

Living in an Awareness of the Presence of God

The Presence of God is one of the Bible's most foundational truths. Here is an overview:

(1) Creation - The Scriptures open up with God present "in the beginning," as the Creator of the world (Genesis 1:1). This Creator God is preparing a place in which to place His created masterpiece, Man. Once the process was complete we read of how God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:28). Man, made in the image of God, heard God say, "Now, live in my presence and worship me - for that is your chief end. Increase and fill the world with worshippers."

(2) God's Name - In the Second Book of the Bible we read of the God who appeared to Moses and revealed His name as, "Yahweh" (Exodus 3:11-15), from the verb "to be" - describing God as the God who is present, living among His people (Numbers 35:34). The people of Israel knew that God was present by the symbols of the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, (Exodus 13:21) and the glory of God that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34).

(3) Localised - This God who was present chose to identify His presence with specific places: (a) *The Mosaic Tabernacle* (Exodus 25:8,22; 40:34); (b) *The City of Jerusalem* (Deuteronomy 12:4-7; 2 Chronicles 6:5,6); and (c) *The Temple of Solomon* (2 Chronicles 5:1; 6:1,2).

(4) Universal - The local manifestation of God's presence did not mean that God was only in one place at any given time. We speak of God as omnipresent. Dr. Rex Mathie once said: "All of God is everywhere present all of the time". (See Psalm 41:12; Jeremiah 23:23,24). J. Oliver Buswell, said: "Everything in the universe is immediately in the presence of God". In Psalm 139:7-11 we read of the joy and security that comes when the believer knows that God is present, while in Amos 9:1-4 we read of the unbeliever's terror and inability to hide from the God who is present to judge.

(5) Promised - Throughout the Old Testament we read this promise of God, "I will be with you" (Genesis 26:3; Deuteronomy 31:23; Joshua 1:5,9; 1 Kings 11:38; Isaiah 43:1,2,5; etc). The God who is present has promised to be with His people. It is interesting to note that each time one of God's people was facing a difficult situation, they heard God promising His presence to them. Some examples include: Isaac worrying about survival (Genesis 26:3); Jacob afraid of Laban (Genesis 31:3); Moses afraid of Pharaoh (Exodus 3:12); Joshua overwhelmed at his task of leading the people into the promised land (Joshua 1:5); Gideon afraid of the enemy (Judges 6:16); Jeroboam afraid of ruling (1 Kings 11:38); Jehoshaphat afraid of the enemy (2 Chronicles 20:17); and Jeremiah overwhelmed at his calling (Jeremiah 1:8).

(6) Prophets - The prophets all experienced the presence of God and made reference to the God who is present among his people (see for example: Isaiah 7:14; Jeremiah 1:8 and Haggai 1:13).

(7) The Word - The Hebrew word for *presence* is often translated *Before Him*, and means literally, "Before the face or under the eyes of." When someone's gaze is fixed on another person they are in each others presence. So we have a God whose face is turned towards His people. Our God is present in the sense of looking on to be actively involved.

(8) The Gospels - The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the King who is God present with us. Matthew begins with Jesus' birth where Jesus is presented as "Emmanuel," which means "God with us" (1:23). In the middle of his book he recalls Jesus words, "*Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them*" (18:20). He concludes his gospel with the Great Commission and Jesus' words, "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (28:20). John in his gospel introduces Jesus as the Word, who is God (1:1), who became flesh (1:14), who is the only begotten God (1:14) and who reveals the Father (1:18). For John, the presence of God is clearly revealed in Jesus as he often speaks of the Glory connected with Jesus, reminding his readers of the Glory of God that was revealed in the Old Testament temple (1:14; 2:11; 11:40; 12:41; 17:1-24).

(9) In the Believer - Jesus introduced the concept of God living in people. He said, "*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*" (John 14:15-18). God lives in the believer - who is referred to as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19 "*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you*").

(10) In the Church - While the individual is called a temple in the New Testament, the church is also spoken of as the Temple of God (2 Corinthians 6:16 "*For we are the temple of the living God*"). Paul says that God's people are "being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

(11) In the New Jerusalem - We read in Revelation 21:3 that in the new heaven and new earth God's presence will be known in a much greater measure than at present: "*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them.*" (21:3). We also read in an Old Testament prophecy that the name of the city will be "*Yahweh Shammai*" (Ezekiel 48:35) which is translated as: "*The Lord is There*".

The Problem of Unawareness

But why does the reality of God Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, living inside of us, not impact us as much as it can and should? The problem is that we are unaware of the presence of God. As Christians we tend to live "underneath the radar." We are unaware that God is always with us.

(1) Why are we unaware of God's presence? James Denney, in *The Death of Christ*, says: "Sometimes I envy the Catholic priest. They carry a crucifix around all the time. I need a reminder of the cross of Christ because I forget so easily what Jesus did for me through His death for us." There are at least three reasons for our lack of living with an awareness of God's presence: (a) *God is invisible* - we don't usually perceive God with our five senses; (b) *God is crowded out* - our hectic and busy schedules make us neglect Him; and (c) *We do not discipline ourselves to think of God* - we are content to check in with God at church or in devotions.

(2) Are there Biblical examples of being unaware? Here are a few references to Biblical characters who were unaware of God's presence in their midst: (a) *Jacob* (Genesis 28:10-17); (b) *Emmaus disciples* (Luke 24:13-16, 30-31); and (c) *Jesus' disciples* (John 21:4,7).

(3) What are the rewards of awareness? If we live aware of God's presence we will experience: (a) *Intimacy* - when we interact with God we grow closer to Him (Psalm 63:6-8); (b) *Security* - when we know that God is with us we will not be afraid (Psalm 16:8; Isaiah 43:1f); and (c) *Holiness* - when we spend time in God's presence we are conformed into His likeness (Acts 4:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Tuning into the Presence of God

The solution to this lack of awareness of the presence of God lies in tuning into the presence of God. David, the Psalmist learnt to live with an awareness of the presence of God. He says in Psalms 16:8, "*I have set the LORD always before me.*" It says literally, "*I keep the Lord continuously in prominence*". Again in Psalm 63:1-8 when David was out in the wilderness, far from the temple, he worshipped the God who was present. He had a spontaneous relationship with God because he was continually aware of the presence of God.

We need to practise the presence of God. Here are some guidelines:

(1) Remind yourself of the reality of God's presence - throughout the day we are to find ways to jog our memories that God is with us.

(2) Decide to talk to God continuously - we must make a conscious decision to communicate with God as much as possible throughout the day.

(3) When you forget God is with you, confess and continue with Him - we must not allow condemnation to fill our hearts when we realize we have forgotten God - just confess and continue.

(4) Do everything, even common tasks, for the Lord (Colossians 3:17, 23). If we can condition ourselves to see everything we do as done for God, we will be able to include Him in our whole lives.

(5) Take control of your senses and let them direct your mind to God - use the senses we use to experience our world (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) to direct our attention towards God.

(6) Make it your aim to experience God continually - get to the point where we decide to increase our awareness of God's presence and experience God as much as we possibly can.