

Desperate for an Encounter with God

Our Ultimate Need

Instead of life-changing encounters with the Almighty, group prayer has been reduced to stuffy spiritual speeches and endless discussions of prayer requests.

It began softly, growing steadily, the distant sound of men singing, echoing through the narrow cobblestone streets. As the sound grew nearer, the tump, tump, tump of their marching feet could be heard.

It was sundown on Friday at this most holy Jewish shrine. As the last rays of sunlight departed Judean hills, the haunting sound of ram's horns echoed through the ancient City of Peace. This crescendo of praise reached its climax as groups of Jewish students began arriving in this world famous courtyard. Ignoring the rows of curious tourists, they marched forward, singing in the language of their ancestors.

As the throng swelled, they reached out toward a wall where millions have sought the blessings of Jehovah. Their songs of praise became fervent prayers for the 'peace of Jerusalem'. As they reached out toward this ancient foundation, some touched it, some bowed, and some even kissed the ancient stones.

The Wailing Wall, Jerusalem's icon of prayer, last remnant of a temple where once their forefathers knew the presence of God. This wall of hewn limestone separates them from Mount Moriah where Solomon's temple once stood. In that temple, the visible Shekinah Glory of God had

hovered continually over the mercy seat in the gilded holy of holies.

Politics prevent them from rebuilding their temple or even worshipping where it once stood. So they weep and pray in the spot that's as close to the ancient seat of mercy as they can get: the Wailing Wall. Week after week, year after year, decade after decade, they have come - desperate for God to intervene on their behalf.

What a moving, but sad picture of faith and hope; yet average Christians must look much the same to God. They attend prayer meetings and worship services, but seldom actually encounter God. It's as if there's a wall between them and a personal conversation with the Lord.

That wall is a misunderstanding of group prayer that reduces it from life-changing encounters with the Almighty to stuffy spiritual speeches and endless discussions of prayer requests.

Tourists may visit the Wailing Wall to watch a Semitic ritual, but the Jews come to pray. Keep this picture in the back of your mind, because every group you ever lead will contain some, maybe more than you think, who are desperate for an encounter with God.

STUDY GUIDE:

1. The Wailing Wall is so significant to the Jews because it's as close as they can get to the spot where the ancient _____ was.
2. According to the author, the 'wall' that separates many Christians from a personal encounter with God is a misunderstanding of _____ prayer that reduces it to stuffy _____ and endless discussions of _____.

Discussion question: When did you feel closest to God during the past week? Can you explain why that situation brought you close to Him?