

519 Dwelling in God's Presence

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

God told Moses when he came to the burning bush to take off his shoes, because the ground upon which he was standing was holy ground. Holy ground is sacred, and when we come into the presence of God, that's sacred too. Of course, God is omnipresent, that is, He is everywhere. Now if you aren't in a right relationship with Him, thinking about God being everywhere, seeing all your secrets might be frightening. But if you love the Lord and serve Him, how thankful you are that God is with you and protecting you every step in your life.

Thanks so much for allowing me to come into your home for a period of Bible study, answering some of the practical and important questions of life from the Scriptures. One of the great needs of our time is to draw close to God. God is omnipresent. That means that God is present everywhere. In Psalm 139:7-12 David asks, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You."

Yes, God is everywhere. That frightens some people to think that God is with you at every moment. But for those who love God and serve God, it is comforting to know that no matter where you are or whatever may happen, God is there with you, helping you and blessing you.

That we are in God's presence at all times is abundantly taught in Scripture. Jesus' last words in Matthew 28:28 were, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He is indeed with us always. In John 14:23, Jesus promised, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him." Of all the places God could live, the place He most wants to live is in your heart. God never wants to be far away from His children, the people He loves and watches over.

Paul reminds us that God makes a temple out of each of us. In 1 Cor. 6:19-20, Paul said, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Even your fleshly body is important to God—He makes it a temple. His presence in our lives shows His relationship to us as one of closeness. He purchased us by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and loosed us from them. We belong to God in every sense. He is our Creator, our sustainer, our Savior, and our Lord.

The Hebrew writer, speaking about everyday life, said in Hebrews chapter 13, verses 5-6, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'" God promises never to abandon us or to forsake us. When we need Him, He will be there for us. But there is another side to this. If God is indeed with us, helping us, are we there for Him, supporting and blessing Him. Are we a blessing to be with?

James in the fourth chapter of his book reveals seven imperatives, seven commandments, associated with dwelling in the presence of God. He said in James 4:7-10, "Submit 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. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to

gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." Let's look at each phrase a little more closely.

First, "submit therefore to God." If God is God, and you are not, then the most important thing you can do is to submit, yield, or be subject, to Him. Jesus learned to do that. The Hebrew writer said about Jesus in Hebrews 5:8-9, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." No matter who we are, we need to bow the knee to the Lord Jesus. We need to say, "speak, Lord, your servant hears." We can never be what God desires in our lives until we humble our hearts before Him.

Second, "resist the devil and he will flee from you." If I belong to God, then I must come to know who my enemy really is. The devil is very powerful, but he is never stronger than God, who will help you through your struggles. Because God is with you, the devil will flee. Peter said in 1 Peter 5:8-11, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen." God allows us to fight the devil for a time, but he will protect us and bless us in the end. He will perfect us, confirm us, establish us and strengthen us as a result of every struggle with the devil. We have a God who knows how to lift us above all the challenges we face by giving us hope and assurance that in the end we will endure.

God does indeed protect and keep us. In 1 John 5:18, John said, "We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." When the Bible says we do not sin, it means that sin is not our way of life (not that we never sin). God protects us from the devil. Jude said in verses 24-25, Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Third, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. God is present with you and me, but we are not always near to Him. By sin, neglect, lack of faith, or idolatry, we can withdraw our trust and love from Him. We don't draw near to God in the physical sense; we draw near God in the spiritual sense. One can be geographically far from another yet still be spiritually or emotionally near. How do we draw near God? By prayer, Bible study, memory work, meditating on God's word, and by worship. As we draw near Him, He draws near us. He reacts to us in the way the we treat Him. God is always ready to be near us.

Fourth, cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. One is wise when he knows that God is with Him always and sees and knows all. Solomon said in Prov. 15:3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good." God sees it all; nothing escapes His notice. He even knows our thoughts and the intents of our hearts. A double-minded man is one who cannot make up his mind who he belongs to and whom he will serve. God does not hear the prayers of a double-minded man (James 1:8).

James spoke of the Christians of his day being double-minded, loving the Lord and loving the world at the same time, In James 4:4-5 he said, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a

friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us'?" Many people live their Christian lives with one hand toward God and the other hand toward the world. Such a posture is adulterous toward God. You can't love the world and love God at the same time.

Fifth, Be miserable and mourn and weep.

Sixth, let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Paul had written to the Corinthians about their arrogant handling of a man living in sin in 1 Corinthians 5. The man's sin was that he was living with his father's wife, a sin that even the pagan Gentiles didn't commit. He rebuked them, saying in verse two, "You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst." Today we live in a world that doesn't know how to blush or to be ashamed. People get just as arrogant as the Corinthians when they should have mourned.

Paul rebuked them and disciplined the man. When he learned that they had changed their attitude, he wrote in 2 Cor. 7:8-9, "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us." It is better to sorrow over sin in this life and repent, than to be arrogant and lose our souls.

Seventh, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you." There is always a need to humble ourselves before God. God is God, and we are not. We are mere men. Peter said in 1 Peter 5:5-7, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." There is always a need to humble ourselves before our great God in heaven.

Jesus' first words in the Sermon on the Mount were "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). It is only the poor in heaven that can ever have the blessing God wants to give to humans. Why? Because a person poor in spirit knows his need for God. The proud person, full of himself, has little need for

God and little room for God in his life. Since he believes he can live without God, God cannot work in his life. He has no room for God, because he is so full of himself. It is a good day in our lives when we admit to ourselves and to all that we need God to help us.

We need to live with the knowledge that God is with us. Such a perspective will make a profound difference in our lives. It will make our faith stronger, our confidence greater, and our respect for God more evident. If we know that God sees and knows all about us, it should make us want to live righteously, soberly and godly in this present world. It should lead us to trust in Him, to turn away from sin, and to be obedient to His every commandment. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. He will bless you more richly than you ever imagined. He will bring you joy, love, and peace. He'll give you grace to help in every need.

In the days of Isaiah, the people were living wicked lives yet coming before God to worship Him. God knew what they were doing. God told how He viewed their worship in Isaiah 1:15-20. "So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. God wants people to realize that He sees all and knows us thoroughly. We cannot hide our actions or our thoughts from Him. How much better it is for us to be genuine—to live true lives and to avoid anything showy or hypocritical.

The presence of God helps us to be honest with ourselves, to evaluate our behavior, our motives, and our attitudes. Knowing that God walks beside us everyday and everywhere makes us want to walk in such a way as to please Him from our hearts. God's presence also reassures us of His love and concern. He knows our every trial and heartache and will help us through every struggle. I hope you're thinking of giving your life and heart to Him. Believe in Him and serve Him. Don't ever let anything build a barrier between you and God. Give Him your heart.

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