

"Several times during the day, . . . ask yourself for a moment if you have your soul in your hands or if some passion or fit of anxiety has robbed you of it....

Quietly bring your soul back to the presence of God, subjecting all your affections and desires to the obedience and direction of his divine will. "

St. Francis de Sales

Practicing the Presence - Spiritual Discipline

Desire: to develop a continual openness and awareness of Christ's presence living in God.

Definition:

Practicing the presence is an invitation to see and experience every moment as a gift of God.

WE ALL LIVE OUR LIVES IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD. In fact, we cannot not live our lives in the presence of God. In Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer, C. S. Lewis wrote, "We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito." Yet we become so preoccupied with the to-do list and so overwhelmed by the pace of life that we forget to look for God sightings in our day.

In her book The God Hunt, Karen Mains suggests that practicing the presence is like going on a "God hunt." It is a way we keep our soul awake to God. And God can jump out at us any time at all and say, "Boo. Here I am." The question is-are we paying attention?

The discipline of practicing the presence is often attached to the seventeenth-century French monk Brother Lawrence. He longed to maintain an ongoing conversation with God no matter what he was doing. In "The Practice of the Presence" of God he said:

I make it my business to rest in His [Christ's] holy presence which I keep myself in by a habitual, silent, and secret conversation with God. This often causes in me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great that I am forced to use means to moderate them and prevent their appearance to others.

Practicing the presence is a way of living into a deeper awareness of God's activity in our lives. Through many small pauses we begin a habit of turning our heart toward God. Through these acts of attention, we express our intention to live in union with Christ. Before we pick up the phone we might say, "Lord I am here. Help me listen." As concerns cross our desk, we might hold up a hand and turn the concern over to God before we move on. Breath prayer and the Jesus prayer are other ways of staying present to God

in the moment. However, it is important to remember that practicing the presence is more about personal relationship than strategy. Practicing the presence of Christ is simply a way we love him and stay connected to him throughout the day.

Reflection Questions

1. Where do your thoughts go when they aren't focused on work or diverted by amusement?
What do these thoughts reveal about your concerns and priorities?
2. How aware are you of the possibility of meeting God during your work day?
3. What is it like for you when God shows up at an unexpected moment?
4. How easy is it for God to get your attention? When are you best able to hear God's still, small voice?
5. What would it look like for you to intentionally seek deeper intimacy with God?

Spiritual Exercises

1. Dedicate some task you are doing to the Lord. Talk to him about the task before you begin and again when you are done.
 - Do you become any more aware of God in the process? How?
2. Offer all of yourself to God for the day ahead.
 - Throughout the day ask yourself if you are still living your intention to be in God's presence.
 - Do not be discouraged when you stray from your intention to live in his presence; simply begin again. God loves for you to turn your heart back to him.
3. When a song comes to mind during the day, pay attention to it. Could this song be a word of God to you? If it is, tell God what it means to you to have him come near you in this way.

4. Practice the presence in interruptions. The intention to live in the presence of Christ is a way of saying, "I am here." Throughout your day-perhaps every time you are interrupted-tell God "I am here." Remind yourself that you are in the presence of Jesus, who had time for people who questioned and interrupted. Remember that some of Jesus' most gracious miracles occurred when he was interrupted.

- What is it like for you to offer yourself to be present to God during interruptions?

5. Spend some time talking to someone who has lived their life attending to the fixed hours of prayer. What can you discover from them about living in a rhythm of prayer that draws you into the presence of Jesus?

6. Decide to stop several times throughout your day to pay attention to God and practice his presence. Set a clock to remind you. Spend five minutes reading Scripture, praying or just being with Jesus. • What is this like for you?

7. Develop some prayers that help you stay awake to God. For instance, find a verse or prayer that is your waking prayer, your in-the-shower prayer, your dressing prayer, your cooking prayer, your driving prayer and so on. Let these prayers lead you into deeper encounters with the God who is there.

Resources

The God Hunt by Karen Mains

Invitation to Presence by Wendy Miller

Living Presence by Tilden Edwards

Practicing the Presence by Brother Lawrence

Practicing the Presence of Jesus by Wally Armstrong

Reference

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us (IVP Books, Illinois 2005) pages 71- 73