

Practicing The Presence

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20b

The Beginning

Let me start with a personal story of the journey that I have been on over the last several months which has brought me to the point of sharing this message with you.

I have been a “Christian” since my childhood and I received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in my late teens. Over the years since I spent a year in a Ministry Training and Discipleship program. I have been a youth pastor on two different occasions and served as part of leadership in a House of Prayer similar to the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. Even in the midst of all of those experiences I have never experienced His ever present presence or intimacy with the Lord like I have over the last few months.

In the fall of last year a group of area churches and ministries held a citywide worship event, including bringing in a world renowned worship leader and revivalist to be a part of the program. I participated as a part of the intercessory prayer team before and during the event. We experienced the presence of the Lord, and there was a degree of breakthrough, but nothing like we had hoped and prayed for. Believing that the Lord still had more for our city, county and region I founded Revival Watch and we continued worship and prayer meetings following the event. In the meantime, I personally, began to diligently seek Him. I returned to having personal quiet time communing with Him in prayer and study. I also began playing worship music almost all the time. In addition, even in the midst of other assignments and responsibilities, I try to maintain a heart and attitude of prayer that is attuned to His Spirit. Not to say I have not faced difficulties or challenges during these months, I have. However, overall, I have found this season to be the most rewarding in my journey of faith to this point. It is for this reason that I feel compelled to share this message with you. My prayer is that you can know and experience what I have discovered over these last few months.

The Purpose

The purpose of this message is quite simple. It is my prayer that I might encourage and inspire you to “Practice the Presence” and discover the power and pleasure of doing so that I have.

It is my hope that as I share insights from the scriptures and my personal experience the Holy Spirit will give you understanding and open your eyes to the importance of, the how to’s, and the rewards of “practices the presence” on a daily basis.

Almost all of us have been in a worship service, prayer meeting or other time when we were with other believers and we experienced the “Presence of the Lord.” My prayer is that as a result of this message your heart will be set ablaze to “practicing the presence” so as to experience that same power and peace even if you are all by yourself and “practicing the presence” will no longer be optional, but the ONLY option.

The Call

‘Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”’ Genesis 3:8-9

From the literal beginning God, The Father, The Almighty has desired one thing above all else. He has desired to have a mutually exclusive and intimate relationship with mankind. I have to believe that the verses above

are not the first time that He had walked through the garden in the cool of the day. I honestly believe that this was a regular occurrence that happened frequently and most likely on a daily basis. He called to Adam, not because He didn't know where He was, but because He wanted Adam to know that he was sought after. Now, just like He called Adam and Eve in the Garden, the Father calls to us. He wants to have the same ongoing personal relationship that had with them, with us. (*Revelation 3:20, Matthew 11:28*)

He can and does at times pound loudly on our hearts door or He uses circumstances in our lives trying to get our attention. However, He will often choose more subtle and quieter ways like He did when He spoke to the great prophet Elijah. The Lord's presence was not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, it came as a gentle whisper. (*1 Kings 19:11-12*)

He will often use a gentle tug at our heart and a quiet whisper in our ear. He will lovingly arrange circumstances in such a way as to guide us to look upon His countenance. He eagerly holds arms open beaoning us to come and let Him love on us. Sadly, too often we get distracted by the things and the voices that we hear in this world, that we can't hear Him when He calls.

I know that at various times in my life I have heard and answered the call to an extent and for a little while, but I am drawn away by the things of this world. These things don't even have to be evil or sinful, they are simply things that feel our ears and minds with something other than His voice and His Truth. I have to learn this the hard way, but anything that I give more time and attention to than I do Him is an idol. Did Jesus himself not command us to "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*" (*Mark 12:30*)

I challenge you, to pause right here, before you read on and spend a moment in prayer asking the Lord to search you and reveal any area that you have made an idol, whether knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally. Then ask for His forgiveness and repent, Ask Him to give you ears to hear and a heart to respond.

Can you hear Him calling?

'Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." ' Mark 4:9

The Foundation

*'And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ' **Matthew 27:50-51***

Yet, our loving and gracious Heavenly Father has done so much more out of His desire to share His very presence with us. First and foremost he sent his son to live and die as a man on the Earth to be the sacrifice that payed the price for our sin. As we see above, at the very moment that Jesus cried out, "It is finished" and took his last breath the curtain that separated the Holy of Holy from the Holy Place in the Temple was ripped completely into 2 pieces. It ripped from the TOP to the bottom, thu signifying that it was only God who could have torn it. If it had been torn bottom to top it could have been questioned whether it was a supernatural event or not. Some with little understanding of the Temple may not understand this significance. The Holy of Holies held the Arc of the Covenant and was believed to be the residence of the Holy Presence of the Almighty. Even the High Priest only entered the Holy of Holies one day a year on the most holy day of the year, The Day of Atonement, for the purpose of atoning for the sins of the people. With the veil rent in two, We ALL now have access to know and experience the presence of God. Yet, our loving Heavenly Father has taken this even a step further! He has given the Holy Spirit who now resides IN us. Thus, not only do we have access to the presence of the Almighty, we now have that very same presence IN us. (*2 Corinthians 6:16,19, John 14:16,20, John 14:16,20*)

When we take a close look at these passages, we see some very specific promises that He has given to us -

“I will LIVE with them”

“I will WALK among them”

“I will BE in them”

That seems pretty convincing that He is interested in having a personal and intimate relationship with each of us. We have already discussed what sharing His presence with us cost Him; the next question to answer is what does “practicing the presence” cost us?

The Cost

*'For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?' **Luke 14:28***

Now that we have an understanding of The Father's deep and sincere desire to share His presence with us and the great price that He was willing to and did pay to make it possible for us to do so it is time for us to consider, what does accessing His presence cost us? We must each “count the cost” and determine if we are willing and able to pay the price required. Let me not mince words and jump straight to the great reveal.

“Practicing the Presence” costs us simply, EVERYTHING.

*'And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.' **Luke 9:23***

*'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.' **Romans 12:1***

Romans 12:1, happens to be my favorite verse in the Bible. In light of what we just discussed above, let me offer an alternative version -

My dear brothers and sisters, that having considered all that the Father has given and done out of His amazing love and mercy towards us in order to give us access to His presence, let us offer our Him a holy and acceptable sacrifice which is simply our lives poured out in love, honor and devotion to Him, lives that are examples of His love, mercy and grace to those in our lives. This is our reasonable act of worship. This is the very least that we can do as an expression of our gratitude for all He has done for us.

Yeah, I know it is a little wordy, but it expresses my interpretation and the depths of what this verse means to me personally.

Let me take this idea a step further, look again at Romans 12:1. Our sacrifice must be “holy and acceptable.” In fact, there are verses throughout the scriptures where we are called to live holy lives and to turn from the ways of the world. (1 Peter 1:15-16, Hebrews 12:14, Ephesians 1:4, Romans 12:2) Again, practicing the presence means giving up living our lives according to our thoughts and ways and living by the Spirit and setting our minds on things of the Spirit. (Romans 8:5-6)

Yes, to our flesh, the price of practicing the presence is very expensive, but to our spirit, the reward for doing so is priceless. By investing everything that I am, in return I have a relationship with “I AM.” He gives me His everything, and He has a WHOLE lot more to offer than I do. All he wants is our, “YES.”

Are you willing to pay the price?

The Choice

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. **Revelation 3:20***

We know He is calling and now have an understanding of the great price He paid to make His presence available to us. Lastly, we just considered what accessing His presence costs us. That only leaves one last step, The Choice. He has already done all that He can and is ready and waiting for your answer. Will you choose a life blessed and empowered by His presence or continue in the status quo going through the motions? While choosing to begin the journey of “practicing the presence” is a significant one time event, actually continuing on this journey is a choice that one must make each and every day. Luke 9:23 reminds us that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him DAILY.

Thus each day, I offer all of I am to Him, I give up my own identity other that they have in Him. When I am in Him, and He is in me, then there is nothing that is impossible. When I set my mind on things of the Spirit, I walk according to the Spirit. Thus, we have been set free from the law of sin and death and the ability is within us to live a life without continuing to sin. When we walk and live lives “practicing the presence” then our character begins to reflect His and our we produce the fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23,25*).

Thus, we can truly and totally surrender ourselves to the ways of the Spirit and know the rest, peace of joy of knowing His presence on a continual basis, or we can surrender in part and be blessed in part. Just a reminder, what did He say to the church at Laodicea about being lukewarm?

Yet again I reiterate, yes the cost may seem to be too high at first, but once you make the choice to go “all in” I promise you that it will not take long to realize that the price you paid was an absolute bargain for what you get in return. Again this is a moment by moment choice, but once you fully surrender, the choice to stay in the Spirit gets easier and easier. Personally, I can’t imagine ever wanting to go back.

For this moment, right NOW, what is your choice? Are you in, and willing to do whatever it takes to walk in His presence and let Him set your life on fire, or are you content to continue to stay where you are and to simply smolder.

If you are willing to give Him your “YES”, then read on and we will talk about some practical applications to help stay on this path. If you are still not quite sure, stay with us as well. I believe that as you read on, you will come to make the choice that is best for you and best for the Kingdom.

The Practice

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25

What does keeping step with the spirit and “practicing the presence” look like practically?

“Practicing the Presence” at its simplest, is simply learning to be aware and acknowledging the presence of God and his ever present interest and involvement in our lives. Below I share a number of practical actions that we can do that will cultivate this awareness and draw us into a closer and deeper relationship with Him.

- *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17) - Yes we should have a time when we “go into our closet” and pray on a regular basis. However, prayer can also be more like a conversation rather than a ritual. Share your joys, concerns, and seek His guidance throughout your day. In addition, for those that have a “prayer language” USE IT! When we pray in the Spirit we are tapped directly into the desires and Will of the Father. I know for me, He will often show me what it is that I am praying for.
 - At times I am walking through the house quietly mumbling a prayer and my wife will stop and ask me, “What did you say?” When I reply, “Nothing,” she has come to understand I was talking, just not to her and we continue as we were. My favorite time to pray and worship is when I am

driving, especially on the highway. It's just me, the Lord, my worship music and a little road noise - no other distractions.

- *Study and Meditate on The Word* (Luke 4:4) - "The Word" is Jesus in written form. When we meditate and spend time reading and studying The Truth He makes us more and more like Himself. The more time you spend in The Word the hungrier you are for more of it.
 - As I have drawn closer and closer to Him, everytime I open my Bible application or my physical Bible and read, it is like the words are jumping off of the page. I find myself realizing insights and revelations in passages that I have read hundreds of times in the past. The more we commune with the Spirit in the Word, the more our natural and carnal minds are renewed and made more like the >mind of Christ."
- *Keep My Commandments* (John 14:15) - Living a life of obedience, is not a hardship it a pleasure and a joyful expression of my love and gratitude in response to His great love for me. When walk in compromise and sin, then we will not feel and experience His presence to the same depth and closeness.
 - There is no easier way to quench once experiencing the presence of the Lord than to knowingly and willfully walk in compromise and sin. "Sin separates us from God."
 - BUT there is nothing that He loves more than one who offers clean hands and a pure heart.
- *Confess and Repent of Sin* (1 John 1:9) - When we do sin, acknowledge, confess and repent QUICKLY. While He has already paid the price for it, let us be careful to not take his grace for granted or lightly. Just as He loves a pure heart, He also loves a repentant one.
- *Walk in Worship* (Psalm 100:4) - THIS IS MY FAVORITE!! Yes, regular participation in corporate worship is important, but we MUST be like David and cultivate a heart that can and does acknowledge and worship the Almighty in ALL of our circumstances. The more time I gaze into His holiness, goodness and love more His character begins to shine in and through me.
- *Set your minds on the things that are above* (Colossians 3:2, Philipians 4:8) - As we grow Walking in Worship, both our natural and spiritual eyes will be open to see Him in even the smallest of circumstances. The Father will also begin to give us eyes to see our world and those in it from His perspective. WARNING - When He does so, He will likely ask you to take action on his behalf in the lives of those He gives you this perspective of.
- *Love Your Neighbor* (Matthew 22:39, John 13:35) - What is the most obvious outcome of recognizing and experiencing His presence and love? Recognizing His love for others and demonstrating that love to them through service. It can be as simple as showing kindness or as involved as taking action to provide a needed service for someone. "Show me your faith by your deeds."
 - The more in love we are with Him, the more we will feel and express love for those around us.
 - We may not consider it as such, but sharing the Gospel with others is definitely an expression of love and we are serving them in the process.
- *Forsake not the Assembling* (Hebrews 10:23-25, Colossians 3:16) - Connect with others who are on this same journey, encourage one another, lift one another up in prayer, share testimonies of what the Lord does in and through as you preactive the presence. Sharing our experiences builds the faith of those with whom we share them.
- *In Everything Give Thanks* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) - A grateful heart attunes our eyes to see the Lord's presence in even the smallest of things. Gratitude also helps see the rainbow in the midst of the storm.

I can personally attest to the value found in each of these. However, that does not mean that you will not know, sense or experience the Lord's presence if you are not practicing each and every one of these principles. In fact, there is only one thing needed and necessary to experience the presence and we discussed it earlier - SURRENDER. Ultimately, all He needs and wants is our "YES" and for us to ask Him as Moses did - '*Then Moses said, "Please, show me Your glory!"*' ' **Exodus 33:18**

The Product

Throughout the lines and paragraphs of this message to you I have mentioned the fruit of practicing the presence either directly or indirectly. I will share more of these directly to conclude momentarily, but let me end how I began, by sharing my experience practicing the presence.

I shared in “The Beginning” some of the ways that I practice the presence, most specifically, I try to maintain an attitude of prayer and worship at all times. As I have done so, I have also tried to live my life in such a way that I am simply an empty vessel or conduit through which He can use me by the Holy Spirit that is in me. Yet, again, this does not mean that I walk around with a “holier than thou” attitude; I still say and do things that I should not have. However, I find myself more quickly convicted when I do, so thus I am also quick to confess and repent. Through this process, my spiritual ears have become more and more attuned to hearing His still small voice. I have found that when you hear and subsequently obey something that the still small voice tells you, the more that He talks to you. I’m not sure I even have the words to explain how my time in The Word has changed. I read and study passages and topics that I may have read hundreds of times in the past, but now I read and study now and it is truly like the words come alive and jump off of the page. I feel like in these last few months I have grown in revelation knowledge of The Word more than in my entire Christian life to this point. I want to share what I believe to be the most special part of this whole process by sharing a recent encounter. During a recent morning as I was in my time with the Lord, I felt led to focus my prayer on a particular man from my men’s group and to share that prayer and whatever else the Lord laid on my heart for him in written form. Approximately an hour and a page and a half later, the message was composed and sent. Later in the day, I received a reply from him sharing his appreciation and confirming that my email had been timely and exactly on point. While I believe it was unrelated, later in the day as I was on my hour drive back to my office from a meeting the Lord manifested His presence right there in the car in the form of having a physical sensation of having a weighted blanket wrapped all around me. With the weight came an almost overwhelming sense of peace and contentment. In addition, while I did not hear Him speak it, my heart “knew” that my abba was proud of me and that I brought joy to Him. My friends, brothers and sisters, even remembering and sharing that encounter with you brings tears to my eyes, because there is NOTHING that I want more than to bring joy to my abba’s heart. So in short, what has practicing the presence done for me - CHANGED MY LIFE and led me to be the type of person that we as “Christians” are called to be.

While I just shared my experience and as noted, others are mentioned above, below are a few “products” of practicing the presence.

- *Draw Near to God and He Will Draw Near to You* (James 4:8) - The more consistent that we are in being aware and acknowledging God's presence, the more He reveals himself.
 - The more I am in His presence, the more like Him I become.
- *Transformed into His Image* (1 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 5:22-23): As you walk in the presence we become more and more like the one we are with, thus producing the fruit of the Spirit.
- *Know You by Your Love* (John 13:35) - “God is Love.” Thus more I reflect Him, and the more love I will show to all those in my life. It will impact those closest to me most, but will touch the lives of everyone with whom I have contact.
- *Keep Him in Perfect Peace* (Isaiah 26:3) - When we come to know Him as He is from being in His presence. When we are in Him and He is in us, we can have peace no matter the circumstances because we trust in Him.

- *Your Word Is a Lamp for my Feet* (Psalms 119:105) - When we live in the presence we are led by the Spirit, as we are minds and lives are transformed by being in the presence He will reveal His good and perfect will for us. Romans 12:2.
- *For His Good Pleasure* (Philippians 2:13) - As we walk in the presence we realize that being in His presence is exactly what our purpose is.

The End

There is NO end to practicing the presence. Even when life ends and this shell breathes its last, we will shed this shell, but just keep walking in His presence for eternity in our new heavenly bodies. When we walk in presence, we bring Heaven to Earth.

My friends I TRULY hope that you hear my heart and how desperate I am in my desire for you and for that matter all believers to understand the NECESSITY of practicing the presence as a way of life.

Do you hear His call? Are you willing to pay the price?

I URGE you with all that it is in me, give him your "YES". Your life will never be the same!

Thanks for your time.

Humbly in His service,

Gary