

Saturday
Christian
Coffee
Group

**Do You Experience What You Believe?
There Is a Difference Between
Believing and Experiencing.**

**Believing in God
Is Required
Experiencing God
Verifies Believing**

EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD

EXPERIENCE IS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR KNOWLEDGE.

Definition of BELIEVING

- 1: To have a firm or wholehearted religious conviction or persuasion. To regard the existence of God as a fact Do you believe? Usually used with believe in the Scriptures.
- 2: To accept something as true, genuine.
- 3: To have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something.
- 4: To hold an opinion or think or suppose it is so.
- 5: To consider to be true or honest
- 6: To accept the word or evidence of.

Definition of EXPERIENCING

- 1: Direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge.
- 2: The fact or state of having been affected by or gained knowledge through direct observation or participation.
- 3: Practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity.
- 3: The conscious events that make up an individual lifeb : the events that make up the conscious past of a community or nation or humankind generally.
- 4: Something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through.
- 5: The act or process of directly perceiving events or reality.

The Presence of God

Most Relevant Verses (Verse Concepts)

Isaiah 57:15 - *For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.*

Acts 17:28 - *For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'*

Psalms 139:7 - *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?*

Exodus 33:14 - *And He said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest."*

Psalms 16:11 - *You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.*

Jeremiah 29:13 - *You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.*

1 John 4:12 - *No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.*

Acts 3:20-21 - *And that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.*

Matthew 5:8 - *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

John 15:9 - *Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.*

Exodus 3:2 - *The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.*

Exodus 16:10 - *It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.*

Exodus 19:18 - *Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.*

1 Kings 8:27 - *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!*

Job 38:1 - *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,*

Psalms 139:18 - *If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand When I awake, I am still with You.*

Genesis 3:8 - *They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

2 Samuel 6:2 - *And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim.*

Matthew 28:20 - *Teach them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Exodus 25:8 - *Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.*

John 14:16 - *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;*

More Bible Passages Regarding the Presence of God

Psalms 16:11 - *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Exodus 33:14 - *And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

Psalms 27:8 - *You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek."*

Acts 3:20-21 - *That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.*

Jeremiah 29:13 - *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

John 14:26 - *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

Psalms 145:18 - *The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*

Matthew 5:8 - *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

Psalms 37:7-9 - *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.*

Psalm 25:5-9 - *Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

Hebrews 13:5 - *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

Revelation 3:20 - *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

Hebrews 4:16 - *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Psalm 25:4-5 - *Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.*

Acts 17:27 - *That they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,*

2 Peter 3:9 - *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

John 4:24 - *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*

Isaiah 60:1 - *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

2 Chronicles 7:14 - *If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

Psalm 37:5-6 - *Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.*

Isaiah 64:1-3 - *Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence— as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.*

Hebrews 9:24 - *For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*

Matthew 28:19-20 - *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

John 6:55-59 – *"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*

Zephaniah 3:17 - *The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*

Isaiah 55:6 - *Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;*

John 5:24 - Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Psalms 73:28 - But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

Job 23:5 - I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me.

Job 22:23-26 - If you return to the Almighty you will be built up; if you remove injustice far from your tents, if you lay gold in the dust, and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed, then the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver. For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God.

Hebrews 13:8 - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Philippians 2:10 - So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

John 6:33 - For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

John 3:36 - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 - "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Isaiah 43:16-19 - Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

James 1:21 - Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Titus 3:5 - He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Luke 1:47-49 - And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Psalms 65:4 - Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

Ephesians 1:7 - In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

Acts 3:18-21 - But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Psalms 27:4 - One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Psalm 22:24 - *For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.*

2 Chronicles 7:1 - *As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.*

Revelation 20:5-6 - *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

1 Peter 1:3-9 - *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Hebrews 9:15 - *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*

1 Timothy 2:4 - *Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

John 14:6 - *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

John 11:25 - *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*

Psalm 91:1-16 - *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ...*

Psalm 37:3-4 - *Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Judges 5:1-31 - *Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day: "That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord! "Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel. "Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the Lord, even Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel.*

Genesis 26:4 - *I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,*

1 John 2:2 - *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

James 4:8 - *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Hebrews 11:1-40 - *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.*

Philippians 4:13 - *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Ephesians 2:8 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*

2 Corinthians 5:10 - *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Romans 5:1 - *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

John 18:36 - *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*

Matthew 25:46 - *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

Song of Solomon 5:8 - *I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love.*

1 Chronicles 29:18 - *O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.*

1 Peter 3:18 - *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,*

Titus 3:5-6 - *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 - *And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

1 Corinthians 4:5 - *Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.*

Romans 8:1 - *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

John 14:2 - *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?*

John 10:7 - *So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.*

John 4:13 - *Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,*

Zephaniah 2:3 - *Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.*

Song of Solomon 2:5 - *Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love.*

Daniel 1:1-21 - *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.*

Jeremiah 31:6 - *For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.'*

Isaiah 2:3 - *And many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

Proverbs 30:6 - *Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.*

Job 23:8-9 - *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him.*

Deuteronomy 30:14 - *But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

Revelation 20:4 - *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

Revelation 2:1-7 - *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*

Revelation 1:1 - *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,*

James 4:7-8 - *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

James 2:20-24 - *Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

2 Timothy 4:1 - *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:*

1 Timothy 4:10 - *For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.*

Galatians 3:28 - *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Galatians 2:20 - *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

1 Corinthians 10:15-17 - *I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 - *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

Romans 5:15 - *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.*

Romans 5:1-2 - *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Acts 2:38 - *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

John 1:1-3:36 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ...*

Titus 2:11 - *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,*

Question: "What does it mean to be in the presence of God?"

Answer: Adam and Eve had intimate fellowship in the presence of God before the fall (Genesis 3:8). Since that time, sin has prevented our ability to be in the physical presence of God (Exodus 33:20). Now only the holy, sinless angels are in the physical presence of God (Luke 1:19). But Christians have the presence of God within us by virtue of His indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:23; 15:4), and that indwelling presence comes only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are aware of the reality of this presence from our obedience to His Word. "We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Note that Peter says that "we are chosen people . . . belonging to God." If we belong to Him, will He not be present among us? We never lose the reality of God's presence, no matter how badly we fail; we never sin so much as to lose our salvation; we never sink so far as to banish the Holy Spirit. We can anger God because of our sin, but true believers never lose the presence of the Holy Spirit. While we will never lose the reality of God's presence, we might lose the "sense" of His presence.

Every child of God invariably goes through this feeling of losing God's presence from time to time, like a landlord who has left his house and gone away on business for a while. He has not left the house completely empty, for, if he had, he would have taken all his belongings with him. But because he has left all his furniture and belongings in that house, does it not mean that he will return once again? Any believer knows that there are times of spiritual leanness when perhaps the Lord determines to test our faith. Does He not push us through the winnowing flames of affliction that we might be all the more pure (Job 23:10; 1 Peter 1:7)?

But the practical result of being in God's presence is joy! Many Christians seem gloomy and dejected because they lack this sense of God's presence. The fellowship is sweet for those who walk with the Lord in obedience and faith. But the sweet fellowship that comes from obedience and trust in the Lord is not a passing feeling. It sustains us, especially during trials, for "the joy of the Lord shall be your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). James, the Lord's brother, writes, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2) because trials produce faith and develop perseverance. When we persevere through trials, proving to ourselves and to others that our faith is real, our sense of God's presence increases, as does our joy.

David speaks of a joy that only the righteous can know (Psalm 16:11)—a joy that is but a foretaste of a far greater and everlasting joy when we see the Lord's face in the glory to come.

HOW IS GOD'S LOVE EXPERIENCED IN THE HEART?

Experiencing the love of God, not just thinking about it, is something we should desire with all our hearts. This is an experience of great joy because in it we taste the very reality of God and his love. It is the ground of deep and wonderful assurance - the assurance that our hope "will not disappoint us" (Romans 5:5). This assurance helps us "exult in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). It carries us through terrible trials of faith.

Is this experience of the love of God the same for all believers? No, not in degree. If all believers had the same experience of the love of God, Paul would not have prayed for the Ephesians that they "be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18-19). He prayed this because some were deficient in their experience of this love of God in Christ.

How then do we pursue the fullness of the experience of the love of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit? One key is to realize that the experience is not like hypnosis or electric shock or drug-induced hallucinations or shivers at a good tune. Rather it is mediated through knowledge. It is not the same as knowledge. But it comes through knowledge. Or to say it another way, this experience of the love of God is the work of the Spirit giving unspeakable joy in response to the mind's perception of the demonstration of that love in Jesus Christ. In this way Christ gets the glory for the joy that we have. It is a joy in what we see in him.

Where can you see this in the Scriptures? Consider 1 Peter 1:8, "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." Here is an experience of great and inexpressible joy. Joy beyond words. It is not based on a physical seeing of Christ. But it is based on believing in Christ. Christ is the focus and content of the mind in this inexpressible joy.

In fact, 1 Peter 1:6 says that the joy itself is "in" the truth that Peter is telling us about the work of Christ. It says, "In this you greatly rejoice." And what is "this"? It is the truth that 1) in "His great mercy [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;" and 2) we will "obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away;" and 3), we "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). In this we "greatly rejoice

with joy inexpressible and full of glory." We know something. In this we rejoice! The experience of unspeakable joy is a mediated experience. It comes through knowledge of Christ and his work. It has content.

Consider also Galatians 3:5, "Does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" We know from Romans 5:5 that the experience of the love of God is "through the Holy Spirit who is given to us." But now Galatians 3:5 tells us that this supply of the Spirit is not without content. It is "by hearing with faith." Two things: hearing and faith. There is the hearing of the truth about Christ, and there is the faith in that truth. This is how the Spirit is supplied. He comes through knowing and believing. His work is a mediated work. It has mental content. Beware of seeking the Spirit by emptying your head.

Similarly, Romans 15:13 says that the God of hope fills us with joy and peace "in believing." And believing has content. The love of God is experienced in knowing and believing Christ because, as Romans 8:39 says the love of God is "in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing will be able to separate us "from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This Advent season, look to Jesus. Consider Christ. Meditate on his glory and his work, not just casually, but intentionally. Think about the promises he made and guaranteed by his death and resurrection. Pray that God would open your eyes to the wonder of his love in these things. Renounce all known attitudes and behaviors that contradict this demonstration of love to you. Then enjoy the experience of the love of God poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit.

HOW TO EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Can we experience the presence of Almighty God on a daily basis? I believe Scripture is clear that we can, and in this article, I will provide four "steps" that will help us achieve this tremendous reality: **be accepted; be aware; be active; and be alert**. I do not claim that this list of steps is exhaustive. In fact, the majority of material in this article is merely meant to give the reader some foundational principles that will provide a starting point for further practical studies on living a life of dwelling in God's presence.¹

Be Accepted

Hebrews 10:19-22 - *¹⁹Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Mankind can only approach the majestic presence of the Almighty "by the blood of Jesus" shed during the redemptive work of Christ² on the cross.³ When we acknowledge our sinfulness and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior⁴, we appropriate His redemptive work *for us*⁵ and we become recipients of the greatest opportunity humankind has had since the Garden of Eden: the opportunity to walk once again in the cool of the day with the God of the Universe.

In Hebrews 10:19-22, we are encouraged to have "boldness" to enter the "Holiest" – the place of *God's manifest presence*. In the Old Testament, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and then only after performing seven days of cleansing activities to ensure he was *fully* consecrated (as well as providing him some degree of certainty that he would come out alive!)

Therefore, boldness was probably not part of their mindset. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, may have been bold when they offered "profane fire before the LORD", but fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them.

We however, because of the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross as our “High Priest”, are encouraged to draw as near to God as the High Priests in the Old Testament did. Jesus’ death on the cross has consecrated believers to enter the holy place of God’s presence with “full assurance” that we are acceptable to the Almighty.

It was in the “Holiest” Place where the priests saw the shekinah glory of God over the Mercy Seat. We may never see God's presence in such a vivid demonstration. Yet figuratively, He is inviting us into the very same place where we can stand in awe of His glorious presence. Let us not forsake the invitation that God has given us in Hebrews 10 to “draw near.” What an awesome privilege to be invited to enter into the very presence of Almighty God, because of Christ’s work!

EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Be Aware

Jeremiah 23:24 - *Can anyone hide from me? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?" asks the LORD.*

This verse applies no matter who you are. Like Adam and Eve, some people may try to hide from God, but to no avail. He is always there, wherever you are. We are always ‘in’ His presence. Here in Jeremiah, the nature of His presence is not manifestational, as it was over the Mercy Seat; rather, it is a universal presence that enables the Creator to always be with His creation.

As believers, we can appropriate this step by maintaining a conscious awareness that His presence is ‘ever present’ with us. When we are at home, when we are at the store, when we are in the car - wherever we are, so is He.

A conscious, daily pondering of this truth will prove to be of great comfort to us when we have struggles in life. It will also help us to elevate our minds from this earthly plane to His heavenly realm: *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Colossians 3:1-2).

In addition to God’s presence being universal, He also indwells believers.

1 Corinthians 3:16 - *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

What an astounding thing - that God Himself has chosen to dwell in us, His adopted children!¹³ We are never alone. He is with us through joy and pain, in blessing and heartache, while we are awake and while we are asleep. Always. He is closer than our very breath. In fact, *"In Him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:28).

Be Active

Hebrews 10:19, 22 - *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus ... ²²let us draw near... .*

These verses call us to *boldly draw near* to His presence. This may appear to contradict the implications of His presence being universal and His Holy Spirit dwelling in us, so let's examine this admonition to "draw near" from two perspectives: our perspective and God's perspective.

Our Perspective: Our drawing near to God comes from our hearts' desire for more intimacy with the Creator of the universe; an intimacy much deeper than His cosmic presence gives and more intimate than even His indwelling presence provides. It is an intimacy not unlike a bride’s desire for her bridegroom’s embrace, or a child’s longing to be held by his or her father.

God's Perspective: God longs to dwell with us in the sweet fellowship that was lost in the Garden because of sin. Now, since Jesus died to pay the price for sin, the Father is ever bidding, ever inviting humanity back into companionship, to dwell and commune forever with Him. He desires to be intimate—friends or lovers, if you will—with those whom He created and deeply loves.

Not to belabor the issue, but to reiterate it because of its profound implications, we can enter into God's glorious presence with a "humble boldness" because of what Jesus accomplished for us.

We may sometimes think of God as a taskmaster with a list of 'chores' for us to do. In reality, His heart beats with both a love for us and a desire to fellowship with us. Jesus issued an invitation in Revelation 3:20: "*Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends*".

As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, I will not be dealing in depth with all the practicalities of pursuing God's presence. However, I feel I would be amiss at this point not to present at least a few personal examples.

One example is my spending quiet time before the Lord, inviting Him to "hang out" with me. I have found this practice extremely beneficial, particularly on cold, wintry mornings, lying face down near the fireplace. As the warmth of the logs permeates my body, the warmth of God's presence penetrates my heart, and I simply find myself basking in His love.

A second example is when I allow the Holy Spirit to lead me in what Scripture passages to meditate on. I try to follow a yearly Bible reading regimen, but I have the most blessed times thumbing through the Scriptures, waiting for the Spirit's guiding, and listening to His instruction. What a beautiful way to learn about God—being taught by Him!

Moving on in our study, we find in the following Psalm a writer articulating a strong desire to be where God was:

Psalm 84:2, 5 - *²My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. ⁵Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.*

The psalmist's longing for God drove him to make the pilgrimage from his perhaps distant home to Zion—the place where God's manifest presence dwelt. This pilgrimage of many was not like a short car ride to a local revival meeting. In some cases, it was an arduous trek through a wilderness that required persistence and determination to complete. The psalmist's hunger for God's presence fueled him with "strength" in the quest to find the presence of God at the end of his destination—always trusting that when he arrived, God would be there.

May our hearts cry out for God's fellowship to such a degree that we will not rest until our pilgrimage finds us in the place of His presence! God is bidding us to "draw near" so that He may touch us with His glory, His awesome grandeur, and His everlasting love. Oh, that our hearts would be reciprocal in our yearning to touch God! Why not invite Him to spend some time with you today?

Be Alert

1 Kings 19:11-12 - *¹¹Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*

Before the events described in this passage, Elijah had witnessed God send fire from heaven to burn up two bulls in a 'duel' with the Baalic prophets. Now, possibly hiding in a cave from an adversary, God told Elijah to stand "before the Lord." As Elijah did, it appears nature itself reeled from God's passing presence: a strong wind tore the mountains apart, an earthquake occurred, and a fire broke out.

What is relevant for us in this theophanic encounter is that although Elijah, in his prior confrontation with the prophets of Baal, saw God send fire down from heaven, now in this passage, God was not "in" any of the terrestrial phenomena Elijah had just witnessed. The Lord came with a "still small voice." There is an immense difference between strong terrestrial disruptions and a small voice.

Perhaps Elijah needed to learn that theophanic signs and wonders do not always indicate the intimate presence of God. On an intimate level, God is more likely to come to us in stillness and quiet. And since He neither shouts nor always make a grand entrance, our alertness becomes crucial.

We need to learn how to recognize God's still, small whispers to our hearts because those manifestations of His presence are just as breathtaking as the earthly eruptions caused by God's glory. God wants to speak to us intimately—what a remarkable thing! God can move mountains before us and the spectacle may only provide an impersonal encounter. But when God speaks to us in a "still small voice," this reveals how intimately He wants to commune with us. In fact, it is not fallacious to say that God wants to speak to us much more often in the context of intimacy than through the extravaganzas that can cause goose pimples to erupt on our skin.

What about those in the Old Testament that witnessed God's presence daily, in fire by day and a cloud by night?

Exodus 40:34-38 - ³⁴*Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.* ³⁵*And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.* ³⁶*Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys.* ³⁷*But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up.* ³⁸*For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.*

Imagine someone seeing the presence of God in such awesome splendor. Imagine their seeing it each day and every night. Is it possible that such a sight would become common or ordinary to the degree that it no longer filled the viewers with awe as when they first saw it? Is it possible that some days they would not even look to see God's manifest presence because they've seen it several days in a row? And is it possible that one day, when they finally looked to see it again, it would be gone? Now what? God moved on, and because of their complacency of experience, or their lack of lasting awe, they missed it when He did. Now what do they do? How will they know where to go?

In the above story, I mixed elements from the factual account of the Israelites in their desert wanderings, given to us in Exodus 40, with a hypothetical "what-if" scenario. I have done so hoping to illustrate the following point: if we look for God's manifest presence to come to us only in certain extraordinary ways, we could miss Him when He comes to us in various, perhaps gentle ways. Although it's unlikely that the Israelites would have not noticed when the cloud or fire of God's presence moved on, it's possible that we can miss Him when He comes to fellowship or talk or lead us in quiet, tender moments.

We need to develop a "vigilant adaptiveness" to His presence—a holy and humble acknowledgment that God can sovereignly choose how He speaks to us and leads us. We also need to avoid becoming routinized in how we expect to experience God's presence. When these

two criteria are met, we will be less likely to miss the sweet presence of God when He manifests Himself to us, in one way or another.

Understanding our acceptance by God because of the blood of Jesus, being aware of God's universal and indwelling presence, actively seeking His manifest presence, and being alert to the varying unveilings of Himself to us will help us to experience more of God, more frequently.

7 AWESOME BIBLE VERSES ABOUT GOD'S PRESENCE

Here are seven awesome Bible verses about experiencing the presence of God.

Exodus 33:14 - *"And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

This is where Moses is encouraged by God that He would go with Israel and with Moses. God's presence is His going with them and it is only with His presence that they can ever truly rest. It's resting in the knowledge that God's going with them every step of the way. This is the type of relationship a person has who is close to God and why it was written of Moses, *"Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend"* (Ex 33:11). You cannot be close to God unless you are obedient to God and Moses was.

Matthew 18:20 - *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*

This verse was never intended to stand alone to be understood as doctrine as many do showing why they don't need the church because if there's only two or three people there, Jesus is there too, so just staying at home on Sundays and not going to church has Jesus' blessing on it, but that's a verse taken out of context (Heb 10:25). Text out of context makes a pretext and you can be sure, usually a false one. The context of this verse actually supports the church as a body of believers or a divine institution because Jesus said that He would build "His" church and the gates of hell (death) won't ever stop it (Matt 16:18). This verse speaks about church discipline as if the sinning brother or sister *"refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"* (Matt 18:17). This means they are disfellowshipped for not repenting of that sin against their brother or sister. Jesus had just been telling the disciples how they should respond to a brother or sister that's sinning in the church and if the church agrees on disfellowshipping someone, then Jesus is there in agreement with them and "among them."

1 John 4:16 - *"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."*

The Apostle John describes a cause and effect in our relationship with God. If we are abiding or dwelling (as the Greek suggests) in love, then we are abiding or dwelling with God. The reason (effect) God abides in us is that we are abiding in love (the cause). That's because "God is love." For John, it seems he had to learn this because he says "we have come to know" and come "to believe the love that God has for us." For us, we need look no further than the Passion to see that love.

Genesis 28:15 - *"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

This verse refers to Jacob's dream where God spoke to him and said that He is going to go with Jacob wherever he goes, and he will go far; yet God will bring him back to this land again; and God seals it by saying that He won't leave Jacob until everything He's promised comes to pass. That shows the great faithfulness of God because when he swears by His own name, there is none higher, so it cannot be affected by the human will.

Psalm 16:11 - *“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”*

If you feel that God is far away right now, and many people go through this, know that God says *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Heb 13:5). The author of the Book of Hebrews knew the Jewish Christians would be familiar with those words because the psalmist so frequently wrote about the faithfulness of God and His being present with the humble and meek. The most reassuring thing in this verse is that God will “make know to me the path of life” and that speaks of eternal life, no doubt, because if you’re going to be enjoying God’s presence in eternity, this means these pleasures will be “forevermore” or for all time.

Revelation 21:3 - *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”*

This verse is yet to be realized but it’s only a matter of time before God will actually dwell with us and “we will be his people” and better still, “God himself will be with” us as our God! It’s one thing to feel the presence of God but to actually be in His glorious presence, I cannot even imagine. Even so, some day we *“will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads”* (Rev 22:4). How can we be any more in the presence of God than that!

Psalm 23:4 - *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

The 23rd Psalm might be the most memorized of all chapters of the Bible. For one thing, we’ve all pretty much passed through the valleys of the deep, dark shadows of death at least once in our life. We’ve all walked through experiences in life that were threatening but for David, he knew enough about God to have no fear of evil because the Great Shepherd could give him all the comfort he needed by having His rod of protection and correction in one hand while having the staff to comfort me and bring him back by Him by the crook in the shepherd’s staff.

Conclusion

Hopefully these verses and commentary will help you believe the presence of God. We cannot trust our feelings. They are highly overrated and in fact, are one of the most undependable of all human traits. On the other hand, God’s Word is objective truth and if God says that He will give us rest in His presence He will. If He promises to be there among the body of Christ, He will. If we abide in love, He abides in us, knowing that He goes wherever we go. In this knowledge, you will find joy in His presence and look toward being in His literal presence someday taking comfort in knowing all these things.

7 WAYS TO SENSE GOD'S PRESENCE

Do you ever feel like God just isn't there?

Although our feelings tell us that at times, we shouldn't be driven by our emotions when it comes to our trust in God. Because Scripture says the "righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17) and "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6), we shouldn't have to *feel* God to know He's there. But I know how you feel if you find yourself discouraged at times, because it seems like God just isn't around.

Unanswered prayer, a series of disappointing events, or a betrayal by someone close to you can cause you to think that God has checked out of your life. Other times we get so busy with our day-to-day lives that we feel guilty that we're not *doing enough* for Him to want to be around us. But because God has promised He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), we can

be assured of His constant presence whether we are struggling with a painful situation or just too busy to notice He is near.

Here are seven ways to focus on Him and sense His presence in the midst of your struggle or your chaotic schedule:

1. Come Clean with Him. Sometimes you can't sense God's presence because there's something blocking the communication between the two of you. He hasn't left, but your sensitivity to His presence might be affected by unconfessed sin in your life. David, the Psalmist, said, "When I kept silent (about his sin) my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Then I acknowledged my sin to you* and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" -- and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalms 32:3-5). If you feel God isn't around because the two of you haven't talked in awhile, or because you've avoided the thought of Him for so long, confess to God what's on your heart and mind and ask Him to give you an ear to hear His voice again. 1 John 1:9 tells us: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." When your fellowship with Him is restored, the communication can flow again. So get clean (through the forgiveness of Christ) and let it flow.

2. Read Scripture Aloud. When you audibly speak God's inspired Word, you will sense its power and His presence. The Bible says God's Word is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). That sharp sword will either make you aware of its weight or prick your heart through conviction, inspiration, or determination. A pricked heart is better than a dull heart any day, wouldn't you agree?

3. Sing Him a Love Song. God inhabits the praises of His people. Ever wondered why you sometimes feel closer to God when you're in a church service, singing hymns or praise songs? Could be because that's where worship tends to take place. When you start praising Him, regardless of where you are, you'll sense His presence, probably because you're no longer focused on yourself, but on Him. When we open the door of our hearts to love Him, He will meet us there.

4. Say His Name. People around you may be using God's name right and left (as a swear word in anger, or as a thoughtless expression). But Scripture says there is power in the name of Jesus because "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Say His name aloud -- as the Answer to all you seek, as the Source to calm your soul, as the One whose presence you long for and you will sense the power of His presence...and His peace.

5. Say a Breath Prayer. There are times we need Him but we just don't know what to say or where to start. Start by saying His name and then speak your heart's cry. For me, often times it's just "Jesus, I need You" or "Jesus, give me a heart for You." I believe the simplest of cries are the ones that penetrate His heart -- and ours -- the quickest.

6. Take a Walk. Exercise brings your body, mind and heart to life. Feel spiritually dead? Get outside, move around, confess to Him what's on your heart and let Him waken you up, spiritually. My best times with God are when I'm walking while I pour out my heart to Him.

7. Breathe Deeply. Sometimes we can't sense God's presence because there's too much of everything else going on. Too much noise. Too much traffic. Too much confusion. Too many thoughts running rampant in our minds. Too much anxiety. Center your mind on Him and start to breathe deeply. Try it. Exhale the distracting thoughts. Inhale a desire to sense His presence. Exhale your pre-occupation with self. Inhale a desire to know Him more completely. Exhale the worries of the moment. Inhale His peace. Now, don't you feel better already? Can you begin to

sense that you're in His arms? There's a reason His Word says "Be *still* and know that I am God" (Psalms 46:10).

EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

(Text Used ; Luke 24:13-35)

Summary: Life is filled with hopeless situations. (illustration Harry Truman election) The two disciples on the Road to Emmaus felt hopeless. Their encounter with the Living God shows how God through his Holy Spirit would enable us to have the same experience.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! The word of the angel spoken at the empty tomb of Jesus tells us that God has, in His Son, gives us hope for the most hopeless situations

Hopeless He is Risen Situations. In 1948, Harry Truman was running for the Presidency of the United States. His was, quite frankly, a hopeless situation. Every public opinion poll predicted that his opponent, Thomas Dewey, would give Truman a through drubbing. Newsweek went to the top 50 political pundits in the country and asked for their opinion. They agreed: Dewey would have a hundred more electoral votes than he needed. The Fort Lauderdale Daily News published a prediction which said that Dewey would get 62 percent of the vote...at least.

Life magazine featured a full page picture of Dewey with the caption, "The new President travels by ferry boat over the broad waters of San Francisco Bay." The Kiplinger Letter, a favorite among businessmen, had an article on the economic policies of the Dewey administration. Truman's re election was hopeless. The Manchester Guardian carried a report entitled, "Harry S. Truman... Study of a Failure". And of course, the Chicago Trib had already gone to press with an edition which headlined, "Dewey Defeats Truman!"

It was a hopeless situation. On election night, Dewey in New York wrote his acceptance speech, while Truman, in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, ate a ham sandwich and drank a glass of milk. Both listened to the news reports. At 6 o'clock in the evening, it was reported Truman had been defeat4ed. At 10 o'clock, Truman was still going down in flames. At midnight, the report came out that Truman was ahead by 1,200,000 votes, but he was still going to lose the election. At 4 in the morning, Truman was awakened by a Secret Service agent who told him he was ahead by two million votes, but the experts were still convinced of his defeat.

The events of that night tell us that Truman's hopeless situation wasn't nearly as hopeless as people and the candidates had been led to believe. Truman won. Dewey lost, along with the pollsters.

Hopeless situations. I recall the times when babies were born and everybody knew their situation was hopeless. Everybody that is, except the good Lord and the baby. Today some of those infants who "weren't going to make it," have children of their own.

Life has taught the optimists among us that there is no such thing as a hopeless situation.... There are only people who have given up hope.

That was certainly the story 2000 years ago, on the Sunday night after Jesus had been crucified.

"Two disciples were walking down the dusty road to the village of Emmaus. Their talk concerns the crucified Jesus. Their words come slowly. Their faces carried the sadness of grief and loss. Eyes down cast. Shoulders carried the weight of lost hope.

"I can hardly believe it. He's gone." "What do we do now?"

Just then a stranger comes up behind them and says, "I'm sorry, but I could not help over hearing you. What things are you talking about?" (God Came near M. Lucado p. 87)

This event on the Emmaus road is a great story. It tells us about an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. An encounter with Jesus is an encounter with God. This event on the Emmaus Road is compelling. It equals the experience of Moses before the burning bush, when he learned God's holy name.

Have you ever wished for a similar encounter with God?

Do you wish for a mountain top experience with God?

Have you ever wanted a burning bush like Moses? Have you ever wanted God to write an answer on the wall like he did for Joseph? Then you would know for sure.

1) How does God speak to us today?

2) How can I know when God is speaking to me?

3) Can God be just as real for me as he was for the disciples on the Emmaus Road?

The Emmaus road. A fascinating scene. Two sincere disciples recounting the events of the crucifixion. God in disguise listens patiently. His wounded hands buried deep in his robe. He had just gone to Hell and back, to give hope heaven to earth and these two were worried about the political situation in Israel. (God Came Near M. Lucado)

This encounter with the living God, on the Emmaus road lays the ground work for my first question. "How does God speak to us today?" "How can I know when God is speaking?" What does an encounter with God look like, feel like?

In the past, God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, and the bush did not burn up. (Exodus 3:1-6) In that spectacular encounter with God... Moses knew he was on Holy Ground.

When Jesus spoke to the wind and calmed the storm the disciples encountered God. (Lk 8:25) "In fear and amazement they asked one another, 'Who is this man?'" "He commands the wind and water and they obey him?" Later in Matthew 14 when they experienced Jesus walking on the water...and when he entered the boat..."they fell down and worshiped him..." "My Lord and God."

God has always been speaking to his people. Today, he speaks by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will use the Bible, prayer, circumstances and other believers."

On the Emmaus road a change was taking place. These two disciples were experiencing an encounter with God the way it happens today...through the Holy Spirit using the scriptures.

Note the facts. V 18 one of them name Cleopas asked him. "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" I want to suggest to you that the other disciple with Cleopas on the road was his wife. John 19:25 tells us on the day of the crucifixion of Jesus, "near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."

The visitor on the road said: "What things?" They responded: "About Jesus of Nazareth...a prophet, powerful in word and deed...he was sentenced to death, crucified and we had hoped.... He was the one who would redeem Israel".

They did not know it was Jesus. Jesus used the O.T. scriptures. It was as if he opened the bible and said: "Look at this verse. Read the passage". Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets he explained these things."

What was their response when they heard the passages of scripture quoted?

V 32 "Were not our hearts burning within us..." didn't you feel the excitement, didn't you sense the truth..."when he walked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us."

There it is! An encounter with God, through the Holy Spirit.

I usually want an encounter with God that is special... out of the ordinary, like Moses walking up to a burning bush that wasn't consumed by the flames... then I would know for sure that this.... Or that.... Was truly God's will.

Even when I review the story of the Emmaus road I say... Wow! Wouldn't that have been a wonderful experience to physically see and talk with the risen Christ? Then by experience I could say... "Yes, Jesus really did rise from the grave... that's the story of Thomas. Then I would no longer be afraid to witness. My prayer life would be dramatic...."

Today, God still changes hopeless situations... and you know. But there is another way. Don't we confess with Luther in his definition to the third article of the Apostle's Creed: "I believe that I can not by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...?"

The Holy Spirit is the One who guides you and me into all truth and teaches you all things. You and I understand spiritual truth because the Holy Spirit is working in our heart when the word of God is read or heard. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the Word of God understandable.

The Holy Spirit takes the written word of God and impresses it upon our hearts. Our eyes are opened and we see the reality of God's word.

You and I do not discover biblical truth... it is revealed. When the Holy Spirit reveals truth or knowledge and insight about God's character or his will for your life, He is not leading you to an encounter with God....IT IS AN Encounter with God. (Blackaby p 91)

An encounter with Jesus was an encounter with God for the two disciples on the Emmaus Road. In the same way an encounter with the Holy Spirit is an encounter with God for you and me.

(story) Years ago I was serving as Pastor in another parish. I had visited a life long Lutheran. In those years we were using the Kennedy Evangelism Explosion Program. I had asked this man (Weert N.) if he was sure he was going to heaven. He had always attended church and bible class. He was in his 70's. His answer was "no". I simply asked him to take out his bible and read John 6:47 (read)

In that moment his eyes were opened, his heart touched and he knew it was true. It was an encounter with God, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

"The Spirit of God knows the mind of God. Haven't there been times when you have read the Bible and a verse jumps out at you. You underline the passage and wonder why you never noticed it before. In that moment you understand a "spiritual truth" about God. (I Cor. 1:10-15) It is an encounter with God.

When God speaks to you through the bible He is relating to you in a personal way. The Event on the Emmaus Road was an encounter with the Living God. It was to be the new pattern for God's relationship with his people through the Holy Spirit. Today God does speak by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will use the bible, prayer, circumstances and other people in the community of faith.

Before the evening was over in the village of Emmaus these two disciples found out as millions have found out, that with Jesus as your Savior, there are no hopeless situations. They heard from the mouth of the Living God that his plan to save sinners had been accomplished at the cross on which Jesus died. He rose on the third day so that all might know that Jesus Christ has defeated death and given birth to hope beyond the grave. In Jesus, death has lost its sting; in Jesus for all who believe, for all who have repented and are forgiven, the grave has become the transition point into heaven.

It has been quite some time ago that King George VI of England addressed the British Commonwealth on New Year's Eve. Although the King didn't know it, cancer was eating at him, and he would die before the end of that coming year. The world's future was then, as it always seems to be, hopeless. The King spoke these words: "I said to the man at the gate of the year, 'give me a light that I might walk safely into the unknown.' And he said to me, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. It shall be to you safer than the light and better than the known."

Let Jesus take your hand. He is the anchor in a stormy sea. Open up the scriptures and have an encounter with the Living Lord.

10 WAYS TO EXPERIENCE MORE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Editor's Note: *The following is a report on the practical applications of Alec Rowland's upcoming book The Presence: Experiencing More of God (Tyndale House Publishers, 2014).*

God has promised always to be with us, but often we're not aware of his constant presence in our lives. It's easy to get so caught up in dealing with the demands of daily life that we don't notice God at all, and we wonder when – if ever – we may experience the thrill of encountering him again.

The good news is that God loves to be close to us and wants us to know him better. If you long to experience more of God's presence, you can take steps that will lead you closer to him, inviting him to make his presence known more strongly in your life. Here's how:

Choose adventure over safety. Accept the fact that there's nothing safe about pursuing God and decide to take whatever risks you need to take in order to experience the blessing of getting closer to God. Be willing to have God turn your life upside down, reshape your values and redirect your energy. Rather than trying to stay inside your comfort zones, be open to saying "yes" to God whenever he calls you to follow him on adventures. Expect encounters with God that inspire awe and wonder in you.

Pursue revival. The definition of revival is: "the overwhelming sense of God's presence that falls powerfully on a Christian people who have become dead and lethargic in their spiritual lives, reviving those elements of the Christian life that God intends to be normal for his church." You may have heard about revivals in history or on the news that affect whole churches or entire geographic areas. Keep in mind that large-scale revivals start when individual people pursue fresh encounters with God. The signs of revival include: repenting of sin, worshiping and obeying God with joy, experiencing a new love for fellow believers that restores broken relationships, using ministry gifts both inside and outside of the church, and witnessing about God to unbelievers who then come to faith in God themselves.

Instead of trying to make a tangible encounter with God happen, prepare yourself for when God decides manifest his presence to you. The constant presence of God around you (and within you, in the form of the Holy Spirit, if you're a believer) that you may or may not sense is his *essential presence*, while the tangible encounters with God that capture your attention are his *manifest presence*. You can't convince God to show you his manifest presence whenever and however you'd like, no matter how hard you may try or how faithful you may be. God shows up on his terms only, according to his own wisdom and purposes. But you can prepare yourself for encountering God's presence in the future by making your relationship with God your top priority in life and investing it in regularly (such as through prayer, Bible reading, and service), so you'll grow closer to God and invite him to reach out to you more. Cultivating your life for God's presence isn't about your own effort as much as it is about responding to God's initiatives of love and grace so you'll be in the right place at the right time, and in the right soul condition, when God shows up.

Expect to encounter God. Supernatural encounters with God aren't actually rare; God manifests his presence through the Holy Spirit in tangible ways every day to various people on Earth. So expect to encounter God through his Spirit in a way that you can powerfully sense, whenever God decides that it's the right time and place to show up in your life that way.

Remember, repent, and return. Remember the passion you felt for God when you first began a relationship with him, and let that motivate you to repent of your sins afresh and return your relationship with God to first place in your heart.

Draw near to God with confidence, yet never be flippant about approaching him. Keep in mind that God invites you to come close to him and welcomes you with great love, but he is also completely holy and all-powerful, so you should always approach God with the reverence and respect that he deserves.

Let go of whatever is distracting you from giving God your full attention. Remove distractions from your life so you can experience God to the fullest. Confess and repent of sin in your life regularly, since sin interferes with your ability to perceive God's presence and grow closer to him. Turn your worries into prayers, so anxiety won't crowd a focus on God out of your mind.

Open both your head and your heart to the Holy Spirit's work. Pursue getting to know God better through the Holy Spirit's work in both your mind (such as guiding you when you're studying the Bible) and in your personal experiences (such as touching your emotions through a tangible encounter that makes you more hungry for God).

Test your experiences to discern whether or not they're truly encounters with God. It's important to ask the Holy Spirit to help you evaluate personal experiences that you think may be bringing you into contact with God's manifest presence, rather than simply assuming that a thrilling spiritual experience really originates with God – because the evil side of the spiritual realm sometimes tries to deceive believers into thinking that God is communicating with them in ways that are dramatic but ultimately lead to confusion. To discern if a specific experience is truly from God, ask: "Does it have clear, telltale marks of being from the God whose nature the Bible reveals?", "Is it in line with biblical principles?", "Does it make me want more of God, or simply more of the experience?", "Does it make me more selfless, or more selfish?" and "Am I teachable and open to correction as I consider the meaning of this experience?"

Let God's presence transform you. Always remember that God's presence isn't simply for you to enjoy; it's meant to inspire you to open yourself up in deeper ways to the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of transforming you into the person God wants you to become.

EXPERIENCING GOD

A Devotional on Experiencing God Intimately and Personally

Experiencing God is rarely how we think it will be.

We hope for a booming voice, maybe an eye-popping miracle, or even an instant solution to all our life problems. What actually happens is something quite different.

This all-wise, all-powerful Ruler of the Universe does indeed touch the lives of his followers, but in this day and age, he typically does it in a way that is very private and very personal.

The Example We Tend to Forget

When it comes to people experiencing God in the Bible, we think of Jesus' miracles, the parting of the Red Sea, or Daniel surviving the lions' den. We tend to forget a very odd occasion when the prophet Elijah was waiting for God:

"Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave." (1 Kings 19:11-13, NIV)

Elijah hid his face because he knew the Lord was in the gentle whisper. If we are wise, we also will listen for the gentle whispers in our lives, because that is when we are most likely to experience God.

Experiencing God in the Quiet

What fills your head? God will not break in on your cell phone conversations or whatever is playing on your iPod. If you constantly fill your head with noise, God will not compete with it.

The Bible tells us to approach God with reverential awe:

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10)

Fear, in this sense, is not fright but respect.

To hear from God, you must give him the respect he deserves. God is not a genie, a butler, or the customer service department. Treating him like those things insults him.

We don't need to take a vow of silence to hear from God. We do, however, owe him a quiet, receptive mind. If you are serious about experiencing God, give him opportunities to speak to you.

Taking a walk, meditating on Scripture, or coming to him in prayer are proven ways to invite God into your heart. Just as we would not expect an intimate conversation with someone we just met, we should not expect God to speak with us until we have established a meaningful relationship with him through his son, Jesus Christ.

So What is Experiencing God Like?

God sees you as an individual, unique in his creation; therefore, he will relate to you in a way best suited to you. If you are a believer in Christ, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who will help you discern a true word or experience from God.

We don't have to wonder whether a prompting or internal word is from God, Satan, or our imagination. The Lord's voice is unmistakable. He speaks with power and authority. The true test, however, is that words from God to individuals always, without exception, agree with the Bible.

God never contradicts himself.

But there are other ways of experiencing God—through people and through circumstances. God uses people as his instruments, which is a common theme in the Bible. Throughout your life, God will move others to help you, encourage you, and draw you closer to him.

Millions of people imagine God is working in every good circumstance that happens to them. While it's true that God is concerned about the minor details of our lives, it's probably overreaching to believe getting the biggest ice cream cone is a sure sign of God's favor.

Still, events happen that have no logical explanation. We manage to avoid a traffic accident at the last second. We get a job we desperately needed against incredible odds. We get healed of an illness after our family and friends prayed for us.

On the other hand, often we don't get what we pray for. Only after years of maturity are we able to look back and see that our desire may have destroyed us. God was working in our life by denying our request but we were too narrow-minded to see it at the time.

How Long Does Experiencing God Take?

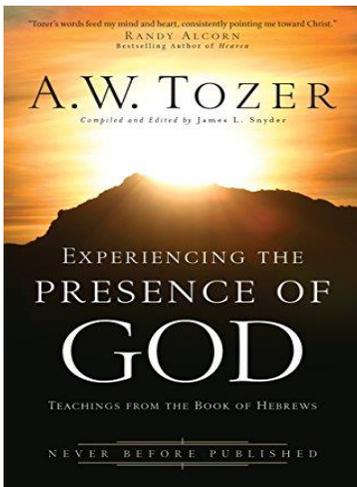
When you love God, you are eager for him to give himself to you.

Remember that Jesus Christ already did that on the cross. He proved his love for you two thousand years ago. Someone once remarked that if you were the only person on earth, Jesus still would have died to save you from your sins.

Experiencing God in an intimate, personal way takes patience. The more you read the Bible, pray, and surrender yourself to him, the more Jesus will move in your life. But we cannot force this to occur. God works in his own time and in his own way.

When it happens, and it will happen, you will know it. You will know, without a doubt, that it was not your imagination or some odd coincidence. You will be stunned at the depth of God's love for you, and your life will never, ever be the same.

Jack Zavada, a career writer and contributor for About.com, is host to a Christian website for singles. Never married, Jack feels that the hard-won lessons he has learned may help other Christian singles make sense of their lives. His articles and ebooks offer great hope and encouragement. To contact him or for more information, visit Jack's Bio Page.

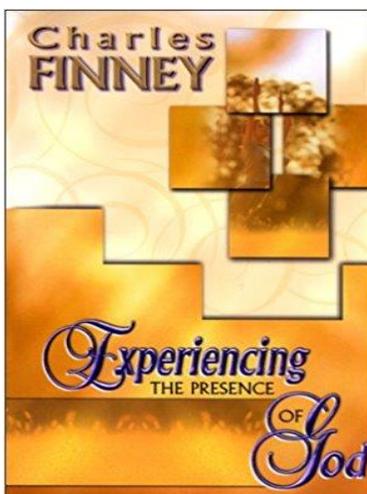


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