

3. Seek

Like the word “come,” “seek” is very prevalent in the Scriptures. We will have to restrict our study to a relatively few of the many references. Most of these will be from the New Testament.

The word translated “seek” in the New Testament is *zeteo*, which is used with prefixes such as *epi*—seek after; *ek*—seek out; and *ana*—seek carefully. Found approximately 115 times in the New Testament, *zeteo* is most prevalent in the Gospels, with Luke and John containing more than fifty percent of the times the word is used in the New Testament.

“Seek” is used in the New Testament in two major ways or senses. First, God is the subject, man is the object. An example is the well-known statement, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). This seeking of man by God is comparable to the shepherd seeking his sheep (Matthew 18:12) or the woman seeking the coin that was lost (Luke 12:48). They were seeking something that belonged to them. So, God seeks man. Like the sheep, man may have strayed away, but God still seeks what belongs to Him.

The other way “seek” is used in the New Testament is where man does the seeking; he is the subject. This will be our major emphasis.

The psalmist says (Psalm 105:4),

Seek the LORD and his strength,
seek his presence continually.

You may not like me to ask so many questions. I assure you, however, that I am asking myself the same questions; they are not exclusively for you. The questions related to the preceding verse from the Psalms are, *Do we really seek the presence of God? How continuous is that search or seeking?*

The word in Isaiah 55:6 is:

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near.

We should be grateful that in Christ God is always near. Hosea says, “It is time to seek the LORD” (Hosea 10:12). Our hearts respond, *It is always time to seek the Lord.*

There is at least a sense in which we not only should seek God, but we actually do seek Him. Man is on a never-ending search for truth. He is never satisfied until he discovers the Truth, the source and unifier of all truth. This searching or seeking may be conscious or unconscious. It helps to explain the constant restlessness of man—non-Christian as well as Christian.

This constant search or seeking is grounded in the nature of man. He was and is created in the image of God. That image has been marred or defaced by sin. Enough of the image is left, however, to create a desire, conscious or unconscious, for its restoration. It was Augustine who said, “Thou made us for thyself; and our heart is restless until it rests in thee.”

But there is the wonderful paradox—and the Christian life is full of paradoxes—when we find Him, we are satisfied but at the same time there is created within us a deep dissatisfaction. We realize how far short we fall of

being what we should be in and for Him. The deeper we go with Him, the stronger and more constant will be the searching or seeking for a fuller understanding of Him and His way and will. Our heavenly Father is both the Known and the Unknown.¹

It was Kierkegaard who said, “Man can only be on the way; always in the process of becoming.” And he might have added, at least for Christians: *in the process of becoming what he already is—a child or a follower of Christ.* Similarly, Bultmann somewhere says that the Christian life is always an intention and a quest. We sing, “I am satisfied with Jesus,”² but are we satisfied with our understanding of Him and particularly of our walk with Him?

You remember the reaction of Isaiah to his vision of God. His immediate reaction was, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). The more conscious we are of His presence, the more we will cry out, “I am a man of unclean lips.”

Occasionally I give personal illustrations in things I write. There is one thing that I want to share with you; it vividly illustrates the emphasis I am trying to make. When I was a college student, I went home one weekend. We were a poor family, having little of this world’s goods. My mother frequently said, “We may not have much, but we can keep clean what we have.” She was an excellent housekeeper.

¹ By this point of the chapter, one may be able to sense something of a philosophical reflection on Maston’s part toward consideration of the idea of seek and search. This approach is at the heart of Maston’s book *Why Live the Christian Life?*.

² See “Satisfied with Jesus,” by B.B. McKinney.

https://hymnary.org/text/i_am_satisfied_with_jesus_he_has_done_so. Accessed 1/20/2024.

Friday afternoon when I arrived home, Mother's wash was still on the line. Since it had not dried, she left it out overnight; something she seldom did. Her washing, as usual, looked spotlessly white.

The next morning when I awoke and looked out the window, everything was covered with snow.

Now, how did my mother's washing look? Did it look spotlessly white? You know the answer. There was something out there to compare it with what was really white. So it is or will be with us. The closer we walk with Him, the more conscious we will be of how far short we fall of being what we ought to be. We will become aware of shortcomings, failures, and sins that we may have been unconscious of previously. We will be conscious of a marked contrast between what we are, what He is, and what we should be.

Also, the more conscious we are of His presence in our lives, the deeper will be the urge to seek to be an instrument of His to reach out to people who need to be touched. Also, we will be challenged increasingly by the fact that if we say that we abide in Christ—and we do so if we claim to be children of God—then we ought to walk or live as He walked or lived (1 John 2:6). Once we are really gripped with this conviction, it will challenge us for the rest of life's journey. It will send us on a constant search for a clearer knowledge of the way He walked and seeking ways in which we should walk with and for Him.

If we will study the life of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels, we will discover that He was supremely concerned about people and not religious structures or theories. He was interested in and concerned for all kinds of people, including people who were neglected and underprivileged. If we follow Him, we will seek out and touch some of these for

Him, some of whom are among the untouchables of our society.

If we are not careful, we and our churches will tend to neglect the very ones for whom He seemingly had a special concern. Many of these people will not come to some of our churches unless we, as members of those churches, seek them out and touch them with some of the love of God.

What?

There are many references in the Bible not only to whom we should seek but also to what we should seek. Before we examine two or three special passages of Scripture, let us call attention to some of the character traits or qualities that God expects His people to seek to build into their lives. These will be restricted largely to references where the word “seek” is actually used.

The great prophets of the eighth century before Christ stressed the fact that God’s people should seek *justice*. For example, Isaiah, sometimes called the “prince of the prophets,” in telling the people what they should do to be right with God said:

learn to do good;
*seek justice,*³

and then defined in a limited way what justice would include (Isaiah 1:17; see also Amos 5:24):

correct oppression;
defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow.

Peace is another quality we should seek to cultivate. The psalmist says (Psalm 34:14; see also 1 Peter 3:11):

³ Italics added for emphasis.

Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.⁴

Paul somewhat similarly says, “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19). Previously, in the same epistle, he had said: “If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). There is a similar emphasis in Hebrews: “Strive for [“pursue,” NASB; “aim at,” NEB] peace with all men” (Hebrews 12:14).

We will be more diligent in seeking or pursuing peace if we within our own lives have the peace that comes from the sensing of the divine presence. It was Jesus who said to His troubled disciples and to people in general, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. . . . Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). This is the source of what Paul termed “the peace of God,” which he said “passes all understanding [“surpasses all comprehension,” NASB],” and “will keep [“guard,” NASB] your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Paul suggests that the child of God should “always *seek* to do good to one another and to all” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).⁵ He specifically emphasizes this in his discussion of the eating of meat offered to idols. After evidently quoting from a communication he had had from the church at Corinth that “all things are lawful,” he said, “but all things do not build up” and then stated an abidingly challenging standard for every child of God: “Let no one *seek* his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (1 Corinthians 10:24).⁶ He added, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the

⁴ Italics added for emphasis.

⁵ Italics added for emphasis.

⁶ Italics added for emphasis.

church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31-32). He then cited his own example: “Just as I try to please all men . . . not *seeking* my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:33).⁷ He closed with the challenge, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). There is enough in these verses from 1 Corinthians, if taken seriously, to give needed guidance in most times of decision concerning the rightness or wrongness of almost any contemplated action or activity.

It has already been implied that we should measure our lives by the kind of life Jesus lived while he walked among men. In other words, we should seek to be like Him. On one occasion He said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). On another occasion He said, “I *seek* not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30).⁸

Jesus had a deep sense of having been sent. Do we have a sense of having been sent? He also believed that He was sent to do the Father’s will. Do we seek to know and to do the will of our Father?

Also, Jesus came proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. The first petition in the Model Prayer is (Matthew 6:10):

Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.⁹

⁷ Italics added for emphasis.

⁸ Italics added for emphasis.

⁹ Maston called his *Christianity and World Issues* (1957) his academic book. It was a macrocosmic perspective toward the global issues of the time, and ironically of any time. He gave two chapters to war: “War and Peace,” and “War and the Christian Conscience.” He also gave a chapter to “Race and Racial Tensions” and a chapter to “Economic Life and Relations.” The last chapter was ambitiously presented as “Christianity and World Transformation.”

In connection with the fullest statement in the New Testament about things material, Jesus said that His disciples or followers should *seek* first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33). As a background for this statement or exhortation, He had set forth the attitude toward and the relation to material things that should characterize a follower of His (Matt. 6:19-21). While money and material things may be and are necessary, they should never be the main thing a follower of Christ seeks. In other words, the child of God should be master of them and should never be mastered by them. And after all, as Jesus suggested, material things may be lost or stolen.

Furthermore, Jesus plainly said, “You cannot serve God and mammon” [“money,” NEB, NIV] (Matt. 6:24). Notice that He did not say, *you should not* but “you cannot.” This applies not only to the wealthy but to all of us. The main thing is not how much we have but our attitude toward it. Whether we have much or little, it is impossible to be a slave of God and of money and material things at the same time. In this whole passage (Matt. 6:19-34), Jesus suggested at least three reasons for supreme devotion to God and His kingdom rather than to material things: (1) material things are perishable and insecure; (2) the danger of a divided mind; and (3) God will provide the necessities of life for those who seek first the kingdom.

It was from that kind of background that Jesus said, “*Seek* [“continually seek,” NASB marg.] first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well” (Matt 6:33).¹⁰ Notice “and his righteousness.” His kingdom comes as His righteous rule is extended. What “things” will come as a result of seeking the kingdom of God first? The reference is clearly to the necessities of life and not to wealth.

¹⁰ Italics added for emphasis.

In the entire passage, Jesus was not suggesting that no consideration should be given to material things and particularly to the necessities of life. His emphasis here and elsewhere was that God and His kingdom, realm, or rule should have first place in the life of every child of God. He was concerned about who and what had priority in the life of His followers or disciples. It was a matter of what would be first and second, supreme and subordinate. If the kingdom is first or the subject of supreme devotion, that “will keep all else in its proper place” (EGT).

George Buttrick, commenting on Matthew 6:33, says, “Life should be a solar system—Christ, the sun, as personal focus of the kingdom” (IB). The often-quoted statement of Henry Drummond was, “Do not touch Christianity unless you are willing to seek the kingdom of heaven first. I promise you a miserable existence if you seek it second.”

Another important passage where the word “seek” is found is in Colossians 3:1. “If [“since,” NIV] then you have been raised with Christ, *seek* [“keep seeking,” NASB] the things that are above.”¹¹ Here are the reasons: (1) Christ with whom we have been raised is there “seated on the right hand of God”—the place of honor and authority (Colossians 3:1). (2) We died and our “life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Note the verb tenses—“died,” “is hid.” “The “death” is fact accomplished; the resulting “life” is fact continuing (CBSC). This is one of the many wonderful paradoxes in the Scriptures—we have died, yet we live. Really, we live because we have died. We are hid with Christ in God—hid in the sense that it is a mystery but also in the sense of concealment and safety. (3) Another reason or motive for seeking the things above is the fact that Christ will appear, and we will appear with Him.

¹¹ Italics added for emphasis.

Then Paul, who was a pastor at heart, spelled out for the Colossians and would suggest to us what it would mean to live the resurrected life. An examination of what he suggested will convince us that living the resurrected life will necessitate a lifetime of seeking, searching, struggling.

Typical of Paul, he balanced the negative and positive aspects of that life. He introduced the negative aspects with the general statement: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” (Col. 3:5). The “therefore” refers to “since you have been raised with Christ.” If you analyze the things that should be put off, you will discover that they include (1) sins of the flesh, (2) sins of the spoken word, and (3) sins of the mind or thought (see Col. 3:8-9).

Then Paul turned to the positive aspects of the resurrected life, introducing the emphasis with “put on” (Col. 3:12). Here Paul uses the figure of changing a garment. He has exhorted the Colossians as he would us not only to put off those habits and sins that are out of harmony with living the resurrected life. He also suggested that they should put on the “garments that suit God’s chosen people, his own, his beloved” (Col. 3:12, NEB). He then listed some of the qualities that they and we should seek to cultivate in our lives. They are “the ethical consequences of having put on the new man” (EGT). They are “the new clothing on the new man in Christ” (WP).

There are few passages of Scripture that challenge me more than Colossians 3:12-17. Will you read the verses prayerfully, permitting them to challenge your soul? Notice the qualities or virtues listed are in the area of human relations. Notice what they are: compassion, kindness—“the character that offers sympathy and invokes confidence” (CBSC), lowliness or humility, meekness or gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. If you were graded on these seven qualities or character traits, how would you rate on each one and on the entire group: A, B, C, D, or F?

Some of us might like to add an “I” for “incomplete,” which would be an appropriate grade for many if not all of us on some of the traits.

Then Paul added: “And above all these things put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14) or “to crown all, there must be love, to bind all together and complete the whole” (NEB). “Put on” continues the idea of clothing. Love is “the outer garment which holds the others in their place” (CBSC.). The Jerusalem Bible translates this as follows: “Over all these clothes, to keep them and complete them, put on love.”

Now, permit me to ask again: Will you not agree that the maturing of all these qualities in our lives will require a lifetime of seeking, searching, and struggling? This will also be true if we are to “let the peace of Christ rule” or arbitrate in our hearts (Col. 3:15).

In the early stages of the roll call of the faithful, the author of Hebrews says, “These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledge that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13; see also 1 Peter 2:11). “For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. . . . they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb. 11:14, 16; see also 13:14). The author then concludes, “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:16). The city that they sought and that we seek has already been prepared. Their and our seeking is not in vain.

Why?

Why should we seek God, His kingdom, the things above, and the heavenly city? We previously, to some degree, have answered these questions. In general, we can say that we should seek because we have the assurance that we will find what we seek.

There is that wonderful promise of Jesus, “Ask, and it will be given you; *seek* and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7).¹² “Ask,” “seek,” “knock” represent degrees of intensity. They seem to indicate a journey. We know by our own experience that we may not always find exactly what we seek. Really, we should be grateful that we do not always find what we seek. In other words, there are times when it would be tragic if the Father gave us exactly what we asked for or enabled us to find what we were asking.

Paul said that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” but he adds, “but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with signs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). Our heavenly Father knows better than we what we should seek. Really, we would not be seeking if He had not already sought and found us: “He is the secret guide of the pilgrimage” (IB), and we should never forget that seeking Him, His will, and His kingdom is a pilgrimage that will not be concluded until the end of life’s journey when we awake in His likeness.

As we close this chapter on “seek,” may we let two verses from the Psalms search our souls. First, Psalm 27:8.

Thou hast said, “*Seek* ye my face.”
My heart says to thee,
“Thy face, LORD, do I *seek*.”

Second, Psalm 63:1.

O God, thou are my God, I *seek* thee,
My soul thirsts for thee.¹³

Do we seek Him? Do we thirst for a fuller knowledge of Him and His will? If we seek Him, we will seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; we will seek the things that

¹² Italics added for emphasis.

¹³ Italics added for emphasis.

are above. Also, we will seek to live a life that will honor Him; a life that can be used by Him to touch for Him the lives of those around us.

Discussion Questions

1. Can “seek” be understood as a synonym for “researching,” “being curious,” “investigative”? Maston never used the term *lectio divina*, but his comment in this chapter of reading Scripture prayerfully is a short definition of *lectio divina*. Explore the concept by practicing it on this or earlier verbs considered in this book.
2. In a day of in-home dryers, Maston’s illustration of laundry on the line compared to snow falls outside of many people’s experiences, and thus they are unable to understand and apply his anecdote. What metaphor could be substituted to make the same point?
3. Do you feel comfortable assigning a letter grade to your character qualities? What about allowing a friend to assign a letter grade from their perspective of your character qualities?
4. Maston’s unfolding of “seek” could leave one in more of a confused state than not. How does one have confidence that “seeking” God’s will, the Kingdom of God, has found resolution?
5. “Seek” implies such acts as searching, exploring, and reviewing. How does one recognize that what has been sought has been found?
6. What ideal do you use to measure your spiritual success? Is it a person you know? What are the dangers of comparing ourselves to a person?
7. Look at the three reasons Jesus suggests for putting God over things. Which do you find most compelling?
8. Answer Maston’s question, *What “things” will come as a result of seeking the kingdom of God first?*

9. As you think of seeking peace, why does it matter that you begin with inner peace before promoting peace with others?