If it is hard for an abuse victim to break out of an abuse cycle because it is a known quantity, so the freed Hebrews yearned for a known structure that would give them a sense of normalcy. For them, God was no more than a useful tool in resolving their issues of security.

With their support structure gone, all they really wanted was a replacement structure. They simply transferred a slave owner's responsibility to care and feed a slave onto Moses and Aaron and by extension to God. That was all they were really after. It was their reason to approach Yahweh.

Moses and Aaron expressed a different approach to God. They were not seeking to instruct God on caring for their needs, but to discover God's will for their lives. They came for guidance, direction, and illumination. They came in expression of their responsibility before God as servants. They came in a spirit of submission and responsible action. They sought direction with a willingness to apply God's direction to their actions.

Their focus was centered neither on themselves, nor on the people. It was centered on God. They were not hanging onto the past patterns of life in Egypt. They were not looking to see how God had acted in some other context to instruct God for their present. They came in simple openness to find where God would lead them in the midst of their current uncertainties.

They took themselves out of the picture and recognized the people's need to relate directly to God. They did not assume responsibility for the reactions and response of the people, but for their own. They refused to take responsibility for God's freeing them from bondage of leading them to the desert, except as servants obedient to God's direction. The manner of their approach made all the difference.

Why do we come into God's presence? Do we come for some ulterior motive, some selfish reason? Do we come to place our lives in submission to God's direction? Do we come to encounter God on God's terms, or just to fulfill some sort of obligation or expectation on the part of others?

Our motivations do not change God. They may, however, interfere in how our lives might be transformed in accordance with God's purposes. If we don't come in openness to God's direction, we stand to lose the blessings of living in dependence and relationship with God Almighty. After all, we are granted freedom to live in God's presence. Will our motives and focus keep us from accepting the purpose of God's salvation? If we do not seek God's presence to join our lives to the Almighty, what is the point of our salvation?

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