

## **Practicing the Presence of God**

God is with us always. It is our delight to be aware of his presence. Yet this is hard to do in lives that are full of busy distractions. We can go through a day without once thinking about God. Brother Lawrence said, 'I do nothing else but abide in his holy presence, and I do this by simple attentiveness and an habitual, loving turning of my eyes on him.'

How can we cultivate a habit of turning our eyes to our Lord? Below are a few simple suggestions for 'practicing the presence' of God. It is good to know, before you start these exercises, the caution that others would have us know: 'Don't grit your teeth and clench your fists and say, "I will! I will!" Relax. Take your hands off. Submit yourself to God. Learn to live in the passive voice, and let life be willed through you.'

### **Arrow Prayers**

These are similar to the Jesus Prayer in that they are short, can be prayed in one breath of air and can be prayed anywhere and anytime. The difference is that you formulate the words you want to pray. A simple rule is to find a name for God that is particularly significant for you at this time, and then to find the phrase that best suits what you are expecting from God. For example, 'Father, help me to know your love.' Or 'Almighty God, give me strength.' Or 'Living Water, refresh me.' Or 'Bread of Life, feed me.' Use this prayer constantly throughout your day and for as many days as it takes until you know and experience what it is you are seeking from God.

### **Flash Prayers**

These are a type of intercession. For everybody that you see or pass by or interact with in your day, send up a flash prayer of blessing. Ask Jesus to touch them, reveal himself to them, prosper them, remove deception from them, overcome the works of the evil one and so on. Frank Laubach, a worker among Muslims in the Philippines, wrote, 'This morning, as I came from the train and prayed for all the people on the street, I felt new energy surge into me. What it does to all of them to receive that instant prayer I may never know. What it does for me is electrical. It drives out fatigue and thrills one with eager power.'

### **The Language of God**

God is constantly revealing himself to us. His creation and his works speak to us of his glory (Psalm 19). Everything you see contains a message from God about who he is. Look around and ask, 'God, what are you saying to me about yourself?' For example, you see a woman carrying a large burden. You are reminded of Psalm 68:19 (NIV), 'Blessed be the Lord who daily bears our burdens.' So God uses the picture and the idea of 'burden' to speak to us about his care. Or you see a child cry, and you are reminded of a time when all tears will be wiped away (Isaiah 25:8) or that though you sow in tears you will reap with joy (Psalm 126:5-6). So God uses tears to speak to us of eternity and joy. Frank Laubach wrote, 'I shall try to learn your language

as it was taught by Jesus and all others through whom you speak – in beauty and singing birds and cool breezes, in radiant Christ-like faces, in sacrifices and in tears.’

### **Remember God on Your Bed**

David wrote, ‘On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night’ (Psalm 63:6). There are at least three ways to do this. Before you fall asleep, go back over your day, recalling what you did in the morning and then all through the rest of the day. In every scene that passes before you, place Jesus in the middle. See him as he was by your bed when you woke up. Picture him as he was with you as you ate your breakfast. Look at him as he was standing next to you when you bathed your child or spoke with a friend. See him reach out to you as you cried when you received some hard news or laugh with you when you encountered something humorous. Then thank him for never leaving you nor forsaking you (Hebrews 13:5) and for being the kind of God who sympathizes with your weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). Another way to do this is to give your dreams to the Lord, asking him to reveal anything he wants to while you sleep. And for those who wake up throughout the night, let your first thought upon waking be of him. Then ask him if there are any people or situations that you can pray about. If you are too drowsy to articulate words, just hold that person before the Lord, sometimes simply by holding up your hands as a symbol of holding him or her before the Lord. Picture that person before Jesus, and hold them there until you either fall asleep or until you move on to prayer for another person.

### **Live Concurrently**

All this means is that you are living in two dimensions at the same time. On the physical level you may be listening to someone or performing a task or running an errand. On the spiritual level you are turning towards God by listening to him or by surrendering yourself to him. Joyce Huggett discovered this after major surgery when her brain was not functioning properly. She found that none of her normal prayer practices worked. But she found that she could be mindful of God at whatever chore she did. She writes, ‘Make a deliberate decision to do the chore and that alone. Do the task slowly, carefully and in silence. Concentrate on the physical feeling of what you are doing. Gradually you will find your silence becoming inner stillness, a state of peace in which you will be more aware of God’s encircling presence. In doing ordinary things with extraordinary concentration and attention, you can encounter God.’ Some people, while doing tasks, surrender their body to God: ‘use my hands, my feet, my mouth’ (Romans 6:13, 19). Others, while listening or thinking, simultaneously pray, ‘God, give me wisdom. What are you doing here? Saying here? Show me your will about this person or situation.’

### **Be still**

Simply stop whatever you are doing and rest quietly (Psalm 46:10). For some this is a symbol, a way of reminding themselves that God is in control of life and their lives. For others, this is a time of silent waiting, a time to

pray, 'Search me, oh God, and know my heart and see if there is any wicked way in me' (Psalm 139:23-24). Give God time to search your heart. If he reveals something to you, thank him for it. If not, still thank him for his love for you. If your mind is distracted during this time, don't get upset. Gently let the distractions go, let them float away like debris on water. And then turn your focus again to waiting silently before the Lord.

### **Practice the attitude of gratitude**

'Give thanks in all things, for this is God's will for you' (I Thessalonians 5:18). So often we ask things from God and forget to thank him for all things. Practice giving him thanks for everything throughout the day. Another way to practice this discipline is to thank others for how you see God working in them and through them. This can be powerfully effective when speaking to non-believers. A man who was not a believer, though married to  
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one, challenged family members to have regular family reunions. One of those family members turned to him and said, 'Your concern for our family reminds me of how important family is. You are showing a part of God's concern and his love. Thank you for reflecting God's image in this way.'

### **A Word of Encouragement**

It will take time before these exercises become habitual. Don't despair. Thomas Kelly, a Quaker who lived in the twentieth century, wrote, 'If you slip and stumble and forget God, and assert your old proud self, and rely upon your own clever wisdom, don't spend too much time in anguished regrets and self-accusations but begin again, just where you are.'