

The Value of God's Presence



Lesson Objective:

The objective of this lesson is to create an increased awareness of the abiding presence of God and to inspire the disciple of Christ to pursue greater measures and experiences as the one thing most valued in life.

Key Scripture:

Psalm 27:4 *One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. To behold the beauty of the Lord. And to meditate in His temple.*

The Ark of God's Presence

Joshua 3:1-11 ¹ Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and he and all the sons of Israel set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, and they lodged there before they crossed. ² At the end of three days the officers went through the midst of the camp; ³ and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. ⁴ "However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." ⁵ Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

⁶ And Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over ahead of the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went ahead of the people. ⁷ Now the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. ⁸ "You shall, moreover, command the priests who are carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" ⁹ Then Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the Lord your God." ¹⁰ Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before

you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite. ¹¹ "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan.

Moses descended from the mountain of God with more than commandments written on stone tablets by the finger of God. He brought with him something greater than the laws of God, which conveyed the standards necessary to honor the holiness of "I Am that I Am." Moses brought with him a promise, *"My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest"* (Ex.33:14). With this promise there also came a plan of how an unholy, obstinate people, bent on sinful behavior and rebellion, may dwell within God's holy presence. This plan included building a tabernacle within which God's presence would abide behind layers of dividing fabrics and a great thick veil. Within this inner chamber called the "Holy of Holies" was placed a specific article of furniture. The Ark of God was a wooden box overlaid with gold containing three articles that testified of God's provision in the covenant. A jar of manna testified of God's provision of their physical daily needs. The rod of Aaron testified that God would choose leaders who would care for their relational needs with one another and God. And, the tablets of stone containing God's written laws, where His righteous requirements would reveal His people's spiritual needs. This box and the contained articles represented the contract God was willing to make with man. Man would fulfill the standards of righteousness and God would provide for all their needs, body, soul, and spirit. Thus, this box was called the Ark of Covenant.

Key Point: ***When the presence of the Lord comes, He brings with Him His kingdom with purpose.***

Upon the Ark of Covenant was placed a lid that was decorated with two winged cherubim. This lid was recognized as the Mercy Seat. This would be the place upon which the manifest presence of God would abide. The Ark of Covenant became an icon of God's abiding presence among His people and an image of fulfilled promise, *"My presence shall go with you."*

However, there is a second part of the promise of God's abiding presence accompanying His people, *"and I will give you rest."* The greatest treasure of all is the abiding presence of God. But when He comes, He brings with Him purpose. As the story unfolds we see that the fulfillment of the second part of the promise was a process. This process included driving out the evil inhabitants in the Promised Land and establishing God's rule and dominion in that land. It included not only conquering the land but also occupying it and ruling it in righteousness. In the midst of dominion and ruling in righteousness the promise of rest and peace would be fulfilled. When the presence of God manifests, He comes with the purpose of establishing His kingdom. But we cannot lose the order by which the kingdom of heaven is established on earth. The priority is His presence then the journey of accomplishing the mission, followed by its fulfillment evidenced by rest and peace.

Key Point: ***The Priority of Connection with God comes before the mission from God.***

There are many within the Church who get focused upon establishing God's kingdom through organizations, outreaches, training and equipping programs, and a long list of necessary

ministries aimed at bringing God's kingdom to earth. Yet, there is a very important priority necessary to minister from. Everything must have its origin and basis in God's presence. Before the mission comes the personal connection with His Spirit.

There are also some who want to enjoy rest in the season of warfare, taking dominion and establishing our King's rule. There is the reality that our rest and peace is secured in Christ's victory over sin and darkness. Rest and peace is our inheritance from which we can now dwell and minister from. But there is an element of warfare and in establishing God's dominion that requires active partnership with the Holy Spirit. Rest does not mean inactivity. It means advancing from the basis of victory. It means risk-taking faith that is violent against the powers of darkness from a source of spiritual, mental and emotional peace.

Key Point: ***Rest does not mean inactivity. It means advancing from the basis of victory.***

In our text we see Joshua preparing God's people for their mission to inhabit the Promised Land. The command given to the people of Israel was to prepare and watch. In preparation, they cleansed themselves, got their household in order, and poised themselves to take action. When they saw the priests take up the Ark of Covenant, the icon of God's manifest presence, they arose and followed.

A distance of over 914 meters, about 1,000 yards, or the length of 10 football fields, was required between the people of Israel and the Ark. The same type of boundaries that were established around the base of Mount Sinai, which kept an unholy people at a safe distance from God's manifest presence, was placed around the Ark of the Covenant. Keeping these boundaries insured that the people of Israel would be able to see clearly the way they were to go, in that they would be taking a journey they had never gone before. In other words, everyone was going to be able to see where the Ark was going. No one was going to be lost in the crowd and rely upon the herd before them to know where they were going. The presence of the Lord was taking the lead and everyone would watch the signs and wonders that accompanied His presence. In confidence and trust, they would venture into areas that once appeared impossible.

The element of time is a good illustration of this distance. While in the middle of a hardship, trauma, or crisis, it is difficult to see where God is in the midst of it all. All you can do is take one step of faith at a time. However, as time passes and you have the advantage of hindsight, God's presence through the ordeal becomes evident. Although He wasn't directly in your face at the moment, His presence was there bringing illumination through wisdom, favor in need, and peace in the storm. In His presence, what would normally have swept us away in the current of fear, becomes an opportunity for His power to manifest in signs and wonders.

As the story with Joshua and Israel unfolds, the priests placed the Ark of Covenant upon their shoulders and approach the Jordan River. The river was at flood stage, creating an impossible crossing. Yet, when the priests carrying the Ark placed their foot into the muddy water it began to subside. Each step they took the water subsided further more until they found themselves in the very middle of the river where there was no more water obstructing their crossing.

The Scripture is clear as to where the river was blocked of its flow. It was a small town far to the north called, Adam.¹ The obstacle that kept Israel from their Promised Land, was dealt with from Adam onward and was swept away into the Dead Sea. Jesus Christ dealt with, once and for all, the obstruction of sin that has kept mankind from entering into their Promised Land – abundant life. All the sin that separated humanity from God, all the way from Adam, throughout man’s history and into our future, was all swept away and cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Our crossing into the kingdom of God was made possible because God’s presence in the Son of Man went before us and provided a way across the barrier where no other man has been able to go. Jesus Christ, as our Ark of Covenant, has gone before us and made a way for us to follow.

Key Point: ***Crossing over sin’s divide comes with a guarantee of entering into God’s rest.***

According to verse 10, this miracle would become a testimony of God’s presence being among them that came with a guarantee of His promise being fulfilled. Israel would find rest as God disposed of Israel’s enemies. The fact that Jesus Christ has conquered sin on our behalf is a testimony that comes with a guarantee. Our Promised Land of abundant life is secured as we face our enemies in the presence of God. Jesus Christ is the guarantee of a better covenant (Heb.7:22). The presence of the Spirit of God is the guarantee of His promises being fulfilled.

2 Corinthians 1:20-22 ²⁰ For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. ²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, ²² who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (NKJV)

Angelic Visitation

I was attempting to prepare a Sunday message for a church in Cabo, Mexico. By Saturday night I still did not have a peace about what I was to share. I went to bed that night still unsure of what I would preach that next morning. I asked the Lord before falling asleep, “If you have a message for these people, please tell me in a dream or something.”

Sometime during the night I was startled awake by a voice calling my name. I’ve had this type of thing happen before and thought it was simply a voice in my head. So I closed my eyes and attempted to go back to sleep. But I began again pulling on heaven for direction in the soon coming service. Then suddenly I heard that same voice call my name again. This time the voice came from the left side of my bed and I realized there was someone in the room. My heart was racing and I attempted to see who it might be next to my bed. But the room was pitch black. “Denny!” came the voice again right in my left ear. He was so close to me that I could feel the warmth of his face next to mine as he spoke into my ear. Then a peace came to my heart as the

¹ Joshua 3:16

realization of what was happening came to my mind, "Oh, this is an angel from the Lord." "What do you have for me?" I asked him.

Key Point: ***God is releasing greater revelation of who we are in Christ and who Christ is in us.***

"The Father is dispatching angels from heaven with two great revelations for His people," said the angel. "The first is the revelation of who you are in Christ. And the second is the revelation of who Christ is in you." Like a vision in my spirit, I could see angels descending from heaven carrying light. It reminded me of what Jacob saw as angels descended from heaven upon a stairway. I saw these angels dispersing into every nation until the light they carried caused flickering lights to appear all over the world. It was like a satellite view of lights coming on in the cities.

Who we are in Christ, and who Christ is in us were not brand new truths to me. In my 40 plus years in the church, I've heard sermons on these topics many times and even studied and preached them myself. But what I saw the angels bringing from heaven had more to do with illumination. They were stirring an awakening to truths that would bring God's people into a greater awareness of their true identity in Christ. We have received a measure of glory in these two truths, but now there is greater glory coming to His church as the reality of our transformed identities becomes illuminated. The process of the kingdom is to bring us from glory to glory unto the fullness of His glory.²

Key Point: ***There is an awakening to our uniquely individual identities in connection with God.***

The revelation of these two truths carry two great dynamics. The first deals with our own personal identities. God created each of us uniquely individual. The reality of who we are consists of our personality types, gifts, talents, and our call. Every human upon the earth carries within themselves God's image and design. This alone creates an element of significance that remains hidden from the multitudes. However, there is a greater dynamic of significance that occurs when our identities are placed into Christ Jesus. The Divinity Code (God's image) within us comes to life and is drawn into abundant living. This transformation is so dynamic that the apostle Paul claims in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." Our identities haven't changed in that our personalities, gifts, and callings are all still there. What has changed is that who we are has been placed into the presence of Christ. The old man who kept us independent from God and thus bound in ignorance of our true identities is dead with Christ. He has lost his power over and control over us. Now we are free to become who God designed us to be.

Although He has given each of us a significant identity with personality, gifts, and calling, He does not define our role. We choose how we will express ourselves to the world around us. In our role, God offers us a partnership with Him to take His kingdom as we go into the world.

² 2Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 1:23; 3:19; & 4:13

Key Point: ***The one in whom all power and authority has been given, has made His abode in us.***

The second great dynamic is the revelation of who Christ Jesus is within us. Christ Jesus, who has received all power and authority in heaven and on earth, and has had all things placed in subjection under His feet, has made His abode within us. We are each a temple of the Spirit of God. The presence of Jesus the Great Teacher, the Good Shepherd, the Prophet, and the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, etc., dwells in us. We have entered into a covenant with the King of kings and Lord of lords that can only be likened to a marriage covenant. This covenant involves two becoming one. There is to be no independence in this covenant with Christ. His mission is our mission. His vision is our purpose. His values are to be our values. And the culture of heaven is to be the environment we function from.

As the words of this angel continued to impact my mind with revelation and insight. An open vision came to me and I knew it was directly related to these two truths. I saw before me the Ark of the Covenant. All around me was darkness, but a light above the mercy seat illuminated every aspect of the Ark. I began to encircle the Ark trying to observe all that I could about it. I saw the poles that were placed upon the shoulders of the priests as they would bare that Ark on their journey. I saw the golden cherubim with wings outstretched over the mercy seat as if bowing before God's presence. I saw the lid fitted snugly upon the golden box that contained its most sacred elements. As I continued to encircle the Ark I could hear a rumbling that started at a distance but then quickly drew nearer and nearer. Although the room I was in was not affected by any shaking, I recognized the rumble as being a great earthquake. Suddenly, from behind me, I heard a loud tearing sound. I turned to see a thick veil behind me being ripped from the top to the very bottom until the entire veil was laid wide open. When I turned back around to look again at the Ark, it was gone. The open vision stopped and the angel was gone. I laid there for the longest time trying to grasp what I had just experienced. The question that continued to run through my mind was, "What does the Ark of the Covenant have to do with who we are in Christ, and who Christ is in us?"

The Ark of the Covenant has everything to do with God's manifest presence He pledged would never leave us nor forsake us. Although this icon or symbolic expression no longer exists in the natural Ark itself, as far as we know. The reality of it abides in the spirits and hearts of all who have received Jesus Christ. We are the temple of God's manifest presence. However, I believe the issue has to do with a veil that keeps these two truths concealed. The hindrances that keep us from being the unique individuals we are created to be are being removed. Our attitudes, motives, and behaviors all indicate the measure to which these two truths have become a reality. The second truth of our oneness with Christ's identity and mission are also being revealed with greater glory. What people experience in our presence, how we impact our environment and our influence upon others grows with favor in His manifest glory.

Being Present with the Holy Spirit

My wife, Danette, and I have an issue in our relationship that occasionally creates friction between us. In our many years of marriage, we have become very comfortable with being with each other. So much so, we can spend hours together without saying a word. I am a mental processor. My mind is usually chewing on a message, working through issues, planning, or off somewhere dreaming. Danette can look at me and know that I have checked out and she will have to pull me back to earth so that we can talk. Danette, on the other hand, loves her electronic gadgets. She can spend time texting, reading face book posts, reading e-books, writing correspondences, and a host of ministry related activities on her devices. Her devices have also provided her something to do while I am checked out. It usually takes some time before we realize that in our comfort with one another, we take fore-granted each other's presence. We have become better at communicating when we are not feeling connected. But we still have a tendency to slide into comfortable abiding with one another rather than active engagement that creates connection. There is nothing wrong with abiding in each other's company where nothing needs to be said. As long as there is connection of heart.

Key Point: ***There is a difference from being in someone's presence and actually being present with them.***

Being in each other's presence is different than being present with one another. Learning to discipline myself to be present with my wife and with those God has brought into our lives to be an influence, is an important aspect of connected relationships. It becomes easy to waste a presence and lose the value of intimate connection with one another.

Key Point: ***Our issue isn't over the truth of God's ever-presence, but rather self-discipline in His presence.***

The issue of God being ever present needs not to be debated or proven. His name is *Jehovah Shammah*, meaning, I Am Ever Present. The truth that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and are carriers of God's presence is a solid reality to those who have been born again and baptized with the Holy Spirit. The issue isn't over the truth of His ever-presence, but rather self-discipline in His presence. The awareness of His presence that promotes connection is our responsibility.

The here and now requires focus on our part. It requires discipline to set aside distractions and break away from the busyness of life to give away the most precious commodity we have – quality time. Distraction is an ulterior attraction. It is an attraction that we yield to more than what we were first attracted to. Learning how to slow down and become alert to priorities based on what is most valuable to us is important. Managing our schedule to incorporate quality time with God, our spouse, and other significant influences is going to require active effort.

Dwelling in the Constant Awareness of God's Presence

Psalms 27:4 *One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord And to meditate in His temple.*

David discovered the one thing that was most fulfilling in his life. He would go to the temple of God and bask in the worship of the priests and fill his mind with the beautiful things of God. It was in that place he says, "Oh, that I could just stay here all the time and never leave." He was so impacted by this sense of fulfillment that he makes a conscious choice, *this is the number one in all my priorities that I shall seek after.*"

The Message Bible phrases this scripture this way. ⁴ *I'm asking God for one thing, only one thing: To live with Him in His house my whole life long. I'll contemplate His beauty; I'll study at His feet.* ⁵ *That's the only quiet, secure place in a noisy world, The perfect getaway, far from the buzz of traffic.*

The number one thing David recognized as the most important thing in His life was discovered in an age prior to God's presence making His abode in man. And yet, this one thing that was sought after with such diligence is taken so lightly on this side of the cross.

In the awareness of God's presence, He displays His beauty, His wonder, His awesome greatness. These revelations come as we simply turn our affections towards Him in worship and then begin to meditate on who He is, what He is like, and the marvelous things He has done and promised to do. These are the things we attribute to His beauty. Beauty is the attraction of the soul that invites us to draw closer for relationship. When the Lord reveals His beauty, it is an invitation for intimacy that says of each other, "Into me I allow you so see,"

God created beauty with a variety of colors in flowers to act as an attractant to birds and bees and thus insure procreation. The image of the plant is implanted within the pollen that is then surrounded by beauty and nectar. Every time a humming bird or bee responds to the beauty of the flower, it is rewarded with the sweetness it offers. In the same manner, God reveals to us His beauty to attract us to Himself. He then rewards us with the sweetness of His goodness as we draw close to Him. It is through experiencing interaction and intimacy with Him we become impregnated with His image.

Psalms 42:1-2 ¹ *Just like a deer that craves streams of water, my whole being craves you, God.* ² *My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God. When will I come and see God's face.* (CEB)³

³ *Common English Bible.* Copyright ©2011 by Common English Bible.

Psalms 67:1-2 ¹ *God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us— Selah.* ² *That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.*

Key Point: ***In responding to God's presence, we draw closer into intimacy with Him.***

The Hebrew language has no word for "presence." The Hebrew translation is literally, "face." When the Scriptures describe Moses' interaction with God as friend to friend, it describes a face to face encounter. It is describing a presence to presence, or person to person interaction. Whereas we cannot behold the actual face of God and endure such intense weight and radiance of His glory and live, there is a face to face, presence to presence, relationship we can have with Him. Through presence to presence encounters, we will discover things about God, and He will see things about us as we journey together in an intimate relationship.

Knowing God in face to face encounters, we discover ourselves. But doesn't God already know us? Yes! The image he created us to be was formed in us before the foundations of the earth. But in these face to face encounters with our creator, what was hidden comes to the surface. Two marvelous things are occurring in times of intimate connection with God. First, God is beholding the image He placed in us manifests from within. As if God is saying, "Oh, there you are. I knew you were hiding in there somewhere." Secondly, we are discovering who we are meant to be as all that is false falls away and we see our true selves. We discover God in us, and He sees some of us in Him. We loose so much when we fail to value experiencing God's presence. When we allow distractions to rob us of quality time with God, we are missing the most valuable treasure of all. Knowing God and thus discovering ourselves must become the greatest core value we possess.

Key Point: ***Taking our thoughts captive, arrest the attractions that pull us off the course off of oneness with Father.***

When Jesus exhorted the church at Ephesus to return to their first love, it was because other attractions had taken them off course.⁴ Paul exhorted the Corinthians to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.⁵ The obedience of Christ is not to be motivated by obligation to His will. It is obedience based in love and devotion to Christ. Doing His will becomes a joy. Devoted obedience comes from recognizing those attractions that want to pull us off course from His will, and consciously turning our thoughts and affections to Him. Where our mind goes, so will our emotions and heart. Attraction isn't sin. It is what we choose under the influence of attraction that leads to sin.

⁴ Revelation 2:4-5

⁵ 2 Corinthians 10:5

No Place for Shame Before His Face

Key Point: ***Our weaknesses and failures will not constrain God from encountering us with His glory and goodness.***

All of us have missed opportunities to spend quality time with God. Many of us don't realize just how far we've drifted from relationship with Him until suddenly we realize the amount of time that has slipped by from our last encounter with Him. Moses discovered there was no place for shame in His first encounter with God before the burning bush. He attempted to disqualify himself from God's calling because of His past failures and present inabilities. God's solution to issues of shame was, "My presence will go with you."⁶ Shame will attempt to disqualify you from approaching God's presence. It holds your past failures into account and attempts to attach those failures to your identity, and thus classifies you as being unworthy. Shame will cause you to focus upon the issues as to why you are not qualified, causing you to fall short of God's glory in the here and now.

Moses discovered that his weaknesses and failures did not constrain God in approaching Moses and allowing His glory and goodness to pass before him. The evidence that Moses overcame shame and regret was seen in his audacious request for more of God even after His glorious encounters. He refused to back away until God set the limit of what was enough. Remember, the bar of what was enough in the Old Testament has exceedingly been raised in the New Covenant. We have yet to discover how much of God and how much of heaven is available to us on this side of the cross.

Face to Face with God

My grandson is a sports fanatic. His sport of preference is baseball. Like many teenagers, he has his favorite sport players he admires the most. So much so that his life long dreams is to play professional baseball like them. If you want to engage in passionate conversation with him, all you have to do is talk about sports and ultimately you will hear of the great plays his hero has performed and his statistics. And yet there is one man that he so affectionately adores that I can watch the mannerisms of this man display themselves in my grandson's actions and character. These are what actually reveal that one hero he admires the most and overshadow all of the baseballs' greats. This true hero is his father and my son. You may not hear my grandson confess this truth, but you can see the reality of it every time he lights up at his father's attention or praise.

Key Point: ***We will take on the appearance of the one we affectionately behold.***

⁶ Exodus 3:12

There is a truth that we cannot ignore. We become like the one we affectionately behold. When we behold God's beauty and encounter His presence, transformation occurs that goes beyond the reach of mere knowledge. It grows within our character and nature, which expresses themselves in our mannerisms and culture.

2 Corinthians 3:18 *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

Key Point: ***Our greatest mission is to become more and more whole, so as to see the glory of God's fullness in us.***

Only when we perceive the face of the One in whose image we were created do we come to know who we are and the one for whom we have been made. Within this face-to-face encounter we discover the greatest mission, to become more and more fit to see Him in the glory of His fullness. The degree to which we behold and perceive the face of God corresponds directly to the degree of being yielded to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit forming us into Christ's likeness. Being yielded is allowing the Holy Spirit to kill everything in us that would inhibit us from becoming a mature representative of Christ.

The quest for the face of God is the ultimate quest that drives us onward through the process until the journey is complete. To embrace this quest for the face of God requires the willingness to die. Thus, this quest is not for the faint of heart. It is far too costly to be pursued from motives that want only comfort, pleasure or satisfied curiosity.

The desire to seek God is birthed in us by His Spirit within us. The desires that lead us to His will are not legislated or forced, but grow with increase as we yield to their draw.

Seeking the face of God has two central dimensions:

- 1. The Quest for God's Presence**
- 2. The Quest for God's Favor.**

Measures of God's Presence

1 Corinthians 13:9-13 ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (NIV)

The issue is this: We don't realize how much childish things are influencing us without beholding the perfect one. We must first realize that seeking the presence of God is not about trying to get God on our side so that He will bless us. He has already given us His Holy spirit without measure. Thus, all measurements are set up on our end of the equation. The measure of our experiences is determined by the degree to which our lives are in agreement with God and His rule from the kingdom within us. All the measures of our experience with the presence of God correspond to the deeper truths about who God is and who we are in Him.

Measure One: God is Omnipresent

The pantheist worships all things, believing that all things possess God and are thus God. While it is ridiculous to worship a tree or a cow as being gods, it is correct to realize that God holds every cell of that tree and cow in place. God is everywhere! Agreement to this truth brings me into an awareness of this certain measure of His presence that is with everyone all the time.

Psalms 139:7-8 ⁷ *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?* ⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.*

Jeremiah 23:23-24 ²³ *"Am I a God who is near," declares the Lord, "And not a God far off?"* ²⁴ *"Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the Lord. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the Lord.*

Colossians 1:16-17 ¹⁶ *For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.* ¹⁷ *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

Measure Two: A Believer is a Temple of God

There is a greater profound truth that must be embraced with agreement in that God has come to dwell inside of each person who is born again of God's Spirit. Although God is omnipresent and dwells everywhere, there is a greater measure of His presence in those who have received Jesus as Savior. He makes our bodies his temple – the eternal dwelling place of God.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 ¹⁶ *Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* ¹⁷ *If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.*

Romans 8:9-10 ⁹ *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.* ¹⁰ *If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.*

Measure Three: God Dwells within the Assembly of Believers.

We progress into a deeper measure when we agree that whenever believers join together in His name, He is there in their midst. There is a greater measure of His presence experienced when we come together as an assembly.

His presence was already with me simply by being a created being. But then I experience a greater measure when I was born again. Then, when I join with other believers, I can anticipate a greater measure of His presence among us.

Matthew 18:19-20 ¹⁹ "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰ "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

Measure Four: God Inhabits the Praises of His people.

King David discovered a wonderful truth that adds to this revelation of increasing degrees of God's presence. God's throne is an even greater measure of His presence. Ultimately, His glory begins to fall on us as we learn to honor His presence through thanksgiving, praise, and worship.

Psalms 22:2-3 ² O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest. ³ Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

Measure Five: The Saints Receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a greater measure of experience in His presence from being born again.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18-21 ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Measure Six: Being “In the Spirit”

Being in the Spirit is an experience used to describe encounters where we enter into a trance with an open vision where our mind and emotions are caught into an experience with our spirit man, engaging with the spiritual realm.

Acts 10:9-10⁹ *On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.* ¹⁰ *But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;*

Acts 22:17-18¹⁷ *"It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance,* ¹⁸ *and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'*

Revelation 1:10-16¹⁰ *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,* ¹¹ *saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."* ¹² *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;* ¹³ *and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.* ¹⁴ *His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.* ¹⁵ *His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.* ¹⁶ *In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.*

Measure Seven: The Experience of Heaven Encounters

Heaven encounters are very similar with being in the spirit, but carries an experience of visitations to heaven or the throne room.

2 Corinthians 12:1-4¹ *Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.* ² *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven.* ³ *And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—* ⁴ *was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.*

Revelation 4:1-4¹ *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."* ² *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.* ³ *And He who was sitting was like a jasper*

stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

Measure Eight: Resurrection Life

The final measure is that point in which we leave this realm and enter into the spiritual realm recognized as the resurrection. We will no longer be of this world, but will be transformed entirely into a spiritual being where we will be with God for all eternity.

Luke 20:34-36 ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; ³⁶ for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:50-53 ⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 ¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Key Point: **God's increasing presence rests in those who create an environment conducive to His presence.**

The point is this: the presence of the Lord will increase for those who embark on this quest. Upon those who will brave the journey and persevere through the process. The Holy Spirit lives in every believer and manifests through those who by faith preach the kingdom of God, pray for the sick, set people free from demonic oppression, and represent God's kingdom wherever they go. However, God's presence rests on only those who create an environment conducive to His abiding presence.

The Supreme Issue of Favor

As with all the gifts, God's grace is given to all of us freely, with no strings attached. His unmerited favor comes with a purpose of bringing His glory from heaven to earth. But not everyone necessarily chooses to use God's grace for its intended purpose, or even use it at all.

Matthew 25:14-18 ¹⁴ "For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ "To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. ¹⁶ "Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. ¹⁷ "In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ "But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

There is a directive of stewarding the grace of God that is related to increase. Just as the servants of their master were all given different amounts of resources, not everyone starts out with the same amount of favor.

Key Point: ***The saying that, "All men are created equal," is not the principle God uses to give measures of His favor.***

In the founding of the Constitution of the United States, Thomas Jefferson inserted a concept that has become a core value of the American Culture. In the face of discrimination against black people and confronting the social status of royals, nobles, and clergy with commoners, "All men are created equal," became a focal point of how the government would relate to its citizens. This statement has become such an emphasis of the constitution that to many it has become gospel. However, "All men are created equal" is not scriptural. This statement is true as it pertains to God's love for each of us being the same. It is true in the fact that we have all been created significant. But not everyone has been given the same measure of favor.

Key Point: ***In wisdom, God only gives increased favor according to our faithfulness.***

The servants of the king were given various amounts of resources, "each according to their own ability." They were given a different measure because the king saw their individual capability and potential for success. Clearly, effective stewardship is using what we have been given in order to gain increase. God, in His wisdom, gives us favor according only to what we can handle by His grace. In other words, God's blessings come with an ability to obtain improvement. As His blessings increase, so also does greater grace empower us for success. The part we play in this

process comes from the same issue required of all three stewards. The primary issue is always faithfulness.

Matthew 25:19-23 ¹⁹ "Now after a long time the master of those slaves *came and *settled accounts with them. ²⁰ "The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' ²¹ "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²² "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' ²³ "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Each of us is given the opportunity for increase by the faithful use of what we've been given by His favor. In the Kingdom of God, faithfulness is the supreme commodity that is rewarded with increase.

Matthew 25:24-28 ²⁴ "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. ²⁵ ~'And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' ²⁶ "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. ²⁷ ~'Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. ²⁸ ~'Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'

Key Point: **Faithfulness is the supreme commodity of heaven, which is rewarded with increase.**

In this parable of Kingdom principles, it is the one who started with the most who was found the most faithful. With greater favor came an increase of responsibility. The principle of reward has a counter outcome to those who receive much, squander them, and therefore fall into greater failure. Everyone receives favor to some degree. Each of us are accountable to be faithful with what we receive. This faithfulness to responsibility is the requirement we all must embrace. Jesus says it this way in Luke 12:48, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."

Matthew 25:29-30 ²⁹ "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. ³⁰ "Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In the same measure that faithfulness is rewarded, unfaithfulness is judged. Instead of responding from a holy fear of the master, the unfaithful servant reacted to an illegitimate fear. A holy fear would have given the lazy servant a correct sense of the weight of trust the master had laid upon him. Holy fear manifesting in wisdom should have inspired him to respond in honoring the master's will. Instead he reacted in illegitimate fear that sought to create distance. He rationalized how he can distance himself from the responsibility of what he had received. He looked at the risk of failing and chose to avoid acting in faith that requires risk. "What if..." "I can't..." "It's too hard..." were likely the excuses he used to justify hiding from responsibility.

Unfaithful servants look at their mission to do the impossible and question the goodness and wisdom of their King. Instead of drawing near to Him for the grace of His wisdom, or at least gaining the experience of the other two stewards, the unfaithful servant isolates himself and independently comes up with his own plan. Independence is the way of the unfaithful. Ignoring relationship with God while pretending to serve Him is a violation of the willful heart motivated by love. The Lord had something to say about this in Isaiah 29:13 *"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men"*(NIV). Independence cuts us off from being able to do the very things we were put on earth. It also robs us of increased favor and blessing the King desires to give us.

Increase in wisdom and increase of favor are interdependent. One accompanies the other. Wisdom gives us the keys to understand and use the favor we have been given in accordance to God's will for us.

The Face of God in Jesus

Key Point: ***The face of the Father is seen in the expression of His loving countenance towards us.***

Jesus came and manifested the face of the Father to mankind. Jesus said of Himself, *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father."*⁷ Remember, the face of God and the presence of God is one and the same, according to the Hebrew concept. Jesus manifested the presence of the Father so that everyone who saw Jesus would know what the Father was like. The face of God, like the glory of His goodness that passed before Moses, reveals the attributes of His nature and character. So, when Jesus was moved with compassion and performed miracles and healing, He was showing us the face of the Father. The face of the Father is seen in the expression of His loving countenance. The countenance of Jesus was seen in His joyful, hopeful, merciful, and kind expressions.

It was only when Jesus was taken into heaven that He could release the connection He had with the Father to become His follower's connection with the Father. And so He sent the Holy Spirit to create that connection and make us one with the Father. When Jesus prayed the prayer, *"that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the*

⁷ John 14:9

world may believe that You sent Me,⁸ the Holy Spirit being sent was the answer to that prayer. This means that anyone who has received the Holy Spirit could have their own face to face encounter with the Father in the way Jesus had. Jesus' experience of being one in connection with the Father becomes the normal experience of all who follow Him.

The prayer of Jesus was made just prior to Jesus final steps towards fulfilling His purpose on earth. He confirms to the Father that He had fulfilled His assignment by saying, *"I have glorified You... I have finished the work... I have manifested your name... I have given them your word... As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them... The glory which you gave me I have given them... I have declared to them Your name..."*⁹ Jesus clearly demonstrated the work of a good steward. He embraced the responsibility for the assignment He received from the Father.

Jesus' prayer for His followers being connected to the Father revealed a purpose. *"so that the world may believe..."* In the face of crisis and trauma with a countenance that retains hope and trust that the face of the Father is revealed. It is the face of compassion for the lost, the sick and tormented that others see Jesus in us. It is in our connection with the Holy Spirit that brings us into the ultimate transformation, that we might become the ultimate transformers.

The Way to True Intimacy

Out of all the people that followed Jesus, He invited 12 to become His disciples and learn of His ways through relationship. Out of the 12 that followed Him, three drew closer than the others. Out of these 3, John chose the be the most intimate.

1 John 1:1-4 ¹ *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—* ² *and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—* ³ *what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.* ⁴ *These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*

Key Point: ***Fellowship denotes the sharing through communication in order to bring a participation in the experience.***

Out of that place of intimate connection with Jesus, John speaks of Jesus as being the one he heard with his own ears, seen with his own eyes, and touched with his own hands. In this connection with Jesus, John experienced *fellowship* with the Father. John is writing this with a purpose, that we who follow Christ Jesus would also experience fellowship with the Father.

⁸ John 17:21

⁹ John 17:4, 6, 14, 18, 22 & 26

The word *fellowship* is the Greek word *koinonia* meaning, “a having in common, partnership, the sharing of common experiences and interests, the participation in knowledge and what is derived from the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ It denotes the sharing through communication in bringing the other person into a participation of their experience.

John’s intimate fellowship with Jesus is what we have been invited into through the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we have ears to hear what He is saying. We have eyes to see what He is doing. And we have experiences with His touch as He moves upon our feelings or manifests upon our bodies. Our fellowship comes through the Holy Spirit, who communicates and shares with us the knowledge of those things that we have in common with the Father. This knowledge goes beyond mere information. “Knowing” God means to be brought into a personal union with Him through experience.

The Way of Quiet Stillness

Key Point: *The realization of God’s presence comes with we learn to come before Him as His is, in peace.*

John describes his experience in the throne room of God as he watched a river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God.¹¹ This river flowed into what appeared to be a sea before the throne. There was no wave or ripple in this sea. Rather, it appeared to be as glass.¹² Under the weight of God’s glory, in an atmosphere of total peace, the sea of the water of life was compressed to appear as glass. There is nothing that can disturb the peace of God. He does not worry or fret. The throne room expresses the nature of the Father who is in absolute peace.

In our invitation to come boldly to the throne of grace,¹³ we must recognize the atmosphere of peace in God’s presence. Fear, worry, and anxiety, are not attributes of boldness. Therefore, we cannot fully realize true intimacy in God’s presence until we learn how to come before Him in peace and stillness of spirit, mind and body.

Psalms 62:1-2 ¹ *My soul waits in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation.* ² *He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken.*

Psalms 46:10 *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! (NKJV)*

¹⁰ Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

¹¹ Revelation 22:1

¹² Revelation 4:6 & 15:2

¹³ Hebrews 4:16

The Bible in Basic English translates this verse this way, "Be at peace in the knowledge that I am God: I will be lifted up among the nations, I will be honored through all the earth." The New American Standard Version phrases it this way, "Cease striving and know that I am God..."

In order to commune with God in our inner man, we must first remove two primary hindrances to our peace: 1) External Distractions 2) Internal Disturbances. The first involves influence and interruptions that come from our surroundings. Jesus encouraged his followers to pray in their closets, where they can close the door and commune with the Father in secret.¹⁴ Jesus modeled this concept when He would continually break away from the crowds and even His disciples, to be alone with God. The second hindrance deals with our struggle in the battlefield of our minds. If there are internal disturbances that pull our hearts and minds away from the quietness of spirit, we need to align these things with the Word of God.

There is a term that has been passed down through church history that originated from the Quaker movement. They would use the term, "center down" to bring quietness to the heart while in the midst of struggle or crisis. It referred to finding that place in the center of the storm, the eye of the hurricane, where peace is discovered. In other words, to center down means to recognize the center of quiet peace in the midst of mental turmoil. It is in that place where we center down into that quiet rest that we enjoy focused communion and connect heart to heart with Father God.

Conclusion

Being silent and still before God is not the goal. We want to come into that place of quietness so my heart can hear the still small voice of God. It is in the place of stillness that we recognize where He is going, what He is doing, and what He is saying. We can position our souls to catch the breeze of His movement.

For most of us, finding this place of quiet stillness is hard to find, especially when your world is typically rushed and hectic. It will require focused effort, determined attention, and perseverant practice. This is not something that happens automatically. It is not something that can be hurried or forced but and only be allowed to happen in its time.

King David wrote in Psalms 47 those things he learned from his quest for the presence of God. "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him... cease from your anger and your need for justice...stop all worry and fretting... for all who humble themselves before the Lord shall be given every blessing and shall have wonderful peace." (various translations).

End of Lesson 301

¹⁴ Matthew 6:6

Recommended Resources:

1. Audio Message: *"This Present Presence"* by Paul Manwaring
2. Audio Message: *"The Journey Into His Presence"* by Bill Johnson
3. Audio Message: *"Living in the Sanctuary"* by Kris Vallotton
4. Audio Message: *"The Value of a Supernatural Lifestyle"* by Kris Vallotton
5. Book: *"The Lost Art of Practicing His Presence"* by Jim Goll. Copyright © 2005 by Jim Goll. Destiny Image Publishers, Inc. P.O. Box 310, Shippensburg, PA. 17257-0310
6. Book: *"Face to Face with God"* by Bill Johnson. © Copyright 2007 by Bill Johnson. Published by Charisma House A Strange Company 600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, FL. 32746