

October 26, 2008
“The Presence of God”
John 14:6, 23 NIV

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

God is real. I think we all believe that. Why else would we be here? Unless we are here because we are trying to figure out if God is real. God is not only real He is living.

The Bible is clear that God is a living, personal God. In the Bible we see this in such words as Psalms 42:2 (NIV), "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

Or in Matthew 16:16 (NLT), When Simon Peter said of Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Or in Acts 14:15 (NLT), When Paul and Barnabas said, "We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things and turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them."

Or in Hebrews 3:12 (NIV), "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."

God is a person, a living person who thinks, and feels, who confronts His people in a living encounter, who has purposes and designs, who speaks, acts, and most of all, who has given us the highest revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, a person. If God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, is not a person, then creation has risen higher than its Source, because the most remarkable part of the material universe is persons.

Our relationship with God is not I and "It" but I and "Him" God is a person. And not only is God real and living, but you can have a personal and intimate relationship with Him. Yet, how many, on a regular basis, are experiencing the Presence of God?

We can read the Bible, come to church, even pray, and yet not experience the Presence of the Living God. Reading the truth found in the Bible or doing religious things will not nourish our soul, until we find God in personal experience. Now understand something, it is God who is seeking you. We did not first seek God, but the other way around. Jesus said (John 6:44 – NLT), "For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me..."

God attracts us and draws us and gives us the desire to come to Him. He wants a personal relationship with us. He wants us to experience His Presence. How can we enter into the Presence of the Living God? How will we experience something real?

1. Know Jesus

First we must have a personal relationship with God and that relationship begins with Jesus. As our text today says (John 14:6), Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

To experience God we must come to Him through Jesus the Son of God. God is holy; to come into His presence sin must be removed. All of us have sinned, and our sin separates us from God. The Good news is that God has made a way for our sin to be forgiven. Jesus accomplished this by His death and resurrection.

In the Old Testament and under the old covenant God had regulations for worship. In the Tabernacle (or Temple) there were 2 rooms, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. They were separated by a curtain. Only the High priest could go into the Most Holy Place and only once a year *and* only after a blood sacrifice was made for his sins and the sins of all the people.

In the New Testament and under the new covenant, Jesus is our High priest who was sacrificed for our sins once and for all. And when Jesus died on the cross we read in Matthew 27:51(NIV), "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Jesus opened the way, making it possible for all people to enter the Most Holy Place...the Holy of Holies.

Hebrews 10:19-22 (NLT)

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him.

Let me repeat that, because we are trusting in Jesus, let us go right into the presence of God; let us enter the Most Holy Place.

2. Know Scripture

The second point from our text today (John 14:23) is this, Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey *my teaching*." Where do we get these teachings of Jesus? In the Bible. If we want to experience the Presence of God we must know about God. In the Bible we learn what God is like and what God expects of us. In the Bible we learn of His teachings. But the Bible is not just a manual for life. Hebrews 4:12 (NIV), For the word of God is living and active. [or as the NLT puts it: For the word of God is alive and powerful.]. In the Bible we meet God, we come face to face with God... if we come to it with that intention. We are not just confronted by principles, but by a Person. Jesus said (John 5:39-40 NIV), "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." Don't just read the Bible as an obligation, read the Bible to meet God there.

Nicky Gumble of Alpha gives an illustration that I will use here: Imagine if there was a book written about my wife Ann. It is called, “Ann, An Amazing Woman.” Chapter One: Her Exquisite Beauty, Chapter Two: Her Great Personality, Chapter Three: Her Incredible Example of Love and Faithfulness, Chapter Four: Her Great Cooking and Baking, Chapter Five: Her Musical and Athletic Abilities...which would be blank pages! I could pick up this book and read about Ann and say, She sounds like an incredibly amazing person. But now I can tell you from experience that she is an incredibly amazing person, because I have spent time with her. In the same way we don’t just want to read about God in our Bible reading, we want to experience God there.

3. Know Obedience

Now look at the text again: “If anyone loves me, he will *obey* my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” To experience the Presence of God we must not just hear or read His teachings, but obey His teachings, *then* God will make His home with us. We experience God as we hear *and* obey. If we love Jesus we will do what He says. If we don’t love Jesus we will struggle to do what He says. If you have lost your first love you will serve out of duty, obligation, habit, guilt, for recognition, but not out of love.

You can be religious without having a relationship with God. If you are serving from these motives you will miss experiencing God the way He created you to experience Him...and your life will be meaningless and fruitless. Your love for God determines your obedience and your obedience determines your experiencing the Presence of God.

So many Christians today say they love God and yet don’t obey His teachings. Jesus said, if you love me you will obey, and that is the only way you can experience Him in your life. Now, am I saying Christians are perfect? No! (Except for Ann the amazing woman...just kidding.). You see there is a struggle between loving God and pleasing God. Sometimes we fail. We will not be perfect in this life. We must not pretend to be. But this is the message of grace: We accept others and ourselves unconditionally, just as God accepts us. We want to be transparent about our failures, but our honesty or frankness is motivated by a desire to have a pure heart before God and others.

One last point that is implied in what we have looked at today. To know the Presence of God you must spend time in the Presence of God. Jesus would go off by Himself to private places to pray. In Mark 1:35 (NIV) it says, Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Many years ago I was part of a home Bible study, and we were talking about spending time with God. I was shocked that people were saying that their lives were so busy, that the only time they could spend with God was while they were taking their shower, or driving in their car, or when they made a phone call and were put on hold. Now, those are all good ideas. There’s nothing wrong with using times like that to be with God. But if that is the limit to your time with God how will you ever get to know Him. Imagine if

the only time you spent with your spouse and children were times that you fit them in while doing something else, when you couldn't give your full attention, or only had a limited time with them (maybe that is the extent to your time with your family...but that's another sermon). The point is it is not enough. Jesus ...Jesus! He had a need to make time to be alone in prayer. He had a very busy life too, but made the time to be with God. The disciples saw the difference in Jesus, so much so that they asked Him to teach them to pray. And when they asked Him to teach them He said, "Pray like this...Our Father..." You see, it was a personal experience with God. "Our Father." When you pray do you imagine that you are actually talking with a person? Do you sometimes not talk at all, but just come into the Presence? Jesus invites you, here's His invitation, He says, come...Come all who are weary. Come to Me, be in My Presence, the Presence of the Living God, get away with me and I will refresh your soul.

Acts 4:13 (NLT)

The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.

Today we see extraordinary people with special training in the Scriptures, but we don't see many people who have been with Jesus.